

An Appreciation Awakening

Daniel Rendelman

*My passion to help others believe has been fueled
by those who have helped me believe in myself.
To all of you I dedicate this work in gratitude.*

*This book is especially for my children
Nick, Judah, Josh, Isaiah, and Rebekah.
I hope you learn these lessons and
your life is full of abundance through appreciation.*

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Introduction

Don't have an attitude of gratitude

When I told a friend I was writing a book about appreciation, she responded, “Oh yes, it’s important to have an attitude of gratitude.” Instantly, my stomach cringed. That’s not the idea I had in mind or what you’ll discover in this book.

We have heard clichés so many times they hardly grab our attention or make us think deeper any more. I don’t know about you, but when I hear someone say to not “judge a book by its cover” or “no pain no gain,” I immediately zone out. Merely the thought of certain phrases makes my eyes roll back into my head. Statements like “every cloud has a silver lining” have become so corny and overused to the point where they are meaningless.

Nope. This book is not about having *an attitude of gratitude*. The message here is about real lasting change and how you can better your personal world through appreciation. The ideas I share include those adapted from others, my own insights, scientific studies, religious teachings, and some deeply personal stories. We simply don’t need another book full of lofty blubber or clichés to waste our time and hardly impact our lives. Here is hope and encouragement, written with you in mind.

Yes, “attitude” and “gratitude” rhyme, but it doesn’t mean we need a lifestyle around another cliché. I hate to burst your bubble, but appreciation deserves better.

Together, we will delve deep into this subject of

thankfulness and will indeed challenge you to change your life in a grateful way. That's why you are reading this in the first place, right? Don't you have a desire for abundance and peace? An attitude adjustment might get you there for a moment, but it won't *keep* you there.

Attitudes are a dime a dozen. They are nice, but attitudes are purely fleeting feelings that come and go like the wind. Simply thinking positively doesn't work long-term. We need real lasting change. What we must have is an appreciation awakening.

An awakening is greater than just an attitude. To have an awakening indicates someone was first asleep. Haven't you felt tired lately? Tired of the normal ho-hum rhythm of life? Tired of feeling lost or alone? Tired of nothing changing for the good? Well, it's time to wake up! Everyone lulled by the apathy of society needs to be jolted from their slumber. Let this book be an alarm clock to buzz you out of hibernation from the norms of society. How can such a small writing make such a big difference?

Through teaching you to live in the NOW.

An appreciation awakening is like a revelation, or more accurately, a revolution. Just a handful of people whose mind is set on gratitude can bring real hope to the world. Encouragement is contagious. If we can affect one small section of our world, then a chain reaction can multiply these efforts and possibly change humanity.

This is my heart's desire.

"Gratitude can change our world in immensely important ways. Because, if you are grateful, then you are not fearful. If you are not fearful, then you are not violent. If you are grateful, then you act out of a sense of enough and not a

sense of scarcity,” said Brother David Steindl-Rast, author and Benedictine monk.

This revelation can turn the restless content and the greedy grateful. This revolution can soften hardened hearts and clean up the acts of those who only want more for themselves. By saying “thanks” in a meaningful and genuine way, you can revolutionize your personal world. One person’s small act of goodness repeated over and over can multiply into a lifestyle which affects many others.

This awakening has started. People are beginning to wipe the sleep from their eyes and recognize how good life is today and how much better it can be in the future. You can fan this flame (another cliché) by acknowledging every good thing in your life as a gift. Let your soul come alive with appreciation.

That’s the goal of this book; written in hopes of being an alarm clock of awakening. Please don’t hit the snooze button. Read the chapters about faith, science, and self-love. Lean into the stories about how to be thankful in the worst of times. Alter your lifestyle with the one-of-a-kind Thirty-One Days of Gratitude Challenge. Take advantage of and use the interactive journal.

There’s more application here than merely information. That’s a good thing. The internet and libraries are full of information. We need to use what we have already learned and implement it. This book is your call to appreciation action.

You can’t be thankful for everything, but you can be thankful in everything.

I know the easiest way to have an awakening to goodness is by living in the NOW. This is how you can experience every single moment in a state of appreciation,

regardless of your circumstances. I really believe the most helpful way to have a shift into abundance is to have awareness of the NOW. Too often, we drift by in our world like it's on auto-pilot. We do the same thing day in and day out in the same way without any consideration of meaning or purpose. That's how you drove around town yesterday or how you made your coffee this morning. Right? You didn't have to think about every nuance of driving a vehicle or how to brew the best java. You just did what you normally do. That's being on auto-pilot.

You were on automatic when you brushed your teeth without considering which direction to push the brush. Do you remember each movement of your flossing or dental hygiene yesterday? Of course not, because it was done on auto-pilot. This boring existence isn't life as it was meant to be lived. Even during mundane tasks, we shouldn't be zoning out into boredom. What we need is to be auto-corrected.

You can't be thankful *for* everything, but you can be thankful *in* everything.

Your auto-correction will be living in the NOW. What this means is having an awareness of the moment, the surroundings, and your overall desires. The word NOW is a perfect way to activate appreciation. You'll learn the deeper distinctions of thankfulness in the chapters to come, but for NOW, let's look at the concept of NOW to get started.

NOW is an acronym with a unique meaning for us:

N is for Near: this tells us to live in the exact moment by being mindful of what is near you. Be present. Think about what is surrounding you. Don't stress over what you don't have. Don't focus on what *could* happen. Look around and be thankful for what is near now. It could be the birds in the trees,

the computer you are using, the clothes on your body, or the person you met for lunch. Simply be appreciative for what is near.

O is for Oblivious: We can look at what's near and still miss people, places, and things to which we're oblivious. Don't be unaware to your surroundings, your safety, or your senses. There is so much we take for granted. A simple quick moment to pause and reflect on what you may be oblivious toward will lead you to be thankful for things like the oxygen we're breathing or the food we're about to eat. Indeed, pausing to simply focus on your breathing during the day or to say "thanks" at meal time are two good ways to be aware of the oblivious and stay in the NOW.

W is for Wishes: Always be grateful for what you have presently and what you really wish for. Making a wish isn't only for children when they see a star or when they blow out the candles on their birthday cake. Instead, it's healthy to dream, to have goals, and to wish as if things have already happened. Knowing what you want and being thankful in advance will help you see your wishes become fulfilled. As you know what you want and then are thankful before it happens, you will often see your WISHES fulfilled.

Living in the NOW—the NEAR, the OBLIVIOUS, and the WISHFUL—is a direct way to tap into the power of gratitude. It makes thankfulness an easy lifestyle and not merely a practice.

"When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around," said singer Willie Nelson. It's normal for people to change behavior for a short period of time, like when making a New Year's resolution or deciding not to eat desserts anymore. These behavioral modifications are practices which often fall short. Your daily consciousness of being in the NOW

is less about practicing thankfulness and more about being in a specific state of mind or mindset. What I mean by this is to pay attention to your emotions and your thoughts. Replace negative or anxious thinking with gratitude. As you are aware of the blessings in your life you can have a state of gratefulness. Your life will benefit tremendously as you focus on the positive and are thankful for what is NEAR, OBLIVIOUS, and WISHFUL.

So, to end with a few more clichés... keep your chin up, your fingers crossed, kick up your heels, and let this work like clockwork.

Your challenge is to go for it.

Live in the NOW.

The appreciation awakening you're about to have is a new state, or possibly even a soul shift. It's a deep transformation of awareness to be in the NOW at all times. This simple act of mindfulness will help you wake from your selfish hibernation. Your soul will come alive and your world can be so much better.

Remember, an "attitude of gratitude" doesn't work. Instead, we must pass from the mundane to the abundant.

We've got to face the frustrations of life and imagine better, as that's the way the cookie crumbles.

Chapter One - Just Imagine Better

Fear and worry danced together as I drove to one of my best friends' house. We had spoken earlier in the day, yet I couldn't shake a horrible feeling hanging around after our conversation. He had been suffering from insurmountable stress. For the last few months, he had fallen deeper and deeper into a dark place. The tension of his presence had become thick and gloomy. He was miserable and was making everyone around him miserable. Over the phone that day, he slurred his words as he had evidently boozed it up the night before. As I pulled into his driveway, my heart pounded wildly. I was worried this wasn't merely a hangover. Something else seemed wrong.

A beautiful blue convertible sat in the garage. This was his dream car and he loved to put the top down and blast The Rolling Stones or Drive-By Truckers. He had everything anyone could ever want in life: the support of a loving family, good health, impeccable integrity, a stunning house with a literal white picket fence, and an enjoyable career dotted with successes. His sister had recently relocated to be closer. His daughter, his princess, hung on every word he spoke. What could be causing so much pain in his life? And, why was there so much dread for me about this surprise visit?

Answers quickly came as I approached the glass storm door on the back of his home. Attached to it, at eye level, was a simple typed note with only two sentences. The font was basic and there was no punctuation.

I'll never forget the words I read...

Call 911

I cant do this anymore Ive had enough

Time slowed. My worst fears were realized as I looked past his posted words and into the kitchen. There on the floor was his lifeless body. Crimson was splattered on his face and his skin was chalky white. I yelled his name. Nothing changed. I screamed louder. Again, nothing happened. Somehow, my fingers dialed the emergency number on my phone. The dispatcher heard my first few words of shock as I described the scene of what I had stumbled upon.

The day before, my friend and I had been together for almost eleven hours. He was his normal, grumpy self and nothing seemed awry. Cynicism and sarcasm were his go to methods of communication, so to hear him complain was standard.

Nothing was normal about this day, though.

It didn't make sense how he could even consider suicide as a solution. But, he did more than consider it. He had taken his own life and left his family to clean up the mess.

The finality of my friend's decision is irreparable; memory of that day unforgettable. His life was squandered by one choice to quit caring. He needed relief for his pain. Yet, even those closest to him didn't know he was in so much pain.

Paramedics, officers, and investigators on the scene questioned me over and over about who he was and what I had found. I questioned myself, as well. "Couldn't I have done something to stop this tragedy," I wondered.

Sadly, the pain and pressure my friend experienced isn't abnormal. Life is hard. It's a raw mixture of ups and downs with suffering sprinkled among sunny days. Life is not a thirty-

minute Netflix sitcom where everyone is laughing by the end. Too bad my friend didn't realize he was not alone with his pain. Too sad he had finally had enough.

In an effort to relieve some of the pain he faced, he chose death over life with one final action. Sadly, we often do the same thing, only in smaller actions. Francis Sinclair said, "We don't die, we kill ourselves." No truer words have ever been spoken. We kill ourselves little by little. Disappointments lead to despair. Stress stacks up. We kill ourselves slowly with dread disguised as worry. If we are honest, we would all admit we've been where my friend was that day. You might not have considered death by suicide, but you surely have considered giving up on something or someone.

Have you ever just had enough?

It's from this tragedy of despair that I am asking you to action. Take up the greatest power known to man – the power of imagination. Acknowledge you've had enough of life as it is and imagine better. Please. Please learn from my friend and don't follow his same fate. Create in your mind what you really desire and deserve. Consider how blessed you are now and how abundance can come to you. Imagination empowers the hope for a different tomorrow.

Fifty years ago, when people envisioned the future, the thoughts of flying cars or even time travel seemed possible. Well, that's not exactly how things are today. Instead of being transported across space by laser beams, we have fidget spinners, reality television and online social communities where you can share memes and watch countless hours of cat videos. This is not life as you would have, or maybe even could have, expected years ago.

***Imagination empowers
the hope for a different
tomorrow.*** 9

Others have tried to

foresee the future with their writing like George Orwell did in the thriller *1984* and Ayn Rand wrote in *Atlas Shrugged*. The poet, Yoko Ono, and her songwriting husband, John Lennon, gave their own vision of the future with their song titled “Imagine.” This tune would become one of the most beloved songs of all time. It paints a picture of a beautiful world which is possible if everyone comes together in unity and peace. Here’s a few lines of what they wrote...

*“Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you
You may say I’m a dreamer
But I’m not the only one
I hope someday you’ll join us
And the world will be as one”¹*

John Lennon and his wife saw the world as it could be. Their mind imagined the opposite of what my friend envisioned when he said he had enough. They projected it better than it had ever been. The Recording Industry of America lists “Imagine” as one of the most influential songs of the twentieth century. The tune is a peaceful plea for greatness. Sadly, it seems our world remains a far cry from this ideal.

