

Gratitude to Overcome Boredom, Difficulties, Complaining, & Feeling Overwhelmed

As many give thanks for what's in their lives this week, we might look at how to go deeper with gratitude.

"Gratitude" seems like a trite and even perhaps boring topic to many — we all know we should be grateful.

And yet, there are ways that we aren't cultivating gratitude ... and our lives could be much easier, even richer, if we did use gratitude in these deeper ways.

Let's take a few examples.

Boredom

I was talking to a friend recently about how she doesn't like to stay in stillness and quiet, because it feels boring. She realizes this probably isn't good for her, as she often feels the need to move, to keep busy. And she'd like to learn to be more present, slow down at times.

The answer to boredom is gratitude.

Let's think about a situation: you turn off your phone, get away from the computer, and go sit outside with no book, no device, no one to talk to, nothing to do.

You just sit there.

How useful is that? How interesting? How productive? You might answer "not at all" to these questions, and it might seem boring. But I believe that's because we're not 1) paying close enough attention, and 2) appreciating the gift of that moment.

If I'm sitting alone with nothing to do, I might have the urge to get up and go do something, or reach for my phone. But what if, instead, I could pay attention to how my body feels, the texture of my breath, the light all around me, the nature sitting right in front of my face, the sounds of the world busy in activity. The vibrant colors, the life that's struggling to survive and thrive. The feeling of just being alive.

The closer I pay attention, the more I might realize what a gift this is. The more I might appreciate the preciousness of it all.

Gratitude trumps boredom, if we let it.

Difficulties

We usually think of difficulties as something we don't like, and they cause us unhappiness: a difficult person we're dealing with, the loss of a job, struggling with a health issue, losing a loved one.

And it's true, these are not things we normally think of as "good." I'm not claiming we should rejoice at having these problems.

But is there a way we can find gratitude for them, nonetheless? Is there a way to see them as a gift?

Gratitude can be found even in our struggles:

1. When we're dealing with a difficult person, we can be grateful for having other people in our lives, for being alive in the first place, for having someone to practice being in a relationship with (including coworker and family relationships), for having a way to practice being better at patience and communication. We can think of this person as our teacher, who is unwittingly helping us to get stronger and to grow as a person.
2. If we lose our job, this can be very difficult ... but we can also find gratitude that we had a job in the first place, even if only for awhile. We can be grateful that we have some savings and/or a network of family to help us (or perhaps we can lean on strangers to help). We can find gratitude for the opportunity to start afresh, to reinvent ourselves, to push into the discomfort of getting good at interviewing and learning new skills and starting a new career. We can find gratitude for the opportunity to grow, even in the midst of pain.
3. Struggles with health are never fun, and can often be very painful and debilitating. I'm not claiming this is good. But perhaps the pain can be mediated by a sense of gratitude of being alive. Of having loved ones who might help us. Of being able to feel pain, perhaps of having hearing and sight and the ability to taste. We take these other things for granted because we're focusing on the part we don't like. We might even find gratitude for the chance to get good at meditating on pain, which is a powerful way to grow.
4. Losing a loved one is painful, of course. But can we be grateful we had the gift of this person in our lives at all? My father, for example, was a real pain in the ass sometimes, but I'm so grateful to have had his inappropriate jokes, his passion for life, his art, his loving heart, his music, his smiling face, in my life. I got 40+ years of him, and that was an absolute gift. His death also reminds me not to take my other loved ones for granted, and each time I find gratitude for my other family members, and my good friends, and all of you ... I have his death to thank for that.

Difficulties are not easy to find gratitude for ... but they can become incredible paths of

growth and learning, if we see the lesson in them. If we start to see everything as our teacher, especially the pain and struggle.

Complaining

Many of us have the mental habit of complaining — about a situation, about another person. We might not even realize we're doing it, but everytime we feel a bit of resentment, this is a form of complaining. And it's a good way to waste our lives.

Gratitude is the antidote for resentment, irritation, frustration and complaining.

Each time you notice yourself feeling resentment, or complaining, notice that you have a story in your head that's causing the feeling of resentment. Notice that you're letting this storyline fill your head. And then find a way to be grateful.

Drop the habit of resentment and complaining each time you notice it. Choose the gratitude habit instead. See what a difference it can make.

Feeling Overwhelmed

Many days we can feel stressed and overwhelmed, especially in the holiday season when we add social events, shopping, family gatherings, cooking and decorating to our already busy lives.

How can we deal with this feeling of overwhelm?

By being grateful for everything in our lives that's overwhelming us. By cherishing each thing in our todo list, each person making a request by text or email, each event that's stressing us out. Each of these is an absolute gift, and to be overwhelmed is to complain about these gifts. To find appreciation for each one of the gifts is to let go of the stress and to find the love in the chaos instead.