

Gratitude

Gratitude - a Vital Tool in the Recovery Process

Thanksgiving

"One of the gifts that came to me early in my healing process was a little expression that helped me start changing my perspective. That expression was, "I don't have any problems I have opportunities for growth." The more I stopped focusing on problems and obstacles, and started looking for the gifts, the lessons, attached to them, the easier life became.

I became a part of the solution instead of getting stuck being the victim of the problem. I started seeing the half of the glass that was full instead of always focusing on the half that was empty.

Every problem is an opportunity for growth.

My subconscious Codependent attitudes and perspectives caused me to take life personally - to react emotionally as if life events were being directed at me personally as a punishment for being unworthy, for being a shameful creature.

Life is a series of lessons. The more I became aligned with knowing that I was being given gifts to grow from - the less I believed that the purpose of life was to punish me - the easier life became.

Everything happens for a reason; there is always a silver lining."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls

Since it is Thanksgiving time it seems only appropriate to talk about one of the most important tools in the recovery process - gratitude. Being grateful for what we have, and keeping things in perspective, is vital in the struggle to stay in the now and enjoy today as much as possible.

There are two aspects of empowerment that come into play here. One is; that empowerment involves seeing life as it is and making the best of it (instead of being the victim of it not being what it "should" be); the other is realizing that we have a choice about where to focus our mind.

To have a healthy, balanced relationship with life we need to see life as it really is - which includes owning and feeling the pain, fear, and anger that is a natural part of living - and then have a Spiritual belief system that helps us to know that everything happens for a reason, that allows us to choose to focus on the silver linings rather than buy into the belief that we are victims.

Society teaches us to view life from a perspective of fear, lack, and scarcity. Rather we view life from that place of fear or go to the other extreme and deny that we feel any fear - either way we are giving power to the fear, we are living life in reaction to the fear.

Growing up I learned from my male role model that a man never admits he is afraid - at the same time that my role model lived in constant fear the future. To this day my father can't relax and enjoy himself because impending doom is always on the horizon. The disease voice, the critical parent voice, in my head always wants to focus on the negative and expect the worst just like my father did.

This programming to focus on the negative was compounded by the fact that I learned conditional love (that I would be rewarded or punished according to what I deserved - which, since I felt unworthy, meant I had good reason to expect doom), and that I had to learn to disassociate from myself in childhood. I had to learn to go unconscious and not be present in my own skin in the moment because emotional honesty was not allowed in my family. All Codependents learn to find things outside of self - drugs, alcohol, food, relationships, career, religion, etc. - to help us stay unconscious to our own emotional reality, but the primary and earliest way almost all of us found to disconnect from our feelings - which exist in our bodies - is to live in our heads.

Since I could not be comfortable in my own skin in the now without feeling the feelings, I spent most of my life living in either the past or the future. My mind was almost always focused on regret for past or fear of (or fantasy about) the future. When I did focus on the now it was with self-pity as a victim - of myself (I am stupid, a failure, etc.), of others (who victimized me), or of life (which was not fair or just).

It was wonderfully liberating in recovery to start learning that I could start to see life in a growth context. That I had a choice to focus on the half of the glass that was full instead of giving power to the disease which always wants to focus on the half that is empty. When I focus on what I have, and have been given, that I am grateful for - instead of just focusing on what I want that I don't have - it helps me to let go of the victim place my disease wants to promote.

What works for me is to remind myself of the difference between my wants and my needs. My Truth is that every day that I have been in recovery all my needs have been filled - and there has not been a single day that all my wants have been met. If I focus on what I want that I don't have then I feel like a victim and make myself miserable. If I choose to remind myself of what I have and how far I have come then I can let go of some of the victim perspective.

Ninety-eight per cent of the time when I am in fear it means that I am in the future. Pulling myself back into the now, turning the future over to my Higher Power, and focusing on gratitude, frees me to have some happy moments today.

When I was about two years in recovery there was a time when I was talking to my sponsor on the phone. I had just lost my job, the car had broken down, and I had to move out of my apartment in two weeks. Talk about tragedy and impending doom! I was laying in bed feeling very sorry for myself and very terrified about how painful it was going to be when I became homeless. After listening to me for a while my sponsor asked me, "What's up above you?" It was a stupid question and I told him so. I was pissed that he wasn't giving me the sympathy I deserved - but he insisted that I answer. So I finally said, "Well, the ceiling." And he said, "Oh, so your not homeless tonight are you?" And of course, everything worked out fine in the next two weeks. My Higher Power always has a plan in place even when I can't see any way out.

We all have much to be grateful for, to give thanksgiving for, if we just choose to look at the half of the glass that is full. So, have a grateful Thanksgiving.

Read more about applying the Twelve Step Principles:

To Parents of Alcoholics / Addicts - An article written in answer to an email from a parent who wanted to know if she caused her son's drug addiction. "Parents do not cause their children to become alcoholics - or drug addicts. Alcoholism / addiction is not caused by environmental factors. It is a physiological, genetic allergy - a hereditary predisposition involving brain chemistry."

Enabling & Rescuing vs Tough Love - A follow up article to the one to parents of alcoholics / addicts, explaining enabling and tough love. "A person who is acting out self destructively has no reason to change if they do not ever suffer major consequences for their behavior. If they are rescued from consequences, they are enabled to continue practicing their addiction."