There is no utopian paradise on the planet. It feels like the idea isn’t only imaginary, but also impossible. We are constantly reminded about how bad things are thanks to twenty-four-hour news cycles. The internet allows us to feel the pain of everyone’s problems with a click. Unfortunately, we’ve become so immune to the heinous side of humanity. It’s

¹ Lennon, John, Jean Jullien, and Yōko Ono. *Imagine*. Boston: Clarion Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

sick how things that should—or used to—shock us are slowly becoming the norm. Kids shooting up their schools, terrorists taking pot shots at concerts, and even sexual misconduct by our leaders are hardly issues of matter anymore. The evils of society are now so comfortable it seems there's nothing good left. Bad day after bad day mounts up until the idea of a world without pain is not even considered. Honestly, when is the last time you heard anyone, a politician or a beauty pageant contestant, talk about world peace? Few people are even thinking about making the world a better place.

But, shouldn't this be part of our mission and purpose?

Shouldn't we leave the world better than we found it?

The options for world change become limited because of the pain we experience. Most choose to ignore the problems in society. Others think only big ideas bring about big change. Both thoughts come up vastly short.

People can ignore the atrocities of the world in hopes such horror never happens to them or anyone they know. This is naïve, though, as bad things happen to good people. The difficulties in other countries or varying areas of our country slowly creep our way and up to our front door. For example, the opioid epidemic started small, but has now swept across our nation exploding into a crisis level.

Ignoring evil only allows for it to breed faster.

Another thought is to try something incredible to change the world. Big ideas make huge impact, right? The inventions of Edison and theories of Einstein have surely made the world a better place. However, most of us haven't come up with something so earth-altering. A friend's father invented the OLED (organic light-emitting diode) source of light and the world has never been the same. The OLED has brought about

amazing benefits in both energy and environmental savings. Yet, that idea is now taken, like so many others. Why couldn't I have thought up the OLED or the concept of Amazon's Alexa or even Flexseal spray paint?

The problem with such life-altering ideas is that we easily become accustomed to the invention. For example, we are so comfortable with plastic grocery bags that we have missed the danger they can pose to the environment. Or we have been so dependent upon that mini-robot we carry in our pocket, that we don't realize how smart it is and how dumb we have become. The rise of robots and now the assistance of AI technology is a little scary. Can't we learn from science fiction that dependence upon technology leads to demise? Of course, ideas aren't limited to science and creativity. Government and philosophy are full of improvement concepts hoping to make lasting transformations.

Overall, government does help the world. Just imagine the chaos we would have if there were no laws, no regulations, and no aide. I grew up in the Bible belt of the Deep South where government assistance had become necessary for many. The USDA provided loans for rural land purchases and even funding for education was determined by how many children were on food stamps. Often, the higher the amount of poverty, the higher the budget dollars would be allotted to the county for education and infrastructure. Today, the government was and is one of the largest employers...city, county, state, federal, armed forces, national guard, judicial, ad nauseum.

The government does a tremendous amount of good by keeping us safe and maintaining order in society. Uncle Sam tries to help, but often finds himself creating dependence or controlling behavior. The government has its hand in every part of life. Worse, the trust people place in politicians today is

alarming. The ferocious political landscape has turned a civil duty into civil war. It is like voters think that their political leader is the answer to everyone's problems. Can't we learn from history that absolute power corrupts absolutely?

Sadly, the United States is becoming the divided states. The red and blue colors of the electorate separate us based on liberal or conservative leanings. During elections, neighbors who were previously kind begin to think differently about each other. Social media becomes a raging battlefield of political banter and offensive posts. Its literally like each party thinks they are right and everyone else is wrong. Whatever happened to compromise?

The idea of winning the entire population for one's specific political leaning is audacious. When asked, more and more people identify their party affiliation as "independent." It seems the masses have become sick of the behavior often shown by political leaders. Lying, name calling, blame, and even violence has become commonplace. People will argue about anything and everything. The Democrats think the Socialists are too liberal, the Republicans fight the media, the television talking heads argue against each other. Will it ever stop? Well, as soon as one election cycle ends, the next begins, so probably not.

If only there was a way to elicit lasting change for good. If only we could make things better without a big idea or invention. If only we could stop ignoring the problems of our culture and imagine a greater life. If only my friend had not given up hope. Too bad John Lennon didn't sing about how to get us to a wonderful imaginary land where dream comes true.

Well, maybe he did.

Lennon and Ono performed and wrote another song

which possibly holds the roadmap to peace and purpose.

The song “Imagine” is almost like a primer to get us excited and ready for the future without hunger or greed. The couple’s other song, “Let Me Count the Ways,” tells us how to experience such bliss. First, we imagine and then we are told how to actualize the dream of a better world.

What is the secret? Just count the ways.

The subject of this second song is disguised to make it sound like Lennon is singing to a lover, nevertheless the words of this song reveal it is written for everyone on Planet Earth. It’s a tune of love for all. It is appreciation expressed in melody.

Read these lyrics and see how simple thanksgiving can make a difference...

*“Thank you, thank you, thank you
Let me count the ways how I see you
It’s like that lake in the mountain you heard about
It’s like that autumn sky that stays so blue
It’s like that air around me that holds me gently
Whispering strongly that you’re always there,
always for me
Thank you, thank you, thank you”²*

Now, I have put the two songs together and it forms what I believe is something that unlocks one of the greatest mysteries of history. How do you bring about goodness and help humanity?

The title of the new song would be “Just Imagine and Count the Ways.”

My version of their lyrics explains...

Let me count the ways how I love you

² John Lennon & Yoko Ono lyrics and song appears on the album Milk And Honey (1984).

*It's easy if you try
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
That it'll be a good day, a good day for us
Imagine all the people living for today*

*Imagine there's no countries
Let me count the ways
How I see you
Thank you, thank you, thank you
Imagine all the people living life in peace
Imagine no possessions
I wonder if I can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
Whispering strongly that you're always there,
always for me
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one
Let me count the ways how I see you
Thank you, thank you, thank you
Thank you, thank you, thank you³*

Changing the world is as basic as adopting the words of two John Lennon songs. Imagine better, be thankful, and imagine better. It's a cycle that works every time. Honestly, faith, science, and philosophy all agree that appreciation is the avenue to abundance.

Now, let's be real. This sounds too simple.

Shouldn't having purpose include some goal-driven

³ Written by John Lennon & Yoko Ono and appears on the album *Milk And Honey* (1984).

action plan, electronic invention or political party to improve life? Wrong. And, you are wrong if you think a world of peace and harmony starts globally. The truth is any global movement is born when individuals reach a breaking point and decide to change. History is replete with stories of brave change agents, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who showed the power of one. One person at a time can be thankful and they can transform their life. Just imagine if we all were positive and thankful.

Imagine.

A chain reaction of appreciation can start with you. This shift I'm suggesting is adopting a mindfulness of gratitude. It's an appreciation awakening. The results will follow. Guaranteed. This isn't just a theory. It's a proven fact.

Scientific studies have proven the power of gratitude upon positive psychology and basic health. Universities and scientists continue to document proof of how thanksgiving is a beneficial practice. Major religions, like Catholicism and Hinduism, also teach the significance of this virtue. Both science and religion agree that showing appreciation has the unique ability to pull anyone out of the pit of despair and offer hope.

This can start with you and with me today.

Changing the world is as simple as doing for yourself what you would want to do for everyone, the Golden Rule. Give to all what you want to receive. Appreciation is something we all desire and can easily spread. Who doesn't want to be appreciated? It's a universal need of every person.

John Lennon was a dreamer. His idea of a pain-free planet can still take place if we can be thankful. Lennon tried to imagine such a world, but no

Changing the world is as simple as doing for yourself what you would want to do for everyone, the Golden Rule.

mind can conceive the radical effect being thankful can actually bring about. It's greater than you can ever imagine. I know this because I've seen it at work in the lives of people my entire life. I've also seen it up close and personal. It was thankfulness that gave me hope when I experienced a horrible time of depression after my close friend died. It was devastating for his friends, family, and me. We all wanted answers. The only place we could find hope was in gratitude.

As my friend's family and I experienced the stages of grief, such as denial and anger, we found only gratitude brought healing. We were thankful for the time we had together. We remembered his snarky, sarcastic comments and how he seemed to always know what to do in any given situation. We were appreciative for the memories. Being thankful brought us through. Gratitude helped me process this tragedy and shifted my thoughts from lack of what I had lost (my friend) to what I still had (the impact of his memories.) His death changed my life. Now, I could see any situation through a different lens.

It's been said a cemetery is the richest place on earth – not because it's full of gold and diamonds, but because in the graveyard lies the ideas and hopes of those who passed away. Life is too short to simply disappear between the dates on your tombstone. You can choose to have meaning and purpose in your life. You can leave a legacy for generations to come. The opportunity is your choice. You can squander away time or experience a life of hope day-by-day through thankfulness. Transforming your life is as simple as using a gratitude journal and counting your blessings regularly. How exactly? You'll be given a guided journal and see how using such can make a huge difference in your life.

When you appreciate your life, you can change your personal world.

When you change your personal world, you change the entire world.

Being appreciative has transformed my worldview and it can do the same for you. We can envision life better, which can lead to a brighter future. Don't buy the lie that we are doomed. Things can and will get better. The next fifty years might not produce flying cars or time travel; however, it can usher in a planet of peace. This peace comes when the soul is content. Contentment is from thanksgiving that spreads as you are grateful every day and in every way. We can now see that Yoko Ono and John Lennon were right all along. When we count the ways, we can imagine and experience the impossible.

It's okay to get to the place of "having enough" as long as you do something positive with the future. Don't make the mistake my friend made in thinking life was beyond repair.

Tomorrow can be different. You can take your frustrated feeling of "having enough" and create positive changes.

Choose today to *choose today* as the starting place of abundance.

Chapter Two - The Science of Gratitude

When Nikola Tesla peered into the future, he saw an energy crisis. Instead of imagining a world of peace and tranquility, Tesla knew the kingpins would be those who could provide energy to the masses. Tesla thought a free energy source would be the answer to world peace. While Edison may have given us the light bulb, Tesla's discovery of the rotating magnetic field gave us the AC electric power system and more.

He is also recognized as the inventor of fluorescent lighting and several mechanical engines which changed manufacturing forever. His passion focused on pulling power from the environment by creating a system to remove radiant energy from the ground to give us power. Before his death, he tried to invent a way to extract solar sparks from the air in what he called the "ideal way of obtaining motive power."

Tesla sought out a renewable energy system to power the world. His inventions changed history and made energy more accessible today. Though his idea of an unlimited source hasn't been developed yet, there are greater ways to manifest energy than ever before. Renewable sources like wind and solar are regularly used. There are other sources of power we are still discovering.

Tesla said, "It's hard to give unlimited power to people with limited minds." How can our minds expand and be open to unlimited power? Gratitude is a source of giving and receiving energy with no bounds. Did you know being thankful releases an energy that changes the world on a subatomic level? It does.

Appreciation is an indisputable law of science, like gravity. Being thankful pulls more to you to be thankful for. Dr. Wayne Dyer, philosopher, author, and motivational speaker, said, “What you appreciate appreciates.” What this means is when you value or appreciate something in your life, it will grow in value to you.

Here’s the great part – you get to choose what to appreciate. You can be thankful for the good or the tragic. You can be thankful through any situation. Having gratitude will raise your consciousness to a state of being until you have an “appreciation awakening.”

Again, there is a big difference between an attitude and an awakening. Attitudes come and go. When you have an appreciation awakening, you will live from a place of thankfulness. You will be constantly thankful. Sure, there will always be issues and problems, but having an appreciation awakening empowers you to overcome any obstacle. I believe a state of thankfulness is the door to an abundant life. Gratitude is a stronger force than what is released when you split atoms to make nuclear energy. This power is available for you. All you have to do is choose to plug into thankfulness.

We need to visit this idea of gratefulness because of its power dynamism to shift our world. It produces health, peace of mind, happiness, wholeness, and elevates your mood. We use solar panels to harness the unlimited energy of the sun, we can also tap into boundless appreciation. When you give thanks, or even when you *are* thanked, amazing things happen inside your body and mind.

Recent studies from the Greater Good Science Center at the University of Berkeley have found gratitude has unmatched powers to benefit physical health and

psychological wellness. Their findings have been well-documented and are scientific proofs that life is improved when you have an awakening of appreciation. The school graciously agreed to share their findings.

“After fifteen years of research, we know that gratitude is a key to psychological well-being. Gratitude can make people happier, improve their relationships, and potentially even counteract depression and suicidal thoughts. But might the benefits of gratitude go beyond that? Could gratitude be good for your physical health, too?

“While some studies have associated gratitude with a whole slew of benefits—from fewer aches and pains to improved sleep to better cardiovascular health—others have found more mixed results. More research is needed before doctors start giving out prescriptions for gratitude, but there’s good reason to suspect that gratitude has positive ramifications for your body,” says scientist Summer Allen for the University of Berkeley. While a new pharmaceutical drug that benefits mental health takes years to make it to the mainstream market, we already have gratitude available. The human testing has been completed and we know that it works. We are now at a time when gratitude is considered a science. This means that your life is the laboratory. The hypothesis here is that being thankful is good for you. Evidence is mounting up to prove the theory correct. The scientific world is coming together in support of these findings that a thankful person is healthier and more whole. This is powerful. We have finally found the source of unbridled power for health – gratitude.

