

Researcher says gratitude may be a key to happiness

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'Tis the season to be grateful. And being grateful for what you have may be the key to happiness, according to research by a UT professor.

Jeff Larsen, associate professor of psychology, investigated whether the maxim "it's more important to want what you have than to have what you want" is true.

He asked [college students](#) if they possessed fifty-two different material items, such as a car, a stereo, or a bed. They were then asked to rate how much they wanted the items they had and how much they wanted the items they didn't have. Larsen calculated the extent to which the students want what they have and have what they want.

The result? People who want more of what they have tend to be happier than those who have less of what they want.

"Simply having a bunch of things is not the key to [happiness](#)," he said. "Our data show that you also need to appreciate those things you have. It's also important to keep your desire for things you don't own in check."

So how can you be grateful for what you have? Larsen offers these tips:

- Don't avoid people who have less. Try volunteering at a shelter or [food bank](#) during the holidays.
- Actively pay attention to and savor your things. Research shows

that indulging in life's pleasures in smaller doses, or even giving them up for stretches of time as Christians do over Lent, helps us enjoy them significantly more.

- When given the choice, invest in experiences rather than possessions. Research shows that experiences make us happier than possessions.
- When all else fails, avoid exposure to better things. "Although, this can be very difficult when cell phone companies roll out new phones every six months," said Larsen.

More information: The study is published in *Psychological Science* and can be viewed at bit.ly/1DXoPj7

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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