Karen’s Kounsel

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KLynn Counseling

 a place for new beginnings

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**Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.**

[**Melody Beattie**](http://www.famous-quotes.com/author.php?aid=566)

Gratitude, appreciation, thankfulness. This is the month for contemplating these ideas. Do they have a bearing on your mental health? I believe that they do. Do they play a legitimate role in psychology and mental health treatment? Yes. In my experience working with people, I have seen different people go through the same circumstances, come from the same background, and watch their lives turn out in vastly diverse ways. The most significant factor in that difference is how they view those circumstances and events. I have watched some of the most financially successful people live a life of selfish unhappiness. I have also seen people of very modest means find great joy in their everyday life.

Our minds run in certain patterns, patterns that we train them in. If we have spent a great deal of time letting our thoughts dwell on negative themes, we can develop something like a “rut” in the way it functions. Just like when a car goes off the main road and gets stuck in a ditch, it takes some effort to push it out and get it back on the road. The same holds true with the brain. It will tend to run along the lines it is used to. It takes mental effort to “push it out of the ditch” and develop a new path for it to run in.

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Thankfulness is an attitude that may need that kind of effort, but it is worth the work. The mindset of a thankful heart reaps many healthy benefits. People who are thankful have better relationships, are more optimistic, and are generally more likely to give to others. They have less depression, headaches, and insomnia. Have you ever tried to help or relate to someone who is ungrateful? It doesn’t take long before you either start avoiding them, or if you can’t do that, your help is given grudgingly.

I am a big believer in journaling, and on a number of occasions I have recommended that someone keep a “thankfulness journal.” The response to that suggestion can be very telling. I ask people to try to list at least three things each day that they can be thankful for. If the person responds positively and starts finding daily blessings to be thankful for, I usually see a change for the better. Unfortunately, most of the time, people don’t take the time to work at an attitude change. Those ruts in the mind and attitude can be extremely deep and it is much easier to “go with the flow” than to make continual efforts. One person I know responded, “THREE! You want me to find three things EVERY DAY? Can I use the same ones every day? I can’t come up with that many”! Needless to say the idea was not successful in this instance.

In a spiritual sense, thankfulness opens the way into the presence of God.
**“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name”.** [**Psalm 100:4**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+100:4&version=NIV)In the presence of God depression leaves because, **“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”.** [**Psalm 16:11**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+16:11&version=KJV) A place of joy and pleasures does not leave much room for depression, anxiety, ingratitude or complaining. When thankfulness takes up a large part of your thinking processes, you see everyday happenings in a different light.

I am not promoting “positive thinking.” Positive thinking does not look at reality. It ignores reality. In some ways it is a form of denial. The problem with that is that the reality is still there, but it is not dealt with. A thankful attitude is more of a “balanced thinking” approach. You can see the reality, even when it is hard, but you can also find the good in a situation and be grateful. When you see the good you can use that to help you deal with the difficulties. When all is negative you have no tools to assist you. It’s like trying to put the nail in the wall without the hammer. It is frustrating and it leaves you with injuries.

It may take some time to retrain your mind into seeing all the blessings that surround you, even in the midst of frustrating and hurtful situations, but the reward is a joyful and contented life. It can be like a light shining it the darkness. It gives you direction and hope. It is worth cultivating in spite of the urge to fall back into old patterns. Once you begin, you will be amazed at the multitude of blessings you can find in the everydayness of life.

 **“If one should give me a dish of sand and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes, and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and how would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction. The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessing, only the iron in God’s sand is gold”.**

**Henry Ward Beecher**

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