

The Goodness and Gifts of Gratitude

A young man I know drives to work from Front Royal to the traffic-tangled roads of Northern Virginia. He recently told a mutual acquaintance that he uses the hour-long trek to prepare his mind for the day's tasks.

On the way home, however, he spends that same drive decompressing from work and readying himself to cheerfully greet his wife and young children. When he arrives home, his first act is to tell his wife how much he appreciates all she has done for their family that day.

I wish I'd possessed his wisdom when I was his age.

In the movie *Cool Hand Luke*, the warden of a prison strikes an inmate, Luke, with his club and then utters one of the film's best-known lines: "What we've got here is failure to communicate."

Today we often have a failure to appreciate.

Most of us, myself included, often fail to express our gratitude for the gifts bestowed on us by others.

An employee goes above and beyond the call of duty putting together a special report for her boss, delivering vital information well ahead of a deadline, but she receives no more recognition than a nod of the head. The wife who has spent all day with the children hands them over to her husband as soon as he steps through the door without asking one question about his day. The grown children who receive money or gifts for their birthdays forget all about writing a thank you note or making a phone call of appreciation.

In my case, I've frequently failed to say thank you for good

deeds and gifts I have received at the hands of others. I have wished many times that I would have thanked my wife more often for her love and care for me and our children. I wish I had told my mother before she died how grateful I was that she had taught me the values of hard work, perseverance, tender love, and forgiveness. I hope that others who have influenced me—teachers, employers, friends, and even family members—know of my gratitude for the lessons they imparted and the help they provided.

There are two things I have learned about gratitude in old age. First, when our loved ones die and you wish you'd told them how much they'd done for you, it's too late. As I write these words, I am thinking of an old college professor and good friend who surely knew of his powerful impact on my life, but I never directly expressed my thanks to him before he died.

Second, while those who have helped us are still alive, it's never too late to express our appreciation for them. In my ninth grade year at Southwest Junior High School in Forsyth County, North Carolina, Mr. Darden taught us a block class of literature and geography. He was an excellent teacher, and 30 years later, when I began teaching, I recreated some of his projects in my own classes. After another 10 years of teaching, I wrote him a note of thanks for all he had done for us. He replied with a kind letter, happily surprised, I think, that someone had remembered his efforts, and he also encouraged me in my own teaching.

Expressing our gratitude for a job well done or for a gift is really quite simple.

Suppose that employee I mentioned above works overtime to get you the information you need. Pay your compliments on her hard work with a personal note or even some flowers as well as a spoken thank you. When a spouse returns at the end of a long day, offer them a word of appreciation. If Grandma, Uncle

John, or anyone else sends you a gift, take the five minutes needed to write out a thank-you note, address an envelope, slap on a stamp, and put it in the mailbox.

There are plenty of websites explaining the great blessings of bestowing such appreciation, not just for the recipient of your appreciation but for you as well. [Expressing gratitude](#) doesn't just help the receiver, it also makes the givers healthier and happier. It deepens our relationships and even affects our physical health, allowing us to sleep better and increasing our energy levels.

When we sincerely offer such appreciation, we strengthen the bonds of our families, our enterprises, our communities, and even our country.

Even more importantly, it's the right thing to do.

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