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# Gratitude Is an Attitude

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Optimism makes you feel resilient and energetic.

## Gratitude Is an Attitude

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Grateful people have fewer health problems.

How we cope with life's difficulties *does* make a difference. A positive mental attitude goes a long way toward keeping us healthy. People with a positive outlook are reported to live 7–8 years longer than those who are not optimistic. In another study, elderly men who were optimistic about the future, observed during a 15-year study period, were found to be 55 percent less likely to die of heart disease or stroke than those who were concerned about the future.

Ellen White mentions that nine-tenths of the diseases from which people suffer have their foundation in mental illness (*Counsels on Health*, p. 324). Since our mental health affects our body in significant ways, it is important that we harness the power of the mind. Having a positive outlook is often a prerequisite to having fulfilling work and marriages, satisfying relationships, better health and longevity. People who rated themselves high on a happiness scale were observed to have lower blood pressure readings and lower cortisol (stress hormone) levels.

Being optimistic does not mean life is without complications, but it does make one more resilient and strong. An optimist confidently sees problems as opportunities, while a pessimist sees those same problems as insurmountable barriers. Optimistic thinking not only promotes a positive mood and a high morale, but also energizes you. Those who are optimistic about the future will invest effort in reaching their goals and don't easily give up.

Gratitude is a real antidote for negative emotions. It is a neutralizer of worry. It's hard to feel sad or angry when one feels grateful. The more inclined a person is to be grateful, the less inclined they are to be anxious and depressed. Expressions of gratitude tend to make people feel more optimistic and more satisfied with life, they report fewer



headaches and other health problems, have more hours of quality sleep, and are more likely to report helping someone in need. We learn that nothing promotes health more than a spirit of gratitude and praise (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251).

Sonya Lyubomirsky, in her book *The How of Happiness*, describes how gratitude boosts one's happiness in a number of ways. Gratitude bolsters self-worth when one reflects on how much people have done for you. It helps one to positively interpret stressful life experiences. Expressing gratitude during personal adversity can help one adjust and move on. People encouraged to be grateful for a specific act were more likely to help strangers and others, even when it involved doing an unpleasant, tedious chore. When someone realizes the value of friends and other people, they are more likely to feel connected with them and treat them better.

When people were asked to write down, once a week, three to five things for which they were grateful or thankful, they reported significantly higher levels of happiness after only six weeks of journaling. Paul admonishes us to *rejoice always and in everything give thanks* (see 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18).

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