A small alteration in your life to be more grateful is part of a global movement of thanksgiving. In chemistry a chain reaction occurs when a self-sustaining sequence is initiated. In physics a chain reaction is the process which continues yielding similar results. In appreciation, one-person thanks another who then thanks another. This is the cycle of appreciation that powers goodness in our world. Here is how it works... let's say you are kind to someone. They receive goodness from you and feel appreciation. This thankfulness is shown and expressed to you in a genuine manner by them. Later you are more likely to give to others (to continue the cycle) as you have received thankfulness. The person to whom you were kind is filled with gratefulness and will no doubt repeat the same cycle in the future. Goodness produces more goodness.

“Gratitude...can be an incredibly powerful and invigorating experience,” says researcher Jeff Huffman, “There is growing evidence that being grateful may not only bring good feelings. It could lead to better health,” the scientist wrote. Just as gasoline fuels a combustion engine, gratitude fuels an abundant life. If you want to be happy then you need to be empowered with this idea of appreciation.

“When you are thankful for what you do have then you are able to receive more. Greed causes stinginess and contraction. Gratitude is the master force that attracts more good to you. It does this with every part of your life, including your health. People of all ages and various nationalities who have more grateful dispositions report fewer health complaints than their

less grateful counterparts. In one study, more grateful participants reported fewer health problems (such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems, respiratory infections, and sleep disturbances); in another, they reported fewer physical symptoms (including headaches, dizziness, stomach aches, and runny noses). Seems pretty clear-cut, right?

“Not necessarily. One big question is whether gratitude causes good health or whether good health causes gratitude—or perhaps something else makes us both grateful and healthy. Indeed, while these studies suggest that grateful people are healthier, they could also suggest that people in poorer health are less likely to feel grateful. To tease apart this relationship, researchers have begun to explore whether people who engage in gratitude activities benefit from improved health.

“Results from the Greater Good Science Center’s own Thnx4 project found that participants who kept an online gratitude journal for two weeks reported better physical health, including fewer headaches, less stomach pain, clearer skin, and reduced congestion. These results are consistent with a 2003 paper published by Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough. In that study, college students who wrote about things they were grateful for just once a week for ten weeks reported fewer physical symptoms (such as headaches, shortness of breath, sore muscles, and nausea) than students who wrote about daily events or hassles,” continued Allen. “A daily gratitude journal or exercise is key to having an awakening. When you take time daily to reflect upon your blessings and then do something

physical with that feeling of gratitude, you are releasing chemicals throughout your nervous system. Gratitude does a body good! It is fuel for a better life,” wrote scientist Summer Allen for USC Berkeley. ⁴

Studies have shown being thankful affects almost every area of your health. When you appreciate life, life seems to improve. The University of Berkeley reports that boosting your gratitude is a relatively good way to improve your sleep, which is vital for good health. They conducted a study of 401 people with whom over forty percent (40%) were horrible sleepers with clinically-impaired sleep patterns. People who were more grateful actually reported falling asleep faster. Those with grateful hearts slept longer, had quality sleep, and stayed awake more easily throughout the day. The positive thoughts outweighed anything negative.

Just as Tesla sought to harness energy from the abundant resources of the world, we can recognize gratitude as an energy force that can change lives. It has even been proven to fight sickness in the body. Studies have proven being thankful is a remedy for illness. You can say thanks and change your health. It isn't a quick “thank you” that works. You must feel the emotion of gratitude. Then, expect better. When you raise the awareness of how blessed you are, you welcome abundance into your life. When we are thankful, the places in our mind that are at a dis-ease are softened and often sorted out.

The Berkeley scientists further wrote:

“Evidence suggests that just performing gratitude exercises can help. In one study, people with

⁴ "Is Gratitude Good for Your Health?" Greater Good. Accessed October 16, 2018. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/is_gratitude_good_for_your_health.

neuromuscular disease who kept a daily gratitude journal for three weeks reported sleeping significantly longer at night and feeling significantly more refreshed than people in the control group. And in a 2016 study, women who kept a gratitude journal for two weeks reported slightly better daily sleep quality compared to women who performed other tasks.

“While the evidence that gratitude practices benefit sleep is still preliminary, it’s strong enough to suggest that those of us counting sheep may want to try counting blessings instead. Gratitude feels heartwarming, and a growing body of work suggests that gratitude might help keep our actual hearts healthy, too,” says scientist Summer Allen.

“Counting blessings makes a difference. Amazing things happen when you consider all of what you have and how your needs have been met. A simple exercise of just listing your gratitude each day for a period of thirty-one days can make a substantial change in your physical and mental wellbeing. Problems dissipate, and sickness is healed when we are thankful.

“This line of research began in 1995, when a study found that people feeling appreciation (an emotion related to gratitude) have improved heart rate variability, an indicator of good heart health. In a more recent study, women who kept a gratitude journal where they wrote about ‘previously unappreciated people and things in their lives’ for two weeks ended up with lower blood pressure than those who wrote about daily events. Together, these and other results suggest that feeling gratitude can be good for healthy hearts.

“What about people who already have heart problems? Recent studies by Paul Mills, Laura Redwine, and colleagues have probed the relationship between gratitude and health in people with Stage B, asymptomatic heart failure—people whose hearts have suffered structural damage but who show no clear outward symptoms. In their study of 186 patients, more grateful people reported better sleep, less fatigue, less depression, more confidence in their ability to care for themselves, and lower levels of systemic inflammation (an immune response that can have negative effects on the body, including the cardiovascular system). Patients who did daily gratitude journaling for eight weeks also showed decreased markers of inflammation at the end of the experiment.

“These results are especially important given that both depression and sleep problems can worsen heart failure, and they suggest that a gratitude journal might indeed be a good addition to the care provided to heart patients,” reported Allen for USC Berkeley.⁵

Using a gratitude journal at night to recount the activities of the day helps bring closure and prepares your heart for tomorrow. You’ll be challenged throughout this book to start journaling because it makes a profound difference. Just note four to five items that happened and the accompanying emotions you experienced. Being mindful of emotions turns a journal into so much more than merely a diary. Your journal is not only a record of your day, but a total outline of appreciation. As you journal nightly, list anything and everything. Write down both the good and the bad. This helps give perspective to what might have happened. In time, you

⁵ *Ibid.*

will discover how to be thankful for it all and through it all. Soon, you will be energized during your day to be on the lookout for bits and pieces you can document later. As you give thanks, you will begin to process future feelings and events differently. Your mind and body are the science lab for appreciation.

“Expressing gratitude is a powerful practice. It transforms (or helps neutralize) painful events. That doesn’t mean saying ‘thank you’ only for receiving something good, although that’s part of it. This activity is about practicing gratitude for everything, as is. Some situations may be too much to express gratitude for or accept all at once, or maybe ever. But we can turn almost any experience around by practicing gratitude for what we experience or feel each moment, especially the moments we don’t like. If we’re grateful for what we label good, we’ll only be grateful a few times each week. Please don’t twist yourself into a pretzel trying to intellectualize how something may ‘work out for good’ so you can be grateful for that. That’s trying to predict how life will evolve,” wrote bestselling author, Melodie Beattie.⁶

Using a gratitude journal at night to recount the activities of the day helps bring closure and prepares your heart for tomorrow.

There are many ways to show thankfulness when you journal other than listing. You can mix in other writing exercises, creative touches, drawings, and random thoughts, etc. Having an appreciation awakening is not a one-time event; rather it’s a lifestyle that helps you live in complete abundance. (In Chapter 9, I’ve created a unique Thirty-One Day Gratitude

⁶ Beattie, Melody. *The New Codependency: Help and Guidance for Today’s Generation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

Challenge pointing you toward bringing appreciation into this world.)

For example, “Each morning (or as soon as possible,) write the top ten feelings or events bothering, upsetting, or confusing you. Write that you’re grateful for those feelings or events – even if you’re not. Write your gratitude list in a notebook, send yourself an email, or write a letter to God. Include gratitude for what you enjoy, the blessings, the good experiences, too. It’s important to say thank you for our gifts. But you also have to fake, force, and will gratitude – write ‘I AM grateful for: _____,’ whether you’re grateful or not. It’s not lying. It’s a spiritual practice and acting as if,” Beattie wrote in her bestselling book, *The New Codependency*. Yes, you can have an appreciation awakening that stretches you to thank through each day. This thanking will often lead to better health. Let’s let the facts from the scientists speak for themselves...

“Gratitude may even help patients recover from a heart attack. In the Gratitude Research in Acute Coronary Events (GRACE) study by Jeff Huffman and colleagues, more optimistic and more grateful people showed signs of improved blood vessel function two weeks—though not six months—after being hospitalized for heart attacks, compared to less grateful patients. Unlike optimism, though, gratitude didn’t seem to improve patients’ physical activity levels or their likelihood of being readmitted to the hospital. A follow-up study found that people who were more grateful or optimistic two weeks after their heart attack were more likely to follow their doctors’ recommendations six months later.”⁷

Summer Allen continues, “A 2017 study by Neal Krause and colleagues may point to yet another way that gratitude

⁷ “Is Gratitude Good for Your Health?” Greater Good. Accessed October 16, 2018. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/is_gratitude_good_for_your_health.

supports heart health. Studies focused on identifying biomarkers like this are likely to be an important part of the future of research on gratitude and health. For example, as part of the Greater Good Science Center’s Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude initiative, Naomi Eisenberger is testing how a gratitude intervention can change the expression of genes related to inflammation, and Wendy Mendes is examining how experiencing gratitude changes biomarkers related to stress, resilience, and aging.”⁸

Is there anything appreciation cannot do? It helps you sleep, affects your heart positively, and even makes your brain healthier. And, here’s the best part – it costs nothing and is done easily. The magical pill of thankfulness is only hard to swallow if your ego is inflated. It might be difficult to say “thank you” or list blessings if you believe you are the be all and end all. Hopefully, that’s not your issue, but if it is, let me tell you that you’re not. There are so many things to be thankful. All the journals in the world could not hold a listing of your blessings. Again, this gratitude affects your entire life. The findings from the University of Berkeley continue:

“Research on the relationship between gratitude and physical health is still developing, but studies so far suggest that there may be a connection. At the very least, it appears that more grateful people report feeling healthier and sleeping better, and they may even have some physiological markers of better health.

“This raises a clear question: How is it that gratitude might make people healthier? Besides helping them sleep, gratitude may lead people to engage in other behaviors that help keep them healthy, like eating

⁸ *Ibid.*

well and not smoking. Indeed, more grateful people report having healthier lifestyles, more grateful heart attack patients adhere better to their doctors' recommendations, and college students who count blessings weekly for ten weeks exercise significantly more than those who do other writing activities.

“But there are other possible mechanisms. Gratitude’s stress-buffering ability and known power to increase happiness and positive emotions may have downstream positive influences on health. And gratitude’s role in fostering and strengthening social connections may be just as important. A growing body of research strongly suggests that our relationships with others can have tangible health benefits.

“Additionally, we still need more evidence to determine whether particular gratitude activities can improve specific health outcomes, how long these improvements last, and whether characteristics such as age, gender, religion, or personality can influence gratitude’s effects on health. But the evidence is mounting that gratitude may well be one of the fundamental pillars of a healthy lifestyle,” wrote Summer Allen for UC Berkeley.⁹

Thankfulness is an unlimited power source much like the sun. Solar panels capture sunlight to use as energy. We can use appreciation to give life meaning. As the sun is always shining, we should always be thankful. Studies have proven a person who continually thankful is also continually happy. As the rays from the sun take over eight minutes to reach Earth, we often do not know the reach of our appreciation. It may

⁹ *Ibid.*

have eternal impact. Life could change for people when you show thankfulness by leaving a nice tip for good service or sending a handwritten thank you card.

Though it may take time for the result of the gratitude to be reflected in your life, your personal gratitude makes a huge difference. Your personal energy is converted to power when you act upon the emotion of appreciation. This power makes the world better. It is a life-altering exercise of your emotions and a continual mindset that flows into your behavior. The energy of gratitude can be used to shift your thoughts from lack to thankfulness. This can happen as you choose the lifestyle of living in the NOW - the NEAR, the OBLIVIOUS, and the WISHFUL. The scientists from Berkeley have more say about this subject: Science continues to show the power of thanksgiving with more proof of its effectiveness:

“Many studies over the past decade have found that people who consciously count their blessings tend to be happier and less depressed. We set out to address these questions in a recent research study involving nearly 300 adults, mostly college students who were seeking mental health counseling at a university. We recruited these participants just before they began their first session of counseling, and, on average, they reported clinically low levels of mental health at the time. The majority of people seeking counseling services at this university in general struggled with issues related to depression and anxiety.

