

Count your blessings: Gratitude walks

There's a chill in the air and I know I'm going to have to wear a heavier jacket, gloves and a hat when I take my walk. My regular walking route takes me through the playground of the elementary school. In the summer, I catch a glimpse of the soccer teams playing and can hear kids laughing with their friends. Past the school, I go through a quiet older neighborhood and then down to the lake where I watch the gulls dip and the sunset reflecting reds, blues and purples on the water. As I circle back to my neighborhood, my route takes me up a steep hill; and if I look behind me, I get one more glimpse of the lake.

I love my walks, but I find it's easy for me to skip them. I have just about a million excuses: It's too cold; I'm too busy; it's too dark. I've decided, though, that I need to pull out my warmer clothes and commit myself to a daily walk. I've made this decision because every time I take a walk I find I return home refreshed, clearheaded and deeply grateful. In fact, I have decided to call these walks my Gratitude Walks.

I leave my phone at home when I take a Gratitude Walk, and I almost always engage in a long conversation with God. (Yes, I admit it, sometimes I do pray out loud on these walks.) I know I don't have to go on a cold winter walk to gain a sense of gratitude, but I do know that my Gratitude Walks are good for me, especially when I consciously commit to them.

I read recently that research has shown that people who cultivate gratitude in their lives live longer, healthier and happier lives. They are more resilient during difficult times and express greater satisfaction in their relationships.

So, I try to find ways to encourage gratitude in my family,

too. I've been asking my kids during mealtime or before I tuck them into bed to tell me three good things that happened during the day. My teen often rolls her eyes, while my son will likely talk about sharing a joke with his buddies that only 10-year-old boys appreciate. But I find the kids do enjoy sharing the good things in their lives. Sometimes, they will say they can't think of anything or that nothing good happened. That's when I remind them that gratitude doesn't require winning the lottery. I tell them that sometimes it's the smallest things that bring us the most happiness. Yes, my teen might roll her eyes again, but she will also probably tell me about a hug she got from a friend that came just when she needed it.

Scripture is filled with gratitude – encouraging us to be thankful for the blessings in our lives and praising God for them. Psalms 118:24 exclaims, “This is the day the Lord has made; / let us rejoice in it and be glad.” Yes, indeed!

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