

## SELF-HELP

# Giving thanks important not just for Thanksgiving holiday

By *Helene Stoller, Psy.D*  
CONTRIBUTOR



Helene Stoller

Too often in our daily lives we get caught up in our strivings – whether for material things, financial security, achievement, recognition, relationships, even harmony in our lives – and lose track of what we have attained thus far.

There is always another hurdle to jump, another challenge to overcome, or another problem to solve. Along with being grateful for the opportunities to learn and grow from facing and surmounting these perceived barriers in our lives (because the absence of learning and growth is stagnation and death), we also need to step back from the hustle and bustle of life to reflect on how far we

have come and what we have learned along the way.

I recently broke my leg in a freak two-bicycle collision with my husband. The break was a bad one, necessitating surgery and a long period of healing.

I would normally describe myself as an independent, active, and not very patient person. This accident has forced me to rely on others' generosity, such as my husband, who transports me everywhere I need to go, prepares our meals and does my laundry.

Even total strangers have reached out to help by opening doors or pushing my wheelchair. Other strangers have offered emotional support by describing their own healing journeys from foot or leg surgeries.

I appreciate what others have to give me and have learned to accept their generous offers as a gift of empathy and compassion rather than reject them because I don't want to feel weak and

powerless or be beholden to others. Additionally, these months of forced inactivity have enabled me to view disability from a new perspective and to become more patient with myself and others.

Once impatient for my leg to be healed, I am now willing to let my leg heal at its own pace and feel grateful for each sign of progress, such as the physical therapy I just began. I now notice the size of doorways and bathroom stalls – can they accommodate a wheelchair; the placement and number of stairs – can a disabled person navigate them; and the presence or absence of ramps and handicapped facilities in hotels, restaurants, and crosswalks. I had been oblivious to these things previously, and may have been insensitive and inconsiderate of the needs of handicapped people.

Even in the most profound grief or trauma, there are major opportunities for

learning and growth, if we allow ourselves to reflect on our emotional journey through the grieving process. I would guess that each of us has dealt with difficult times in our lives, and hopefully, each of us has become stronger as a result of developing or finding new qualities in ourselves and understanding relationships and the world in a more mature way.

During this month of the Thanksgiving holiday, I hope that we can all be thankful for what we have, who we are and the sometimes steep and rocky terrain that we have traversed in order to arrive at our current place in life. Consolidating and reflecting on our gains, however briefly, enables us to develop a fresh perspective and renewed energy toward the next set of challenges we will face in life.

Wishing you a very thankful holiday.  
*Helene Stoller, Psy.D., licensed psychologist, Bluffton*