“We randomly assigned our study participants into three groups. Although all three groups received counseling services, the first group was also instructed to write one letter of gratitude to another person each week for three weeks, whereas the second group was

asked to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings about negative experiences. The third group did not do any writing activity.

“What did we find? Compared with the participants who wrote about negative experiences or only received counseling, those who wrote gratitude letters reported significantly better mental health four weeks and twelve weeks after their writing exercise ended. This suggests that gratitude writing can be beneficial not just for healthy, well-adjusted individuals, but also for those who struggle with mental health concerns. In fact, it seems, practicing gratitude on top of receiving psychological counseling carries greater benefits than counseling alone, even when that gratitude practice is brief.

“And that’s not all. When we dug deeper into our results, we found indications of *how* gratitude might actually work on our minds and bodies. While not definitive, here are four insights from our research suggesting what might be behind gratitude’s psychological benefits.

1. Gratitude unshackles us from toxic emotions

“First, by analyzing the words used by participants in each of the two writing groups, we were able to understand the mechanisms behind the mental health benefits of gratitude letter writing. We compared the percentage of positive emotion words, negative emotion words, and ‘we’ words (first-person plural words) that participants used in their writing. Not surprisingly, those in the gratitude writing group used a higher percentage of positive emotion words and ‘we’

words, and a lower proportion of negative emotion words, than those in the other writing group.

“However, people who used more positive emotion words and more ‘we’ words in their gratitude letters didn’t necessarily have better mental health later. It was only when people used fewer negative emotion words in their letters that they were significantly more likely to report better mental health. In fact, it was the lack of negative emotion words—not the abundance of positive words—that explained the mental health gap between the gratitude writing group and the other writing group.

“Perhaps this suggests that gratitude letter writing produces better mental health by shifting one’s attention away from toxic emotions, such as resentment and envy. When you write about how grateful you are to others and how much other people have blessed your life, it might become considerably harder for you to ruminate on your negative experiences.

2. Gratitude helps even if you don’t share it

“We told participants who were assigned to write gratitude letters that they weren’t required to send their letters to their intended recipient. In fact, only twenty-three percent (23%) of participants who wrote gratitude letters sent them. But those who didn’t send their letters enjoyed the benefits of experiencing gratitude nonetheless. (Because the number of people who sent their letters was so small, it was hard for us to determine whether this group’s mental health was better than those who didn’t send their letter.

“This suggests that the mental health benefits of

writing gratitude letters are not entirely dependent on actually communicating that gratitude to another person.

“So, if you’re thinking of writing a letter of gratitude to someone, but you’re unsure whether you want that person to read the letter, we encourage you to write it anyway. You can decide later whether to send it (and we think it’s often a good idea to do so). But the mere act of writing the letter can help you appreciate the people in your life and shift your focus away from negative feelings and thoughts.

3. Gratitude’s benefits take time

“It’s important to note that the mental health benefits of gratitude writing in our study did not emerge immediately, but gradually accrued over time. Although the different groups in our study did not differ in mental health levels one week after the end of the writing activities, individuals in the gratitude group reported better mental health than the others four weeks after the writing activities, and this difference in mental health became even larger twelve weeks after the writing activities.

“These results are encouraging because many other studies suggest that the mental health benefits of positive activities often decrease rather than increase over time afterward. We don’t really know why this positive snowball effect occurred in our study. Perhaps the gratitude letter writers discussed what they wrote in their letters with their counselors or with others. These conversations may have reinforced the psychological benefits derived from the gratitude

writing itself.

“For now, the bottom line is this: If you participate in a gratitude writing activity, don’t be too surprised if you don’t feel dramatically better immediately after the writing. Be patient and remember that the benefits of gratitude might take time to kick in.

4. Gratitude has lasting effects on the brain

“About three months after the psychotherapy sessions began, we took some of the people who wrote gratitude letters and compared them with those who didn’t do any writing. We wanted to know if their brains were processing information differently.

“We used an fMRI scanner to measure brain activity while people from each group did a ‘pay it forward’ task. In that task, the individuals were regularly given a small amount of money by a nice person, called the ‘benefactor.’ This benefactor only asked that they pass the money on to someone if they felt grateful. Our participants then decided how much of the money, if any, to pass on to a worthy cause (and we did in fact donate that money to a local charity).

“We wanted to distinguish donations motivated by gratitude from donations driven by other motivations, like feelings of guilt or obligation. So, we asked the participants to rate how grateful they felt toward the benefactor, and how much they wanted to help each charitable cause, as well as how guilty they would feel if they didn’t help. We also gave them questionnaires to measure how grateful they are in their lives in general. We found that when people who are generally more grateful gave more money to a

cause, they showed greater neural sensitivity in the medial prefrontal cortex, a brain area associated with learning and decision making. This suggests that people who are more grateful are also more attentive to how they express gratitude.

“Most interestingly, when we compared those who wrote the gratitude letters with those who didn’t, the gratitude letter writers showed greater activation in the medial prefrontal cortex when they experienced gratitude in the fMRI scanner. This is striking as this effect was found three months after the letter writing began. This indicates that simply expressing gratitude may have lasting effects on the brain. While not conclusive, this finding suggests that practicing gratitude may help train the brain to be more sensitive to the experience of gratitude down the line, and this could contribute to improved mental health over time.

“Our research so far not only suggests that writing gratitude letters may be helpful for people seeking counseling services but also explains what’s behind gratitude’s psychological benefits. At a time when many mental health professionals are feeling crunched, we hope that this research can point them—and their clients—toward an effective and beneficial tool. Regardless of whether you’re facing serious psychological challenges, if you have never written a gratitude letter before, we encourage you to try it. Much of our time and energy is spent pursuing things we currently don’t have. Gratitude reverses our priorities to help us appreciate the people and things we do,” wrote scientists Joel Wong and Joshua Brown for UC

Berkeley.¹⁰

Again, gratitude is a type of science. Your life is the experiment. Each day, you can prove the hypothesis correct in that appreciation adds value to life and life to value.

“Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity; it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all,” said William Faulkner.

You are scientific proof that saying “thank you” is meaningful. It is experienced in the heart and processed through actions. This cycle continues when you think about what was done, rejoice in the moment, and then, like sunlight, shine your appreciation upon someone else. Appreciation is always demonstrated in action.

President John F. Kennedy said, “As we express our gratitude we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.” A true appreciation awakening is not a mere following of specific rules or regulations. What we need is action, appreciation action. Just as we could use a free, renewable resource for energy, we all need more appreciation in our lives. When you say thanks, it changes the world. It changes you and makes the world a better place. What could be more wonderful than that?

The previous articles originally appeared in the online magazine of the Greater Good Science Center at USC Berkeley and are reprinted used with their permission. Read more at www.greatergood.berkeley.edu.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter Three - A Thanksgiving Faith

Thanksgiving!

Just the name of the holiday brings to mind precious memories of families gathered together for a festive meal. Over 46 million turkeys are prepared in the United States on this one day. The bird can be baked, smoked, or even deep fried. However, those in other parts of the world don't necessarily know of our Thanksgiving fun. More than likely, they have never experienced our wonderful indulgence in cranberry sauce, family fellowship, and football. The way we celebrate Thanksgiving seems to be purely unique. A different country eating turkey on the fourth Thursday in November would be akin to Americans celebrating the Australian Anzac Day. It doesn't make sense. The world doesn't share the joy or the calories of our Turkey Day. At least, they can share the concept of the holiday.

Thanksgiving began as a celebratory meal between the Pilgrims from the *Mayflower* and the Native Americans. Historically, it's a day of prayer and appreciation to a higher power. It was President Lincoln who declared it as a time of "thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens." This chapter discusses gratitude from a faith perspective and shows how the science of thanksgiving supports its religious context. Be prepared to be surprised by this exploration of appreciation and its ability to change lives. Even if you are not spiritual, these concepts are universally beneficial.

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of all virtues, but the parent of all virtues," said Marcus Tullius Cicero.

The connection between the hungry holiday and the practice of gratitude bears repeating: giving thanks naturally pairs with enjoying food just like gravy goes with mashed potatoes. Since the cave man cooked his first meal over the fire, people have gathered together to feast. There seems to be something inside of people that draws us together to eat. Maybe the ancient pterodactyl bird was too big for one family, so they shared it with others. Who knows?

Most people don't enjoy eating alone on a regular basis. What good is an amazing dish if it isn't shared? Stopping to have a meal alongside those you care about is a normal part of life. (Think picnics, fast food lunch breaks, etc.) We are a relational people and eating gives us a chance to slow down and share. We were created to be in community. "Enough is a feast," says a Buddhist proverb.

For some, a meal will start with a bowing of the head and a prayer of "thanks" or "grace." The prayer is normally a short expression of gratitude for those who prepared the food and a blessing for what is about to be consumed. This specific practice is regardless of religious preferences. Jews, Christians, Buddhist, and the Hindu all share a custom of prayers before eating. The ancient Al-Araf writing says, "Satan's primary mission is to make humans ungrateful."¹¹

Gratitude is finally something on which all faiths can agree. Gratitude gives us the concept that we are not alone. It shows us we are to acknowledge our dependence upon a Higher Power and other people.

We should be grateful to others always. Without people, we simply couldn't exist. You literally came from your mother's body and were dependent upon your parents/family for years.

¹¹ Al-Araf 7:17

When you are elderly, your diaper may be changed again by care givers. And, you certainly can't carry your own casket.

All your life, you have enjoyed the benefits of those who have gone before you. You didn't have to create the internet or manufacture your own tin foil – someone did that for you. Neither did you have to pave the road you traveled yesterday or make your own electricity. The efforts of others make life so much easier.

Every day, you are around those who offer their services. Often, they go unnoticed as they are stuck in thankless situations or you have merely become so used to the service that you don't think twice about it. When was the last time you spoke up and thanked the street sweeper or checkout clerk? So much is taken for granted.

“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it,” said William Author Ward.¹²

Sharing a meal allows those in your circle the opportunity to pause and appreciate how we need each other. Even at Thanksgiving, you shouldn't do it all. The kids can set the table, your friend may cook the macaroni and cheese, your parents could prepare the turkey, and you get the house ready for the guests. This big event reminds us we are not the source. Life is a group effort. Shouldn't we recognize those who make our life easier?

Gratitude toward a Higher Source is also important. Acknowledging our need for other people is, in a way, acknowledging how we need God. Have you ever wondered who brought those folks across your path in the first place? Or,

¹² "Why It Matters to Express Gratitude." Mindfulness Muse. July 05, 2012. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://www.mindfulnessmuse.com/positive-psychology/why-it-matters-to-express-gratitude>.

why you were born into your specific family? There is, indeed, a cosmic plan for your life. You are not an accident. You were planned and there is a plan for you. Our creator made you on purpose and for a purpose. You'll discover your purpose when you are thankful.

“Now the key to all this is that we cannot only experience this once in a while. We cannot only have grateful experiences.

***“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it,”
said William Author Ward***

We can be people who live gratefully,” explained Brother David Steindl-Rast. “Grateful living; that is the thing. And how can we live gratefully? By experiencing, by becoming aware that every moment is a given moment, as we say. It's a gift. You haven't earned it. You haven't brought it about in any way. You have no way of assuring that there will be another moment given to you, and yet, that's the most valuable thing that can ever be given to us, this moment, with all the opportunity that it contains. If we didn't have this present moment, we wouldn't have any opportunity to do anything or experience anything, and this moment is a gift. It's a given moment, as we say.”¹³

Being appreciative connects us with a Higher Source. I use the term “Source” as a reference to God on purpose. God is the “Source” and supplier of everything you need or want. Don't be mistaken that you are the sole provider. The Spirit, alone, is Source. The Source is everywhere always. Everything you have is because He has loaned it to you for His purpose. Source even gives you the desires of your heart. Those desires can come to pass as you trust and then surrender to His plan.

¹³ "Want to Be Happy? Be Grateful: Brother David Steindl-Rast at TEDGlobal 2013." TED Blog. August 14, 2015. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://blog.ted.com/want-to-be-happy-be-grateful-brother-david-steindl-rast-at-tedglobal-2013/>.

This universe is bigger than you and me. We have someone bigger to thank. God is the Source. God loves you. Source is for you. The Spirit is deserving of our thanks. When we pray in gratitude or say “thank you” aloud, God hears our dependence on Him. By having a thankful heart and grateful disposition throughout our day, we also hear our dependence on Him. It reminds us we are not alone. Thanksgiving reinforces trust in our Source. It openly acknowledges our dependence upon other people and upon God.

“But Daniel,” you may be thinking. “I thought you have proven thankfulness is a science and; therefore, should not have anything to do with religion?”

