

# Ask an Expert – Three Steps for a Happier Life in 2021

Kathy Riggs

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Despite the dark, hanging cloud of the coronavirus, there is still much happiness to be had. Though 2021 still holds uncertainty, it can be as good as we make it.

USU Extension family life specialist David Schramm's publication, "Three Steps for a Happier Life," available at: [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension\\_curall/1779/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_curall/1779/), states that following three basic steps can lead to both a happier life and happier relationships.

## 1. Notice the good in every day – past, present and future.

**Past:** Taking a deep look into the past can often bring up painful, depressing or other uncomfortable emotions. Whatever the feeling attached to these memories, they are the experiences that made you who you are. What did you learn from those experiences? How did they shape you into who you are now? How are you a stronger person because of them?

Re-labeling is a powerful tool for finding the good in the past. Take a negative experience, think about the above questions and find the positive in the situation. Forgiving someone who has wronged you can be worth the effort it takes. Try the five-step process for forgiving others, developed by licensed clinical psychologist Everett Worthington. The process uses the acronym REACH:

**R-** Recall the hurt: In order to heal, you need to acknowledge you have been hurt and make the decision to fully forgive.

**E-** Empathize: Try to understand why the person who hurt you did what they did.

**A-** Altruistic gift: Remember a time when you transgressed and were forgiven.

**C-** Commit: Write a note of forgiveness or forgive publicly.

**H-** Hold onto forgiveness: Remind yourself that you decided to forgive; re-read notes of forgiveness when feeling doubt.

**Present:** One of the best ways to be optimistic about the present is to keep a journal. Writing positive experiences often leads to an increase in overall happiness. At the end of the day, take time to write three things you were grateful for that day or things that went well. This helps keep the mind focused on positivity.

**Future:** Be optimistic about the future. Optimism and hope buffer against depression when negative events occur, and are also related to higher performance at work and better overall physical health.

Being optimistic requires courage to face the future, accepting what you can't change and controlling and/or dismissing the urge to ask, "But what if," which can cause us to think negatively.

**Step 2 – Find and use your strengths.** We all have quirks and personalities that make us unique and valuable. Recognizing and using our individual strengths will help us live joyfully, be more productive and continue to progress. One way to identify your strengths is to take a strengths test. There are several free online versions available. Or you could simply ask a trusted friend or family member what they consider to be your personal or professional strengths.

**Step 3 – Make time for service.** Serving others is an important part of a happy life. For many of us, we either think we are too busy to serve, or we fail to think about it at all. However, service doesn't need to be large to be meaningful. If you are looking for ways to serve, visit [www.justserve.org](http://www.justserve.org). The site was developed to help people find ways to serve in their community according to the amount of time they have available.

Best of success as you envision a better tomorrow and a brighter, happier 2021!

By: Kathy Riggs, Utah State University  
Extension professor, [kathleen.riggs@usu.edu](mailto:kathleen.riggs@usu.edu), with

information from David Schramm, USU Extension family  
life specialist, [david.schramm@usu.edu](mailto:david.schramm@usu.edu)