

Advanced Gratitude

Even things that irritate us or cause us pain can be transformed by gratitude. Instead of feeling hard-done-by, gratitude helps us discover the pearl of blessing hidden within the abrasive old shell. For example, a friend's annoying habit of interrupting us is an opportunity to develop patience and kindness. When we are hurt by a careless act or an argument with our spouse or dating partner, the pearl of blessing is the increase in love that comes after we reconcile.

Questions for Reflection

1. Choose one thing that irritates you about your spouse/fiancé/dating partner: How do you usually react when he/she does this?
2. What might be the pearl of blessing in it?
3. How might you respond differently, with greater love and more gratitude?

A Married Couple's Prayer for Gratitude

Lord God,

Creator of all good things in our lives;

You have created us in your image and have blessed our union.

We thank you for the many blessings in our lives, most especially for the gift of each other.

We thank you for all that we have shared together: the good times and the bad, the times of plenty and the times of want, the times of sickness and the times of health.

We praise you for your faithfulness and we give you glory for the fruitful blessings of our love.

As we honour each other, we give honour to you.

May your name be held holy and may your praise be forever on our lips.

Amen.

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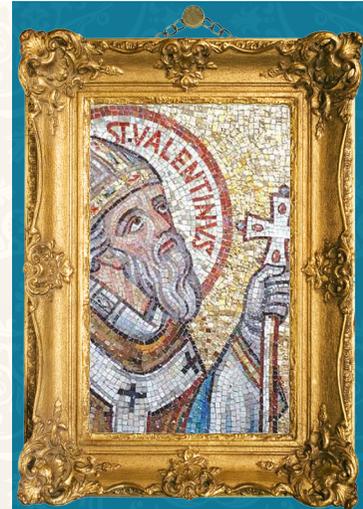
Grateful

The pursuit of happiness is a universal obsession – we all yearn for it, and in fact, we are neurologically wired to seek it. Happiness is so central to our existence it has become the subject of scientific study, the theme of numerous conferences and the promise of endless commercial advertisements.

It's not surprising then, that most people associate happiness with romantic love and marriage.

"They're so happy" we say of the engaged couple, or "It was a very unhappy marriage" of the now-separated couple. Happiness seems to be the litmus test of whether a marriage is successful.

But is the relationship between happiness and marriage that simple?



St Valentine was a priest in Rome at the time of Emperor Claudius II. His association with young lovers is well known even in modern times. The story goes that Claudius, urgent to recruit soldiers for his armies, decreed that all weddings be suspended so as to encourage more single, unfamiliar men to serve in combat. Seeing the anguish of young couples forbidden to marry, St Valentine performed secret weddings in defiance of the Emperor.

He was eventually arrested and imprisoned. While awaiting execution, St. Valentine restored the sight of his jailer's blind daughter. On the eve of his death, he penned her a farewell note signing it, "From your Valentine".

On February 14, 269 AD he was beheaded. He is the Patron Saint of engaged couples and married lovers.

ref: www.catholic.org/saints

The Happiness Factor

Many people believe that the purpose of marriage is happiness. Indeed many people decide to marry because their dating partner 'makes them so happy'. While it may seem reasonable, the problem with this kind of assumption is that **un**happiness is taken to mean that the relationship is failing.

Authentic happiness, that is, enduring contentment and joy, is an inside job. That means that the one responsible for my happiness is me. Not my spouse, not my parents or dating partner, not my boss or my job or my latest material acquisition. Each individual is the gatekeeper on their own capacity to embrace the joy that God and life offers them.

Joy-filled Couples

We all love to be around joy-filled couples. Their good humour and welcoming generosity make their homes places of hospitality for all their visitors and friends. People leave their presence refreshed and uplifted by their joyous delight in each other.

A well-developed sense of gratitude is one of the distinguishing characteristics of happy couples. Gratitude leads them to look for the good in each other rather than the faults. They have found ways to embrace their differences with good humour rather than argue about them. And they are motivated to serve each other, because they each feel blessed and privileged to be loved by the other.

"Matt and Therese are one of the most delightful couples I know. Even after 35 years of marriage, they are still affectionate with each other. They are always building each other up and telling us how lucky he or she is to have the other. We always feel encouraged when we visit them." James

"My daughter has been dating a wonderful young man for almost a year. As a parent, it gives me so much pleasure to see her and her boyfriend bringing out the best in each other – they are great fun to be around". George

Gratitude

...an essential virtue

One of the most effective ways to transform any relationship is to consciously cultivate a disposition of gratitude. Regularly thanking God, who is the source of all good, helps us to see life more realistically; we become humbled as we appreciate his love for us and we come to appreciate the goodness of others more clearly.

A habit of gratitude is like putting on a pair of x-ray glasses – it equips us to see past the superficial behaviour of others into their heart so that we see their brokenness as well as their true beauty.

"Our marriage was not going well. My husband was working crazy hours and for months on end, we hardly saw him and when we did he was exhausted. Though I understood, I felt abandoned to deal with the family issues and started to resent him. Constant arguments, stress and worry were taking a toll on our marriage. Then I started consciously being grateful. I was grateful we had work and an income. I was grateful we were still together. I was grateful the kids' problems weren't life-threatening. I was grateful I had friends to support me emotionally when my husband couldn't. I was grateful for fragrant flowers and sunny days. I was grateful we lived in a democratic country... Once I started looking for it, there was SO much to be grateful for. It immediately lifted my spirits and gave me a new energy to love my family and my husband. I stopped feeling like a victim and realised that I had been creating my unhappiness by my attitude." Liz

The 40 Day Gratitude Challenge

Gratitude is a virtue that can be deliberately cultivated and is a vital ingredient for any relationship.

Try the 40 Day Gratitude Challenge: Every day identify one good thing in your spouse/friend and express your gratitude to him/her. Say it, write it, sing it, text it, draw it – it doesn't matter how – just communicate it!

Do this for 40 days and see the difference.