The science of gratitude has proven its effectiveness through countless studies. It is no longer a theory. It is a proven fact that being thankful can better your life. But, is it correct to simply thank the universe for being the universe? Who allowed the universe to *be* in the first place? Science proves Source!

I have found gratitude to Source gives the Almighty a unique opening to reveal His purpose in my life. When I thank God, I find I have more to thank Him for. Again, Dr. Wayne Dyer’s quote is important to revisit. He said, “What you appreciate appreciates.”¹⁴ This is totally true. Appreciating something small makes it grow in value to be bigger in my life. For example, just by acknowledging the oxygen I breathe makes it more precious. Because of my appreciation I am more aware of my dependence upon Source. You or I didn’t make the trees or the ocean. As you are thankful for the little things, you are given more. The Almighty provides automatically. Speaking the two words, “thank you” allows their power to be released

¹⁴ Awaken. Accessed October 16, 2018. <http://www.awaken.com/2012/12/quotes-by-lynn-twist/>.

and causes a movement of positivity. This is a religious idea that has been backed up with scientific evidence, as seen in the previous chapter

Science and religion do not have to be opposites. Instead, I believe science explains God, and God exemplifies science. God is for science. He wants us to study His creation as it is the greatest science experiment ever. It's okay to blend science and faith. They are not exclusive ideas. Science says there is a Source. Religion points us to the Source.

The director of the National Institute of Health, Francis S. Collins, wrote in a 2007 book about faith and science colliding. The famed scientist said, "I have found there is a wonderful harmony in the complementary truths of science and faith. The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. God can be found in the cathedral or in the laboratory. By investigating God's majestic and awesome creation, science can actually be a means of worship."¹⁵ The science of gratitude proves there is a God, as we must have a Source and recipient of our appreciation.

Whether you are a follower of Jesus or not or a Christian or not, we can learn a lot about gratitude from the Bible. The verses and stories teach us how the mindset of thanksgiving can make a difference in our lives. Being thankful is the Lord's will for our lives. Consider this: what if all you had today was what you thanked God for yesterday?

Religion is all about peace with God and man. From this, flows thanksgiving which is a popular virtue and theme in most faiths. The holiday of Thanksgiving is merely one example of how showing thanks has made its way into the customs and

¹⁵ "Collins: Why This Scientist Believes in God." CNN. Accessed October 16, 2018. <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/04/03/collins.commentary/index.html>.

calendar of our culture. Saying grace is similar.

It is tradition for believers of various religions to repeat a specific prayer at meal time. Worldwide, the followers of Jesus often vary with their offerings of grace. There is no prescribed or definite Christian way to pray before a meal. When I was growing up, I remember my mother and father saying the same blessing each night before our meal. Once, when I visited a friend's house and heard them say grace differently for the first time, I thought they had it all wrong. They didn't say grace exactly like we did. I spoke up and insisted they needed to start over. I was told it was okay to pray in a different way. As a kid, I learned prayers of blessing often change from person to person and situation to situation. Well, the wording of prayer changes for some faiths, at least. In contrast to Christianity, the Jewish blessing of a meal has stayed the same for thousands of years.

The Jewish prayer of thanks is normally repeated in Hebrew and is of special note for us. Why? Because of what it says and doesn't say. The Hebrew blessing of food is, "Baruch atah Adonai eloheynu melech ha olam borey miney mizanot," which means "Blessed are You, oh Lord our God, the King of the Universe, who creates various kinds of food." This is a prayer of thanks to Adonai God, their highest power. The first section of this blessing is the same for most other Hebrew prayers. Jewish prayers always start with recognition of the Higher Source. They say, "Blessed are You, oh Lord our God." Regardless of the ending or purpose of the prayer, it is traditionally identical to the start. The rabbis teach we are not to bless "things" when we pray. Instead, we are to bless God. This is indeed a different way to pray.

Hebrew prayers usually begin with the phrase, "Baruch atah." This is translated to "blessed are you." When Jewish

people pray during meal time they are thanking God specifically and directly. From them we can learn how grace before a meal is a time to bless God. We are not to consider the prayer of thanksgiving as some type of incantation which “blesses” food to supposedly make it special. We don’t have magical powers. Burnt steak stays charcoaled even after a heartfelt blessing. Jewish people understand this concept of prayer. They say, “baruch atah” or “blessed are you” and mean it.

Here’s a key point: the Hebrew prayer uses the concept of blessing as an adjective while other religions use it as a verb. Hebrew prayers describe God as “blessed” instead of asking for a “blessing.” This is startling. Jewish people are thanking and extolling their God while other prayers are action and object based. This might seem like a slight difference, but it is huge. Describing God as blessed and giving Him thanks is totally opposite of begging God to make a nasty dish taste good.

Seeing God as your Source for all things is a central theme in Judaism. The faith also believes everything was blessed during the six days of creation. Therefore, nothing else needs to be “blessed” again. Saying a blessing to God instead of over an item is a daily reminder that God is thanked and praised for His provisions. Jewish people pray over their food with blessings to God. This comes to the faith from Temple times when various animal sacrifices would be given. Now, would you believe there are several links connecting an ancient Hebrew sacrifice of thanksgiving, modern day Christianity, and the traditional American Thanksgiving holiday?

During the Old Testament times of Moses and King David, worshippers would bring special offerings to their God. These gifts of sacrifice often included the slaughter of many animals. The sheep and lambs weren’t unnecessarily killed. They would

often be used for a meal shared by the priest and the giver. One of the most interesting sacrifices in the Scriptures is the “thanksgiving offering.” This was used to bring the giver closer to the Lord through a special meal of praise. Called the “korban todah” in Hebrew, this was a totally voluntary offering. It wasn’t commanded or even expected. It was simply a willing offering.

Bible commentaries explain the thanksgiving offering, or “korban todah,” was normally a huge amount of food. Worshippers invited friends and relatives to partake so the sacrifice would not be wasted. A person with a bountiful harvest would offer an exuberant amount as a sacrifice. (Again, picture a potluck dinner instead of a bloody altar of dead animals.) Friends, family, and even strangers would stop by to talk about and enjoy the harvest. Much praise would be given to God during these temple time extravaganzas. “In other words, the special laws of the korban todah help create an environment through which its purpose will be best fulfilled,” says famed Rabbi Menachem Leibtag.¹⁶

Of course, we can see the similarities between the korban todah and the meal of Thanksgiving Americans share. During both, there is an abundance of food, thanksgiving, and friends. And, though Thanksgiving comes only once a year, the Temple thanksgiving offering could be given at any time by anyone.

Another odd similarity is regarding the Hebrew word “todah.” The ancient phrase “todah” means “thanks” or “thanksgiving.” It also means something else in Modern Hebrew. When people in Israel use the term “todah,” they are speaking thanks and are also saying “turkey.” Yep. The Hebrew word for both “thanks” and “turkey” is the same. And this isn’t

¹⁶ Tanach Study Center - Korban Pesach and Korban Todah. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://tanach.org/special/pesach/pesachs3.htm>.

the last connection with the holiday of Thanksgiving. There's actually a prophetic teaching about gratitude and Jesus that has been hidden away in ancient Hebrew texts.

Judaism, Thanksgiving, and Christianity all come together in the context of an ancient prophecy referencing the korban todah today. The olden prediction was after the coming of the Messiah, all Temple sacrifices would end except for one – the “korban todah.” It was foretold by Jewish Rabbis who said that though the temple would be destroyed, the thanksgiving sacrifices would continue. How does this relate to Christianity? Before His death, Jesus gathered with His disciples to have a special meal. This was like the Passover meal traditionally held each year during the springtime. However, Jesus was not having a traditional Passover Seder with His disciples. It wasn't the correct day or time to celebrate Passover. So, this meal with the disciples had to be something different.

What was it?

Jesus was holding a korban todah. It was a thanksgiving meal offering.

As described within the Law and Jewish tradition, the meal with Jesus included a breaking of bread, consecration of wine, prayers and Psalms of gratitude. In my opinion, Jesus blended the Passover and thanksgiving meals together. This meal was later continued by the first Christians as communion. The korban todah meal of Jesus soon became known as mass or the Eucharist. It is simply amazing that, without knowing it, Christians today eat the wafer and drink the wine and are actually offering a type of ancient Jewish sacrifice. The Eucharist communion meal is the korban thanksgiving meal.

Catholic scholar Tim Grey wrote,

“The importance of the todah as a backdrop for Jesus and

the Last Supper comes into sharp focus when we realize that in Jesus' day the Greek word that would best translate the Hebrew *todah* was *Eucharistia*, which also means 'thanksgiving.' From the earliest Christian sources, we learn that the celebration of the Lord's meal, or what we call the Mass, was known by Christians as the Eucharist. After all, at the Last Supper Jesus took the bread and wine and gave 'thanks' (*Eucharistia*) over them (Luke 22:19)."

"The Last Supper celebrated in the upper room is both a Passover and a *todah* meal. The Passover has all the same elements found in the *todah*: bread, wine, and sacrifice of a lamb, along with hymns and prayers... Note that Jesus' words over the bread, His thanksgiving, is what the Christian tradition has focused upon — so that they could call every re-enactment of the Last Supper 'Eucharist,'" Grey continued, "For Jesus had told them, 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19). This act of remembrance is what the *todah* is all about — recalling in gratitude God's saving deeds. This leads us to one of the key fruits of a *todah* — or Eucharistic — spirituality: A deep sense of thankfulness leads to worship. Worship flows from gratitude; cut off from gratitude the will to worship withers."¹⁷

The old Rabbinic prophecy says, "in the coming Messianic age all sacrifices will cease, but the thanks offering (*korban todah*) will never cease." Jesus gave a *korban* on the day before His death. Then, shortly afterwards, Nero destroyed the temple. All the sacrifices have stopped, except for the *korban todah* because it is now kept as communion/Eucharist.

¹⁷ User, Super. "From Jewish Passover to Christian Eucharist: The Story of the *Todah*." Catholic Education Resource Center. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/apologetics/from-jewish-passover-to-christian-eucharist-the-story-of-the-todah.html>.

Could this point to Jesus as the foretold Messiah of Judaism?

Religious writings are full of thanksgiving stories. Once, a rich young man came to a teacher and asked, "Oh good teacher, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?" In response to his question, the Rabbi said, "You know the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, and do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother." He added, "All these I have kept from my youth."

This man had good works, but he lacked something else.

"Now, when the teacher heard these things, he said unto him, 'Okay.' You still lack one thing. Sell all you have, distribute it to the poor, you shall have treasure in heaven. Come and follow me."

When the man heard this, he was sorrowful and left. He wouldn't give up his possessions. He had obedience, but he lacked gratitude. The man was not thankful for his possessions. He thought *he* was the Source. He was stingy and selfish. He didn't realize blessings are given to us, so we can bless others. The man should have known he was not blessed to hoard and keep stuff. We are given to, so we can give to others. The opposite of gratitude is unbelief. When you are not thankful, then you are probably not trusting Source to come through for you either.

The man had a choice and so do we.

Will we choose gratitude or ingratitude? There is no middle ground. Either we are grateful and content or not. When you show your gratitude by sharing with others, you are saying to the universe you have enough. God hears that you are content as you offer your time, efforts, attention, or money. That giving is a way of saying the God Source has blessed you.

When you are kind to someone, you are showing gratitude.

I've learned God truly is my Source. It's not my job or the government that gives me what I need. Every good gift I require comes from my Source. The rich, young ruler thought he, himself, was his own source. He refused to give up his belongings. We don't know exactly how his story ends, but I think I know what happened to him. One day he died. He was buried. By other people. Without his stuff. How sad for him. He could have realized God was his Source and the story would have read differently.

***Will we choose
gratitude or
ingratitude? There is
no middle ground.
Either we are grateful
and content or not.***

“Anyone who is grateful does so to the profit of his own soul,” reads the Koran.¹⁸

Thanksgiving can transform lives because it is a spiritual force. It is the key ingredient to a life of abundance. We can tap into this power by picking up a pencil, piece of paper, and then simply counting blessings. By journaling a few items, you are thankful for each day, you will create an entire huge master list in a matter of weeks.

The Apostle Paul takes it even further. He said, “In everything, give thanks for this is the will of the Lord concerning you.”¹⁹ Yes, it's God's will for you to be thankful. We may think it is the Lord's will for us to one day grow up to become the president of a successful company or to be a mother of some children. That may be part of His plan. His ultimate will is, regardless of what we do, we are always thankful.

