

Spreading Happiness and Joy

I came across a delightful children's book some years ago, quite by chance, that introduced a wonderful concept to our family. With clear, eloquent prose and charming illustrations, *Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids*¹ explains that everyone has an invisible "bucket" which holds "...your good thoughts and good feelings about yourself." (p. 8) People feel happy when their buckets are full – and sad when they are empty. We can fill other people's buckets by saying kind things, being friendly, and including them in what we are doing. We empty other people's buckets when we say unkind things, make fun of them, or ignore them. Some people seem to deliberately empty other peoples' buckets by bullying, teasing, and being mean. Usually this is because their buckets are empty, and they mistakenly believe they can make themselves feel better by dipping into someone else's bucket. That doesn't work, but when we fill someone else's bucket, we fill our own as well.

A Christian educator friend added another insight to our family conversations about bucket-filling: we need to be able to fill our own buckets and not always have to depend on others to do it for us. We brainstormed things we like to do that make us feel happy: singing, dancing, praying, reading, meditating, etc. We have also talked about the need to ask for what we need when we are feeling down or lonely and want someone to do something for us. If we let ourselves get upset or resentful because of unmet needs, we not only suffer ourselves, but have little energy to share with others. If we practice good self-care by doing things that "fill our bucket," we have more happiness and joy to share with others.

According to McCloud, the "bucket" concept originated with Dr. Donald O. Clifton, who told the "Dipper and Bucket" story in the 1960s and later co-wrote *How Full is Your Bucket?*² and a children's version as well.³ In addition to *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*, McCloud has written several other children's books expanding on this theme.⁴ In 2011, she published *Growing Up with a Bucket Full of Happiness: Three Rules for a Happier Life*, in which she explains and expands on concepts related to "bucket filling" for pre-teens and teens. She adds a new concept especially appropriate for this age group. In addition to Rules 1 and 2 ("Be a Bucket Filler" and "Don't Dip" into someone else's bucket), she states Rule 3: "Use Your Lid," which means to "guard and protect the good thoughts and feelings inside your bucket." (p. 39) We are bound to encounter people with empty buckets who will try to dip into ours. Our "Lid" is the thinking part of us that can stop - instead of reacting, think about what is happening, and decide what to do next. Most important of all, do not believe unkind things someone might say to or about you. Instead of taking unkindness personally, realize that the other person has a problem, which may or may not have anything to do with you, and above all, don't try to get back at someone because that would dip into your bucket too! McCloud also encourages readers to protect other people from bullying or other hurtful behaviors, to take a "bucket-filling" pledge, and to keep a daily journal. Pages 73-75 of this book provide daily questions to ask oneself, or you can purchase *My Bucketfilling Journal: 30 Days to a Happier Life* on line at www.bucketfillers101.com.⁵

I am so glad I discovered McCloud's work while our grandchildren were still young. By introducing this concept to them early, we have established a language for encouraging and rewarding positive relationship behaviors. I urge families, classrooms, and other groups to read these books together and weave this concept into their daily conversation. Such conversation can help individuals discover a way to talk about their needs as well as practice both self- and

other-awareness. Parents and teachers can point out applications by asking appropriate questions and sharing their own experiences: “You just filled my bucket,” “Do you think that bully might have an empty bucket?” or “How can I help fill your bucket?” Church leaders and teachers can easily connect these teachings to familiar scripture passages about love, such as Luke 6:31, Luke 10:27, and John 13:34-35. The bucket-filling concept offers a wonderful illustration of the teaching in Galatians 5:22-23a, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Resources

1) *Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids*, by Carol McCloud (Northville, MI: Ferne Press, 2006) At a parenting workshop in the early 1990s, the author heard an expert in brain research describe an infant’s mental and emotional health as a bucket, which must be filled by the loving attention and care of its parents and other caregivers. She wrote this book to show children how to love others, express kindness, and experience the joy that comes from helping others feel good.

2) *How Full is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life*, by Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D. (New York, Gallup Press, 2004) Using examples from the workplace as well as stories about personal relationships, the authors explore the effects of positive words and actions on families, health, longevity, worker satisfaction, and productivity. Among the strategies they offer for increasing positive feelings is the “drop,” a short specific, individualized written note complimenting a person for something.

3) *How Full is Your Bucket? For Kids*, by Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer (New York: Gallup Press, 2009) A easy-to-understand picture book explaining the power of positive words and actions.

4) *Fill a Bucket: A Guide to Happiness for Young Children*, by Carol McCloud and Katherine Martin, M.A. (Northville, MI: Ferne Press, 2008) This book for younger children includes a song about filling buckets and effectively communicates the importance of kind words and actions to help a person develop a healthy self-concept.

Will You Fill My Bucket? Daily Acts of Love Around the World, by Carol McCloud and Karen Wells (Northville, MI, 2012) In this beautifully illustrated children’s book, children from twelve different countries invite someone to fill their buckets by kind words and actions. This book reinforces the power of bucket-filling and suggests bucket-filling actions anyone can do.

Bucket-Filling from A to Z, by Carol McCloud and Caryn Butzke (Northville, MI: Ferne Press, 2013) Short poems for each letter of the alphabet highlight various aspects of bucket-filling.

My Very Own Bucket-Filling from A to Z Coloring Book, by Carol McCloud and Caryn Butzke (2014)

5) *Growing Up with a Bucket Full of Happiness: Three Rules for a Happier Life*, by Carol McCloud (Northville, MI: Ferne Press, 2011). The author explains and expands on concepts related to “bucket filling” for pre-teens and teens.

6) www.bucketfillers101.com Visit this website to download free materials, learn about school and classroom programs, book a presentation, sign up for an e-newsletter, and purchase resources.