Fostering an attitude of Gratitude can be tricky business. I cannot tell you how often I begin to emphasize the power of gratitude when I am interrupted and informed by others of their negative and dire experiences. It would seem that as soon as I begin to touch on the potential of their situation, others realize what I am trying to do and seek to stop me in my tracks and remind me of the horrors that they have lived or experienced.

Again, gratitude is no easy concept to grasp, much less practice. With this article I do not wish to undermine your experiences or deny the reality that you face. Instead, I hope to set clear that you cannot have gratitude unless you are acutely aware of the injustice, wrong, or terrible nature of what you have endured.

Gratitude is a choice and it is not blind. If you practice gratitude and yet you have never suffered or gone without, then what you experienced is not gratitude. Gratitude is a lifestyle choice as well as a mindset choice. Gratitude is not blind or oblivious; it is an awareness of pain, suffering, and a scarcity of the good.

I am sure many equate gratitude to the Thanksgiving holiday. However, I have reason to believe that gratitude existed well before pilgrims and Native Americans split bread. The eminence of this holiday is not born from the overwhelming excess of food and resources that were shared between Native American hosts and pilgrim immigrants. Rather, Gratitude took place with a full understanding and awareness of the pilgrim difficulty adapting to a foreign land, the deaths, illnesses, trials, tribulations, and the scarcity of food that ensued.

Gratitude therefore is an awareness of what is lacking, however, gratitude is also the ability to appreciate your condition and foresee how you benefit from the experience and continue to near yourself to your goals.

I do not think it is a coincidence that Thanksgiving takes place around food. There is something very powerful about being able to appreciate your dire situation for what it is (bad) while also transforming it into a positive force. Our bodies do something similar in the digestive process. When we eat, we are able to consume something (sometimes of a horrendous appearance) but convert it into energy and nourishment moving forward.

It is my challenge to you, what would it take to be fully aware of your dire, bad situation, or hardship and yet transform it into a piece of food; a piece of food that—once consumed—serves as nurturance and puts you closer to your goals. In order to find your attitude of gratitude, acknowledge one hardship and think of one way in which you have taken your situation and yet moved closer to your goal(s). Who is one person whose friendship you owe to your hardship?

If you feel like you could use an extra support or need help finding your attitude of gratitude, please come and see a professional at the Counseling Center. At the very least, know that you are not alone and that a resource is available to you should you need it. The Counseling Center will be hosting an outreach event on 11/16/16 named Attitude of Gratitude. Come and join us at the Student Rayburn center 10am-2pm.