¹⁸ Luqman 31:12

¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:18

We are to give thanks “in everything.” His will is that no matter what you go through, no matter how good it is, no matter how hard it is... give thanks. We cannot judge the Lord's purpose for what occurs. We may think something is good or bad, but we can't be so sure in the moment. Gratitude is a deliberate decision to bless God regardless of the circumstances. You shouldn't allow bad things to stop you from being appreciative. *Instead, we must stop the negativity in life from consuming us by being thankful.*

When it comes to faith, we must understand where there is no sincere gratitude there is no real spirituality. There is authority in our words of gratitude. The power of life and death is in the tongue. “For as (a man) thinketh in his heart, so he is.”²⁰ If all we think about is how bad things are, they will get worse. If we whine, complain. or feel bad, if we talk about how sorry our boss is or needy our friends are, we are going to bring more problems into our lives. Like thoughts attract like thoughts. When we are content and get our mind positive our attitude changes. If we thank God, regardless of the circumstances, our circumstances will change. Thankfulness modifies your outlook on life. It changes you. It stops you from seeing only the negative. If we can give thanks instead of giving in, we can empower this force of gratitude. A korban todah, a turkey thanksgiving offering, describes your Higher Power as blessed through the pain and will help deliver you out of the pain.

Another spiritual principle to consider is “faith works through love.”²¹ Love is what empowers our faith to move mountains, to move people. If you truly love somebody, you can extend faith to bring them out of a horrible situation. A

²⁰ Proverbs 23:7

²¹ Galatians 5:6

friend or family member can be reached through prayers of thankfulness to the Lord. Instead of telling Source how awful and terrible the person is and how their situation is ruining their life, try praying from the position of faith, victory, and gratitude.

Make your prayers positive.

Speak faith through your love.

Try praying, "Oh Lord, I love this person and I know you love them more than I do. I know that what they are doing is not the best for them, so I pray blessing into their life." Love shown through prayers of thanksgiving can empower your faith to break through boundaries and have influence. Gratitude should shift the way we pray and the way we act.

Gratitude shows you are not a victim. You may have had some bad things happen in your life, but you are not those bad things. You may have made some mistakes, but you are not your mistakes. You are the master of your destiny. When you say, "thank you" to your Source, you are expressing how you are an overcomer. Being thankful declares that no matter what has occurred in our lives, no matter what has happened, the Lord wants the best for us and we can trust Him. We can learn this from two of the first Christian missionaries named Paul and Silas. If anyone ever had an excuse to be negative, it was them. They could have had a victim mentality for sure. They had been sharing a message of good news with the people and were suddenly thrown in jail. No due process and no trial by jury. Immediately, Paul and Silas had their clothes stripped from their bodies and were severely beaten.

Can you put yourself in their shoes for a minute? (Technically, they did not have any shoes, because they were naked.) Just consider you are being kind to people and sharing

a meal. You stop to thank God for His blessings when, suddenly, a group of people get upset with you. They violently grab you. They humiliate and shame you as your clothes are ripped off. They tie your hands behind your back. A whip is used to tear your skin. Your head throbs. Your body aches. Chains are placed on your arms and legs and you are thrown to the bottom of a dirty, dark jail.

How would you feel at that moment? Would you honestly feel like being grateful to the Lord? Or, would you be like most and want to curse God? Would you want to rejoice in thanks for the pain or would you wish things had gone differently?

Paul and Silas could have been upset over their situation. If anyone deserved to have a pity party, it was definitely those two. Instead of stressing, they praised their Source. Rather than complaining or giving up, they looked up to heaven and thanked God. The story continues that about midnight, as they were singing thanks to Source, a miracle happened. Swiftly, there was a great earthquake. The foundation of the prison was shaken. Immediately, all the doors opened, and the prisoners' bands were loosed. Thanksgiving broke the chains.

Paul and Silas had been through a horrible situation, yet they still had proper perspective. They found gratitude counteracted negativity. It removed the chains. They learned you cannot say, "Thank you," and be in a bad mood at the same time.

We must follow their example. We must say "todah" or "thanks" to Source amidst the storm and on the sunny days. This type of offering is what He desires because it helps us gain perspective.

I'm not sure if perspective is a byproduct of gratitude or vice versa. Either way, perspective is important because of how

it helps us have a specific point of view or way of regarding a matter. Perspective is a different look at something which; therefore, draws a different outcome. It helps us thank through the ups and downs of life with an awakening of gratitude. Perspective takes prison and makes it praise. It helps a rich young man decide his priorities. It allows us to take these ideas and do something positive with them. Perspective takes the Hebrew word for “turkey” and uses it to simultaneously mean “thanksgiving.” It changes things. It changes us. Perspective is a teacher who shows us life is eternal and not temporal. It pushes us to believe that from God’s point of view, we can always be grateful. A spiritual perspective allows us to honor our Source for all the blessings of life. That’s the essence of gratitude and thanksgiving. Faith may be the greatest perspective of all. And that’s something we need more than once a year on a Thursday in November.

Chapter Four - Find Beauty Daily

Okay, so gratitude is a good idea. It is beneficial for health and brings happiness. Science supports its transformative power and God tells us to “give thanks.” What about when things go awry? What then? How do you give thanks in the midst of the hard times? How can you be grateful when everything is painful?

These questions probably perplex you as they do me. It’s difficult enough to remember to be thankful when things are good. It’s even more challenging to have appreciation during the tragedies of life. To bring some clarity, consider the words of someone who lived through the worst atrocities of humanity’s history.

Victor Frankl somehow endured the Nazi holocaust and went on to tell of his experiences until his death in 1997. His thoughts about being thankful, even in the danger of extermination, are astounding. He gives us perspective from a place few survived to tell their own story. Perhaps it is a perspective like his that is needed most when things go negative. He said, “Pain from problems and disappointments is inevitable in life, but suffering is a choice determined by whether you choose to compare your experience and pain to something better and therefore feel unlucky and bitter or to something worse and therefore feel lucky and grateful.”²²

His point was there is always something worse in the world, so there is always opportunity for gratitude. Though he went through literal hell on earth, he was able to somehow feel

²² Frankl, Viktor E., John Boyne, and William J. Winslade. *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017.

lucky. It's all a matter of perspective and how you define your situation as good or bad or whatever.

If you say you will be grateful "when" things go your way, you will never be fully appreciative.

I have found gratitude comes when I focus and think about what I have, instead of what I don't have. Frankl had life and felt grateful. He trained himself to find meaning in the air he was breathing. He learned such thankfulness from tragedy. Frankl had an undying purpose for his life that kept him going during the many years he was held captive in camp. It is usually not the good times, but the hardest of days when we often have the most personal growth. He learned a tremendous amount about humanity in camp. Later, he showed how focusing on contentment and blessing often breeds more of the same.

True contentment is not getting everything you want, rather it's about being satisfied with what you have. It is about being happy with a little or a lot. This shows us gratitude is an inside job. Appreciation is all about who you are deep down within your soul. This understanding makes a difference. If you say you will be grateful "when" things go your way, you will never be fully appreciative.

Frankl tells in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, how it was his mental attitude which empowered him to survive. The amazing book tells the story of how Victor was once overcome by gratitude in a concentration camp when he was served a "meal" of filthy dirt water with a fish head floating on top. He looked down at the fish soup and saw beauty. Can you just imagine this? Instead of horror, Frankl saw beauty in the scales and bones of a severed fish head. With such an observation, he instantly redefined the word "beauty." Wow.

Beauty is not some Instagram model in a bikini. It is found when you are thankful regardless of the circumstances.

Looking for beauty gives you the opportunity to see problems and pain differently. This doesn't mean you should ignore the hurt or pretend everything is rosy. Instead, find something positive and focus on it. Discover the beauty beyond the pain. Choose to think about what you have instead of what you don't have. Train your brain to see the good that may come out of the hurt. This can help you through any tragedy of life.

Victor Frankl had been a neurologist and psychiatrist before his encampment. He was studying human behavior and was often in conflict with Freud's thinking that people are mainly motivated by sexual impulses. The concentration camp gave Victor ample opportunity to see if his personal theories on human behavior were true. Every day, the prisoners were forced to work, were sorely mistreated, and barely kept alive. Frankl watched how his fellow prisoners responded to torture and pain. Those who held a strong desire for meaning would often make it through the cruel treatment. Purpose gave people hope. Others didn't have a will or motivation to live and would easily give up. Those overwhelmed by grief wouldn't keep going and often succumbed to an early death. Frankl discovered his theory was true.

***Instead of horror,
Frankl saw beauty in
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word "beauty."***

Man's search for beauty is what gives us hope. Thanks to Frankl, our definition of beauty is "whatever allows us to see good in the face of evil." Personal definitions are so important.

How you define life will determine how you live it. Your mind's personal dictionary of terms and thoughts will affect you greatly. It is not what happens to you that matters. What makes a difference is how you define what happens to you. The meaning you place on the events of life will directly impact your emotions and actions. You may think the pain in your past was God punishing you for something and; therefore, harbor bitterness. Or, you could place a different meaning on the pain and look at it as an opportunity for growth. A relationship can end and devastate you emotionally or you can consider the relationship "completed" and learn lessons from what occurred. A floating fish head can be disgusting or beautiful. You choose. You get to decide the meaning of everything in your life.

Frankl interpreted the horrid treatment as an opportunity to find out who he really was. He came out a victor, not a victim. He walked in his truth and personal definitions. Similarly, you can master the art of giving your own definition to events and words in your personal world. You don't need Webster's Dictionary. You can control the meaning of everything you experience. You choose the quality and purpose. By controlling or defining the meaning of your experiences, you also determine how much time and energy each issue is given. Definitions allow you to prioritize what is important over what is trivial. To decide your own definitions, you can ask yourself questions. Think about the why and the how. Ask yourself, "what does this look like to me?"

There were others who had the same circumstances of Frankl but didn't have such mental fortitude to define beauty as he did. He wrote of many who faced his same tortures, yet chose to give in to suicide or dark despair. Definitions and attitude made the difference between those who lived through

the camps and those who would simply give up. This shows us it is possible for two people to look at the exact same problem and see two different perspectives. The difference is in the definition.

Are there areas in your life needing to be redefined? How do you define success? Or love? Or purpose? Or security? Or legacy? Or hate? What do these definitions look like?

Finding something to be thankful for during a tragedy almost seems sacrilegious. It's odd to consider a good side to the holocaust of seven million Jews dying for no reason. Likewise, how can you be happy about the loss of a job? Who is thankful to be attending the funeral of a loved one? What is to be celebrated when your partner wants to leave? Frankl would agree you don't have to be grateful for the tragedy. However, find something in the situation which invokes a feeling of gratitude. Any tragedy can be processed in a healthy fashion, considering the meaning you determine. That meaning can be the beauty of thankfulness, pure luck, or karma. Personal definitions excel over the norms of desolation.

Perspective shows us that regardless of the evil, there is always good present. The school shooting might have hurt twenty-four kids, but hundreds were left unscathed. The divorce may have separated you from your children physically, yet proximity doesn't determine parental love. The job may have come to an end; however, there are plenty of lessons to learn and many other employers to seek out. Frankl focused on what he had and thought, at least, there was a fish head and not just dirty water for dinner.

Defining good and evil or blessing and curse is all a matter of perspective. Victor learned, regardless of loss, there are always memories to celebrate. Beauty is waiting to be

discovered. Even in the darkest of times, there is a reason to be thankful. And maybe, just maybe, gratitude is more heartfelt when it is given in the midst of pain.

It is not what happens to you that matters. What makes a difference is how you define what happens to you.

Darkness gives us a basis for light. Everything that is not bright is a shade or shadow of the light. We wouldn't know light if

we didn't experience its absence, which we call darkness. Therefore, when facing tragedy, we should never, compare the hard times to the bright days of happiness. This means you shouldn't live life with an "if only" attitude. You can't have an abundant life and constantly wish things were different. An "if only" attitude complains "if only..." would have happened then something else might have occurred. This is pure speculation and distracts you from beauty.

Understand there must be evil for there to be good. Both sides are necessary to help us find purpose. Good or bad, there is always beauty or light present. An experience you might consider as today's demise may benefit your future. Hidden goodness can come from anything horrendous.

This happened with me when I lost what I thought was my perfect job. My employer not only let me go without reason, but also insisted I move out of the house I was renting from her. This was devastating for my family in the short term. Nothing looked good for us. However, we trusted the God Source. Within a few weeks, we found a new place to live with more space and I took a job earning double the salary. Everything worked out for our good. What was meant for evil flipped to benefit us.

No “if only” thinking allowed. Good will come your way as soon as you realize you’ve already been surrounded by goodness. See the beauty and don’t wish things were different.

So yes, life sucks at times. It rains on our parades. Sticks and stones break more than mere bones. Divorces happen. Businesses crumble. Loved ones pass away. The hard times we face are part of life’s story. You can turn the page and focus on gratitude, though. Or, if you don’t find beauty in tragedy, you can be stuck in depression or despair.

Which will it be?

