



"...Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

This partial lyric from the old familiar hymn by Johnson Oatman, Jr. counsels us to recall our blessings when we are burdened, discouraged or overwhelmed. But we can gain a lot more from "counting our blessings" than just a way of cheering up. Much more than merely "counting" our blessings—if we *remember, focus and meditate on, and intentionally call to mind* the blessings God has provided, our attitudes will change so that our relationships with God and others will improve.

I've heard that our brains are wired so that it's not possible to keep thankful thoughts together with negative feelings of depression, bitterness or anger at the same time. When we choose to count (*focus on, meditate on and intentionally call to mind*) our blessings, it causes a mind-shift—negative feelings like depression, discouragement, anger and bitterness are less important. After a while, thankfulness can start to become our "default" thought pattern and we become generally happier.

A few years ago, a close friend gave me a "blessings jar" for my birthday. I know she intended it as just a

thoughtful gift. But I'm sure she had no idea how much it would truly impact my life. As I started to write down blessings for which I'm thankful and put them inside the jar, something in my perspective began to change for the better! I found that I felt generally happier, and I didn't dwell on negative things in life or in the world around me. I didn't get sucked into the "drama" of friends and family relationships as much as I had before I started writing down my blessings.

You may be thinking, *Okay, that's nice but we don't really need to write down blessings to remember them.* Yes, that's true, but like most of us learned in elementary school, writing things down cements information into our brain using a variety of senses and creates a more vivid memory. There's just something about the act of writing something with our hand (touching the pen or pencil, while looking at what we're writing and perhaps "listening") that helps information in our brains become more likely to stick.

One great thing I've found from writing down my blessings and putting them in a special place, in this case a "blessings jar," is that when I'm starting to feel discouraged, overwhelmed, bitter or angry, I just open the jar and read some of the things I've written down. My mood

immediately starts to lighten and I feel closer to God and others.

Many people keep a journal or diary for appointments or daily thoughts, and this would also be a great place to write down blessings or thankful thoughts.

These past few years have been incredibly stressful, anxious and discouraging for so many people around the world. Many have lost loved ones, friends, health, homes, income, a sense of safety and security...the list goes on and on.

If you are feeling discouraged, depressed or overwhelmed, perhaps you can't even bring your mind to focus on any blessings. Maybe you are so discouraged that you can't even "count" **ONE** blessing in your life.

If that's the case, just take a baby step. First, **simply thank God that you are alive.** Thank Him for the air in your lungs. Thank Him that you can see the sunshine, feel the breeze on your cheeks, hear a bird chirping and taste a sip of coffee or a bite of food. Then thank him for the color of the sky, the grass, the flowers... that's enough to start.

Once you begin to recognize and focus on these seemingly insignificant or "normal" blessings of daily life, you will gradually begin to notice more vividly the blessings around you every moment of every day, no matter what your particular circumstances in life. Continue to thank God even for the smallest of blessings, and before long you'll find you are a generally happier person, easier to be around and overflowing with thankfulness.

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6-7). □

Laura Urista is managing editor of Plain Truth and CWR magazine.