

The Spirit Of Thanksgiving

"Enjoying each day by dwelling in a spirit of thanksgiving, not only changes your chemistry, but it changes the world around you."

Sometimes tragedy can teach us lessons that we would never learn any other way. I have a friend who shared a story that deeply touched me. My friend is a physician and in the process of writing a book so I won't use her name. Her story has profound inspiration for each of us. Let me give you some back ground to personify the lesson.

Here's her life. She has a very busy, successful practice, overseeing a large staff. She is at the top of her field, married, with wonderful children. She basically has it all. She is the ultimate self-starter.

Her diet is pristine, I mean pristine. If it's not organic, it doesn't pass her lips. She will not drink water that isn't purified no matter where she goes. In fact, I attended a wedding where she even brought her own purified water. When we were all toasting the bride and



groom with champagne, she drank her own water. She is in great shape; in fact, if she has 10% body fat, I would be surprised.

In her mid 50's, she had the world by the tail; until her world fell apart, and she experienced a condition called RCVS, short for reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome. It's a rare condition that occurs as the result of a sudden constriction of the vessels that supply blood to the brain.

The main symptom of RCVS is sudden, severe, and paralyzing headaches that are sometimes called "thunderclap" headaches. Strokes or bleeding into the brain may or may not be present. She spent many weeks in the hospital and has spent months in recovery. She almost died.

The experience has been so profound, now that she's recovered, she is re-organizing her entire life. When the headaches first began, knowing the side effects of pain killers, she

chose to stick to natural therapies rather than walk around in a fog. She said the "pain was so intense." I was wincing as she described it. But this is the part that I wanted to share, when she experienced stress, the headache pain was magnified to an unbearable degree.

Stress ramped up her nervous system and the neurotransmitters released, amplified her pain. It didn't matter if the stress was real or imagined. It didn't matter if the situation was big or small. Any stress would amplify the pain. She had to breathe through it and literally talk to herself to reframe her perspective to transform the situation. For her, her success came by dwelling in a spirit of thanksgiving. It was the main ingredient to her recovery. She reframes her perspective many times a day reminding her that she is not in control and that she is lucky to be alive. She reminds herself that healing is a process and not a switch we turn on and off.

I share that story because we forget how emotions are affecting our health. Emotions exert powerful forces upon our neurology. We live in a fast paced, overdriven society. Many people live in sympathetic overdrive. Dr. Mark Force shared with me that after 35 years in practice, the one thing he wished he would have focused more on is balancing the sympathetic / parasympathetic nervous system with his patients. Because when we are in sympathetic overdrive, we are not repairing, we're in catabolism.

The tragedy my friend experienced refocused me and reminded me that our emotions are affecting our neurology in a powerful way, whether we are aware of it or not. We all have so much to be thankful for.

Each day is a gift. If you think about it, each breathe is a gift.

I have missionary friends who share that in some places, women have to walk miles each day to get water to cook and clean. And the water they carry back is often contaminated. You and I turn on our faucets and water comes out. Conveniently, we can purchase pure drinking water. But we often get distracted from the reality that "We don't deserve life, we get to receive life." Living in that "gift" mentality brings a spirit of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving gives me freedom to let other people be who they are with fewer expectations. Fewer expectations upon other people mean less stress. I heard an interesting definition of the word "grace". Grace is getting what we don't deserve. When we are living in the "thanksgiving zone", we are more kind and give people grace to fail and do things we may consider inappropriate or insensitive. And a magical thing happens when we really give grace to others. We start giving grace to ourselves for our failures and shortcomings. And that my friends, is when the magic happens. Forgiving ourselves and those around us is one of the most powerful forces of healing we possess.

The pain and healing my physician friend experienced is a story that touched me. It reminds me to keep my focus on the big picture, that each day is a gift. Each day is an opportunity to give grace, but maybe more important, each day is an opportunity to receive grace. Enjoying each day by dwelling in a spirit of thanksgiving, not only changes your chemistry, but it changes the world around you.

Happy New Year.