War makes people long for peace. Hard financial times lead people to recall the good ol’ days when everything was stable. Sickness is a stark contrast to health. It’s the power of thankfulness which brings the differences to light. And, it’s thanksgiving that will minimize the effects of evil; the peril of pain. Gratitude, regardless of circumstances, can release you to supersede the pain. When your heart is broken, you can find something to be appreciative for if you choose to look for the beauty of the light.

I make it a common practice to write down at least three things each night which happened to me during the day that I can find beauty in, even if they are seemingly bad. This gratitude exercise helps me have perspective and define the events of my day. (Here’s that idea of a journal again.)

When you are frustrated or hurt, it is important to experience the emotion of thankfulness. Take out a pen and piece of paper and write out what is good about yourself. Feel it. Look for something beautiful amid the hell breaking loose. Again, perspective is key. Things may be bad, but they could always be worse. Depression may eat at you, yet there is always something (or multiple somethings) to appreciate.

This is important for the issues of life from big and small. You may be upset over your burnt steak or how it's not medium rare as you requested. Send it back to the kitchen, if you can, but also remember to be thankful you can even order a steak. A flat tire may be another Monday problem slowing you down, but it shouldn't stop you from being thankful. Who knows... the delay of the flat tire might have saved you from sitting in traffic when an eighteen-wheeler ran a red light and barreled into several cars.

Let life unfold and look for the good. It's there. Even in the darkness. Even in the darkness of death.

There's another interesting story from a holocaust survivor and her personal lesson in gratitude. The author of *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom, told how she learned the importance of thankfulness. She and her sister Betsy were in the Ravensbrück concentration camp together. They were often covered with fleas and lice. The bugs were on absolutely everything including their bodies and in their hair. Corrie ten Boom recalls how her sister said they should be thankful for the lice.

Corrie said, "Betsy, you have gone too far this time. I am not going to thank God for lice." Betsy said, "Oh, but Corrie, the Bible tells us, 'In everything give thanks.'" Why would Betsy be thankful for these bugs that make you itch constantly?

Later, Corrie would find out that it was the lice that kept their guards from physically assaulting or raping them. The Germans stayed their distance from Corrie and her sister because of their present circumstances.

So, yes, they had good reason to be thankful for the bugs. They found beauty in the horrible situation.

Being thankful when life is hard is not easy, yet it is

worth it. If these ladies could be thankful for lice, then we can find something to appreciate. We can have hope that goodness will prevail, even during times of pure evil. Light always extinguishes darkness. Again, what you focus on you feel. Abundance is always available when you think about gratitude. Indeed, gratitude is just another word for abundance.

Victor Frankl said love makes people seek greatness. He taught the major motivating factor of mankind is to find meaning in life, even in the most horrible of circumstances. His insights show us that we may just need our own personal definitions to know beauty in the pain. Amazing things happen when you reach the place of thankfulness regardless of circumstance.

This goes back to our idea of living in the NOW and being thankful for the NEAR, the OBLIVIOUS, and the WISHFUL. Who knows, you might even find beauty in fish head stew?

Chapter Five - Just Thank Yourself

The hardest person to thank is also the hardest person to love – *yourself*.

Have you ever written yourself a “thank you” card or said “good job” as you looked yourself eye-to-eye in the mirror? Probably not. These ideas seem preposterous. Only the self-obsessed or insane would speak to themselves in the mirror. Right? I’ve learned you need to thank yourself the most though. You need to be grateful for and to yourself more than anyone else in the world. You should do this on a daily basis. This isn’t something I learned from a book or seminar. It was only through a huge loss that I finally learned to thank and love myself.

I learned this lesson the hard way.

After many years in a turbulent marriage, my wife and I were in the middle of an argument when she said she wanted a divorce. I was totally shocked. My heart immediately hurt. Imagine the pain that struck me deep down inside. We had recently moved to a new community after I had received a promotion from my company. It was to be a fresh start. I had hoped we were entering a positive phase of life; however, everything was about to come crashing down much to my dismay.

“What happened to our restart?” I wondered.

Within a short time, my now ex-wife and five kids loaded their belongings into a U-Haul trailer. They piled in our family van and waved goodbye. Though we shared custody, the kids moved with their mom to our old home town three hours

away. To say I was devastated is putting it lightly. The thoughts in my head were... ugly. I wondered what I had done to deserve the divorce. Why couldn't she be happy? How was a guy in his mid-thirties going to start over by himself?

I found myself alone and lost without my children. As time passed, the pain grew worse. The every-other-weekend schedule with my kids became the sad norm. And, it simply wasn't enough. I missed them soooooo much. Everything in my home reminded me of them. Rebekah's playdough wasn't played with. Josh and Isaiah's PlayStation sat useless in the living room. The house, usually filled with the boisterous noise of drumming from Nick, had become a silent crypt. My busy family schedule was instantly erased to nothing. My heart hurt deep inside. I took the loss of my children personal and struggled with feeling rejected and hurt. What would my kids think of me now? How could I be a good father if I only saw my children a few times a month? I fought off negativity at every turn. There were days it was a battle to even breathe. It wasn't only the divorce I was upset over. It wasn't the divorce *at all*, actually. What hurt the most was *my* children moving out of *my* home and taking *my* identity with them. I had lost my kids; thus, I had lost myself.

My ultimate pride was in being their full-time father, but that was taken away from me. Because of my wife's chronic illness, I had (basically) become the kids' primary caretaker after school. When they moved away, it felt like the only part of me that mattered... left. Suddenly, I couldn't take care of my kids or see them daily. Stress and anxiety flooded my mind as I questioned my next steps.

Quickly, I found myself at arms in the battlefield of the mind. Doubts, cares, and worries bombarded me like missiles. The negative self-talk was blazing enemy fire and I was rapidly

spiraling toward a defeating depression. Before I ultimately lost the war, I remember finding hope in a quote from an Old Testament king. The passage inspired me *not* to give up. It let me know the rest of my life was going to be the best of my life.

“The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me.”

~ Psalm 138:8

As a person of faith, I grabbed on to this verse like a life preserver. I realized God was still working in my life and He wasn't finished with me. This particular Psalm literally saved me. I was so thankful. This passage breathed life into my spirit and gave me hope for the future. It quickened my desire to make my future better than my past.

The book of Psalms was written mostly by King David about a thousand years before Christ. David was a pretty cool Old Testament guy. He wrote some good stuff in the Psalms, which is a collection of his prayers and poems. They are raw, and they are real. Each chapter of Psalms reads as if you are overhearing David pour his heart out to his God Source. Plus, it is not all spiritual fluff. In one passage, he's happy and saying, "This is the day the Lord has made so let us rejoice and be glad in it."²³ Then surrounding this statement in other chapters of the Psalms, David laments on how he is enclosed by tormenters who want to take his life. David wasn't confused or a psychopath. He was real. He knew about heartache. He faced many struggles. He went through a similar identity crisis I had faced.

History first finds David

²³ Psalm 118:24

***How long, Lord, will
you continue to ignore
me? How long will you
pay no attention to me?***

as a young, shepherd boy. He is overlooked by his own family, but then, somehow, he is chosen to be the upcoming king over all Israel. This is the same David who killed the giant, Goliath, with only a sling and stone. That's merely one part of his amazing life. Sometime after killing the giant, David became a fugitive and hid in caves from the reigning (crazy) king. Over thirteen years later, David led his mighty warriors to conquer surrounding lands and then, finally, became the king of Israel. He had his faults and bad judgment calls, though. He fell in love with a married woman and had her husband killed. Yes, David made mistakes. Yes, he had his problems. However, he also had a heart for God's ways.

As I read through the Psalms after the divorce, there were times it was difficult to turn the pages. I felt David's pain. I empathized with his suffering and confusion. He wrote, "How long, Lord, will you continue to ignore me? How long will you pay no attention to me? How long must I worry, and suffer in broad daylight? How long will my enemy gloat over me?"²⁴ And, "For my enemies speak against me, and those who lie in wait for my life conspire, saying 'God has forsaken him; for there is no one to rescue him.'"²⁵

David often felt anxious and rejected. He battled his own doubts. His words were often full of pessimism. David also sought a life of meaning. His destiny was to be the conquering king of Israel. His worries, problems, and negative self-talk didn't stop him. David was the one who originally said, "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me."

It was this idea that replaced the negativity about the situation. This was the passage that reminded me I could keep going when I felt completely alone. David's words of

²⁴ Psalm 13:1-4

²⁵ Psalm 71:10-11

encouragement in Psalm 138 hit me hard because they were from a *real* man who had experienced *real* problems. Surely, he had questioned his own identity in the cave. He had wondered if God still loved him. He had also chosen to believe in the reason and purpose for his life. If he could overcome, then I could, as well.

First, I had to deal with this issue of negativity and figure out how to accept myself.

Like David, our days are often full of pain and its accompanying negative self-talk. We are constantly saying things to ourselves we would *never* say to other people. Hard thoughts cross our mind during most of the day. Self-doubt surrounds us. Whether we realize it or not, we tell ourselves things about our shortcomings *all* the time. I'm sure I'm not alone when I admit my mind often goes into overdrive with self-doubt and worry.

"What if they don't love me anymore?"

"You shouldn't have said those words."

"Why did you do that? It was so stupid!"

"If you don't change, then people will not accept you."

Negative self-talks feed into a low self-worth and its accompanying behavior. I'm probably one of the most outrageous, outspoken, and outgoing people you'll meet. However, it's normal to battle negative thoughts every single day. So much of life is unexpected thrown at you. Events affect you in ways you will never know until—after, perhaps—they happen. Some of my scars came from my childhood, some from my personal disapproval from the divorce, and some from everyday life.

With the divorce, my job as the family hero was gone. I

could no longer be the answer to my kids' problems. I was no longer their favorite play toy. It was so painful that I went through a time when I didn't need a bully to point out my problems because I was my own tormenter. Doubt came every day and I never thought things would improve. I told myself so many lies to the point where I believed them. I battled hard against worry for my children.

Have you ever had similar thoughts?

"My life is ruined."

"I am not attractive."

"I am not smart enough."

"They don't want me."

"My bones are too big."

"I am way too needy."

"They will reject me again."

Of course, you have had some negative thoughts like these. Everyone has at some point.

Thoughts like these will suck the life out of you.

I'm happy to tell you these thoughts didn't bring about my demise. Gratitude worked to bring me from a place of pain to a place of happiness. I was deep in the valley of death, but was somehow rescued.

I'd walked through this valley before.

My older sister died when I was only sixteen and she was twenty-one. That pain was unreal. My mind was filled with anger and confusion. The hurt and regret was overwhelming. That valley seemed to be unbearable. Death changed life forever. Grief filled my heart and made it difficult to simply get

out of the bed. The pain of divorce was similar. The whole in my heart was huge. The pain of loneliness was too much to handle. For me, it wasn't simply a divorce and end of a marriage. It was a total loss of my identity. The valley of the shadow of death perfectly describes the feeling of pain of my loss in both a physical and a metaphorical death. A shadow is a dark place without light. When you have loss, it feels as if you are surrounded by gloom. From within the quagmire of the valley, everything seems grim and hard. I didn't come to the valley to stay. Neither did you. You came to the valley to go through the valley. You didn't come to that hard place to stay. You came to go through and come out better than ever before.

Major changes have come to my life, yet I have chosen to *thank* through them. Appreciation has made a difference.

***You came to the valley
to go through the
valley. You didn't come
to that hard place to***

Slowly, I began to process the divorce and separation from my children from a different perspective; a different definition. I realized my family had not been *destroyed*... it had

been *changed*. My life wasn't over, it was different. I was still a father, and time or space between my children and me could never stop our love.

Soon, I began to be appreciative for every single second I had with my kids. My time with them became even more treasured. I viewed our weekends as sacred moments to make lasting memories. The decision to be grateful, regardless of the pain, was one of the best I've ever made. It helped me break free from the bondage of negativity.

It can do the same for you.

Getting back to what I said before, journaling my

gratitude on a nightly basis helped tremendously in my self-journey. Notebooks soon filled with things I was thankful for during my day. The lists would include the good, the bad, and the ugly. I would describe the events of the morning, afternoon, and evening, as well as the feelings I experienced. As I did this, I began to have a different point of view. I started noticing the little things like the sunrise, the flavor of my coffee, and the love I did have from friends and family. Soon, I slowed down and began to be thankful for so many things I had previously taken for granted.

Then, one night as I was journaling, I wrote down something so preposterous it made me stop. I put the pen down and had to read the crazy words out loud.

I had written: "I'm thankful for myself."

This simple sentence released a tsunami of feelings within me. Tears appeared, and burdens were lifted. All of the regret and guilt seemed to wash away. A wave of emotions came over me as I realized I *should* be thankful for myself. I didn't need the approval or acceptance of anyone else because I could be thankful for myself.

What?

I was thankful for me!

There was a lot about me for which I could be grateful.

