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H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

Blessings In My Life

I'm a very lucky person. People who look at my life and my situation - 33 years in prison and I don't know when I'm getting out - probably do not regard me as blessed or fortunate. But I am. It is not what happens to you in life, but how you perceive it.

It took me a long time to learn that lesson. I used to focus on what I didn't have, what was wrong in my life. I was dissatisfied and unhappy all the time. I was always thinking "If only . . . then I could be happy." I needed to have the things external to me occur in a certain way in order for me to allow myself to be happy. But that's not true unless you believe it's true.

When I took a program called "Get the Edge" in Oakhill over 10 years ago, I learned a new way of being in the world. It was based on the motivational teachings of Tony Robbins. I learned that it is not what happens to you that determines your degree of happiness or success. It is the meaning you attach to events in your life. In other words, your perceptions determine whether a situation or incident is good or bad. The world is as you perceive it to be.

We are free to interpret our lives in any manner we choose. We can choose to focus on the positives and find the silver lining in every cloud. We can turn adversity into advantage by a simple process called reframing. It is where you change your interpretation of events so that they are positive rather than negative. You can choose to be happy or sad regardless of what happens to you. Every morning you have a choice on how you are going to interact and respond to the world. I choose to be thankful and grateful and it makes all the difference in whether I am fantastic or wallow in self pity.

That's why I have so many blessings in my life. I emphasize the good things and reframe the bad things to find the good in them. And I thank God every day in every way for all the blessings he brings me and most of all for the ability to recognize them when I see them.