In that moment, the malevolent thoughts inside my brain were exchanged for healthy, thankful words. I was grateful for my organs, my legs, my mind, my skin, my health, my personality, my hair, my... everything. Gratitude filled my soul for my marriage, my children, and even my divorce. I was appreciative for myself. I was grateful for all that had happened in my life. I learned that I shouldn't regret anything in my

past... the good, the bad, any of it because all of those things that happen to us, the tears, the disappointment, the heartache, the joys, the victories... it has all brought us here and now to where we are and what we're doing and if any one tiny thing had been different, we wouldn't be exactly where we are right now.

Thanking yourself replaces the negative with the positive. It is a game changer. Look at it this way, when you substitute the good for harmful self-talk, you are like a basketball coach deciding to replace a five-year-old basketball player with megastar LeBron James. The difference is amazing. Everything can be better if you do this one thing. Get rid of the lies you tell yourself and speak truthful thanks all day long.

When you are kind to yourself, it adds tangible worth to your life. Suddenly, because you have worth, you want to be all of yourself. Value is important because what we prize we cherish and protect. When you are grateful for your life, then you recognize its worth. I believe gratitude gives value to your life and then gives life to your value. As you realize you are special, talented, and blessed, your life takes up new meaning. It's a beautiful cyclic process.

Thanking yourself replaces the negative with the positive. It is a game changer.

Yet, it didn't totally happen overnight for me. It took work for me to love myself. I had years of doubting and adverse thinking to overcome. To end the evils of disapproval, I had to do more than try not to think bad thoughts about myself. I tried, and that didn't work. The harmful ideas kept creeping back. Instead, I decided to be kind to myself and show constant gratitude. I replaced the warped thinking with positive affirmations. When I was down or frustrated I would

replace the negativity with gratefulness.

The difference was alarming. Life was altered. My mind began to change and then my life changed. Light came into darkness. I was given beauty for ashes. Strength replaced fear. Faith overcame doubt and worry.

I reprogramed my mind. The negative thoughts were replaced with good ones. I began to think good about myself and my future. At first, it honestly felt stupid. I hoped it would work, but I wasn't sure. So, I kept trying. I made a list of positive affirmations and said, "I am so happy and grateful now that..."

This was my mantra for anything and everything. If I had a doubt about my ability, I said, "I am so happy and grateful now that I can do all things."

When I felt inadequate or rejected, I said, "I am so happy and grateful now that I am accepted and approved."

As I felt the darkness of gloom, I said, "I am so happy and grateful now that I am enjoying happiness each day and oppression is far from me."

Slowly, I began to feel a difference. The harmful doubts still came, but I quickly dismissed them and replaced them with good. As I worked on establishing my identity, I then had to face the mountain of self-care.

The idea of self-love sounded selfish. It didn't seem right to love myself in such a way. Our snowflake society of instant internet stardom loves themselves too much already, right? Well, I was wrong about being selfish. It is not a sin to love yourself. It's an important practice. Honestly, our problem is not that we love ourselves too much, rather we don't truly love and accept ourselves as we are now.

Often, we don't accept ourselves, so we hope by adapting or changing, we will be loveable. We tell ourselves, "If only I could..." hoping it will follow with the result of love. "If only I could be better at..." If only I could have more money... If only I could look like..." Well, these "if only" statements lead to more pain. Comparison is the general of evil's army. Nothing good comes when you compare yourself to others. Be the best you that you can be at all times. Learn to love yourself.

Pain often becomes a master teacher when we find our world is off-centered. Most people go along with the day-to-day drudgery until tragedy strikes or if they hear words like "divorce" or "cancer." It's easy not to realize there is a huge void in our world until it is almost too late. We get hooked on co-dependently helping others, constant entertainment, withdrawing, or the ecstasy of drugs and/or alcohol. The search for healing frequently tends to end up in self-medication in a negative way. Trying to fix ourselves is often short-lived, as we must come off the high at some point.

The medication we really need is a dose of ourselves via the needle of awareness.

Take these words to heart and find yourself, so you can thank yourself...

The world needs more of you.

You need more of you.

To give your family, partner, boss/co-workers, or friends your best, you must be healthy. To get there, you need a shot of self-love. This works like a vaccine that inserts a part of the virus to build up resistance. When you love self, you actually destroy your ego. It sounds like it would backfire, but it works. Caring for yourself kills the ego.

One way to love self is to thank yourself. The way to thank self is to love yourself. Even kids know this. At a young age, children are taught The Golden Rule of, "Do unto others the way you want them to do unto you."²⁶ The way you will make the world a better place is by following this basic rule. The world can really change when you do for one person what you would like to do for the entire human race. Or, what you would like for someone to do for you. If you want to have an impact, then do for one person what you would like to do for all.

Let's take this idea one step farther: Apply it daily. Take a dose of your own medicine.

Do to yourself what you wish would be done for others. Treat self the way you want others to treat you.

Love you the way you desire to be loved. Don't expect others to love you or meet your needs. Love the image in the mirror. Become your own best friend. Thank yourself. "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself," said Leo Tolstoy²⁷. Know today that you are special. You are unique. You are enough. You are amazing. You are you and that's all you need to be.

Kindness to self, before others, is how you will change the world. It's also how you show everyone else how to do unto you. Self-care *must* come first. This isn't selfish. Self-love honors your Creator.

It's selfish *not* to love yourself. You are full of pride and (believe it or not) selfish when you don't take care of self. You are selfish when you are overweight, unhealthy, or a grump

²⁶ Matthew 7:12

²⁷ Leo Tolstoy, "Three Methods Of Reform" in Pamphlets : Translated from the Russian (1900) as translated by Aylmer Maude, page: 29.

because you take the best part of you away from other people. Taking care of you is like the adage we learn from the airline attendant. You know, the person we all ignore during our flights? They're right in their instructions about how to handle life, in general. Help yourself first. Put your oxygen mask on before you try to take care of anyone else. Happiness is waiting. "I am happy because I am grateful. I choose to be grateful. That gratitude allows me to be happy," said actor Will Arnett.²⁸

Please note, there is a difference between selfish, self-gratification and self-love. The two ideas are diametrically different. Self-gratification is when you only please your self-centered ego. Self-gratification normally leads to indulgence and pain. You might have some short-term fun, but there is no lasting joy when you are only gratifying yourself. When you are loving, caring, or thanking yourself, it is very different. Self-gratitude is being aware of your personal needs and meeting them first. It is giving thanks for just being you. One of the best ways to do this is by being kind to yourself. Stop your pain by giving life a break. Instead of thinking or saying negativity, reprogram your words to be kind to self.

We have been negative forever to ourselves. This must stop. Be mindful of your thoughts and repeal and replace the ones sabotaging your life. You can even measure your joy throughout the day to see how you're doing with self-love. If what you are doing brings you happiness and is easy, then you should do more of it as it flows from your soul. If what you are doing is robbing your joy, then you should look for a way to do less of the action. This means you may need to change your job,

²⁸ Kumar, Pawan. "How Gratitude Formula Can Turn You Into a Better Person (and Coworker)." Medium. December 14, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://medium.com/@prepawan/how-gratitude-formula-can-turn-you-into-a-better-person-46e27b389445>.

relationship status, or even your physical address. Success in life is measured by the joy you experience. If you aren't feeding it all day long, then you are robbing your life.

There's an interesting occurrence of self-love in the creation account found in the Jewish Old Testament. Here, the Creator Source does something extraordinary. At the end of each day, after making animals or trees, God said, "It is good." The Creator looked at His creation and praised Himself. He gave Himself self-love. If Source God can praise Himself by saying, "It is good," then you can do the same. You can look at your life, personality, or body and praise it by saying, "It is good." This should come easily and naturally. If you can't do this without it hurting inside, perhaps you need a break and a time to love on self more. Awareness of who you are and calling it "good" leads to acceptance and even perfection.

Try it now. Look upon yourself and say, "It is good."

Imagine you have a one-hundred-dollar bill in your hand. Now, picture throwing it to the ground and stomping on it. Really grind it into the dirt. Yell at it. Call it "stupid" and "worthless." Reject it. Walk away from the imaginary bill. Is that dirty, lonely, messed up bill still valuable? Isn't it worth the same as a crisp, clean Benjamin? It sure is. Though it has been used and abused, it has the same value. The cash did not lose one single cent of value because of how it was treated.

You are the same. You are the cash. You are the bill that has been thrown down and trampled on. Some days, your coworkers, family, or even strangers mistreated you. On other days, you were too hard on yourself. You've been thrown around and seen better days. However, you have not lost your worth. You are special. You are valuable. You are talented and unique. Be kind to self and acknowledge your worth today. Just

as you can shake or wash off the money, shake off the condemnation and pain on you. You are of immeasurable value.

Having self-love means you will think about yourself differently. Take your thoughts captive before you act upon them. That means processing your thinking differently. When something crosses your mind not inspired by joy, simply recognize the negative thought and replace it with something good. Substitute it with gratitude. Instead of being upset over bad, morning traffic, grab that frustration before it manifests. Swap it with something positive. Choose the positive emotion. Be thankful for traffic as it means you have transportation. Be appreciative for a vehicle. Say, "It is good."

The pattern here is simple. First, notice the negative thought. Then, hold it captive in your mind. Exchange the thought with gratitude. Find something to say, "It is good." By following this simple process, your self-love will grow because you will actually treat you as you lovingly treat others.

Showing self-care starts in the mind. Remember, gratitude is an inside out progression.

"Gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart and not in the mind," said Lionel Hampton.²⁹

Notice the moods or desires you have throughout the day. Submit to some ideas and resist others. Then say, "Thank you for being aware." Do it. Be thankful throughout the day. Say, "thank you" when you make a good decision or do something of benefit. Notice your feelings. You can even do this in front of the mirror, if you dare. Look into your eyes and say, "I'm feeling frustrated about being late to work, but I'm thankful I have a job. It is good." Then, say thank you to self throughout the day. "Fall in love with yourself. Stop being in

²⁹ "Biography." IMDb. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://www.imdb.com/>

war with yourself,” said author Joyce Meyer.³⁰

Here are some things you can do:

1. Write yourself a letter.
2. Take quality time to be alone.
3. Enjoy a spa day.
4. Go to the library and read something you don't typically read.
5. Eat a delicious cupcake.
6. Go fishing.
7. Take a nap.
8. Buy something new like a computer or clothing.
9. Rub your body with a nice lotion and say, “thank you,” to your skin.
10. The possibilities are endless...

Indulge yourself sometime. Having self-gratitude is more than an experience. It is an ongoing mindset. Anyone can fake an action. You must be grateful for you from the inside out.

Imagine that hundred-dollar bill again. Now, visualize giving yourself a hundred bucks each time you do something beneficial at work or home. Would that extra money make you feel better about yourself? (Probably.) Would having more money solve some of your problems? (Probably.) When you thank self, you are making a deposit into your soul. You're investing in you. The real bank account will catch up later.

How can I be so certain? Because as you feel better, you will perform better and potentially earn more. Employers don't normally pay for what the job is worth, they pay for value. As your knowledge of your own value increases, you are worth

³⁰ Meyer, Joyce. *Living Beyond Your Feelings: Controlling Emotions So They Don't Control You*. New York: FaithWords, 2014.

more money to your employer. After I started self-care and thanking myself, I started earning more money than I ever had in my entire life. This works.

That one-hundred-dollar bill can teach us another lesson. Use one as a reminder to appreciate automatically. How? By keeping a hundred-dollar bill in your wallet at all times to see and remember that you have value. You are worth more than a Benjamin. Your value is not measured by the money you have, your job, or your accomplishments. You are valuable because you're you. Open your purse or wallet, put a one-hundred-dollar bill in there and say, "thank you" each time you see it. Be assured in the fact that you have growth and value.

When you are kind to yourself, you are setting the world right. Saying "thank you" to you is the first way to do unto others appropriately. You must take care of yourself or you will never be able to care for others or thank them for their service. "Be confident in what you have. You have the right looks, the right talent, and the right personality. It might not be what somebody else has, but you aren't them," said speaker and author Joel Osteen³¹.

Look for reasons to feel good about yourself and then say them. Say...

"I feel great."

"It is good."

"I am so talented and blessed."

"Out of all the people in the world, God chose me."

"The rest of my life will be the best of my life."

***Look for reasons
to feel good
about yourself.***

³¹ "Be Uncommon." Blog. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://www.joelosteen.com/>

Loving self means you accept and thank yourself for where you are NOW. Yes, you could be better in the future, but you must accept self today. Don't wait until "when" something changes to be thankful.

You can't think you will be happy "when" something specific occurs. That "when" may never happen and you'll always be miserable. Or if the "when" does occur, you may still be frustrated.

It's not that you will be happy "when" you lose weight or accomplish a particular goal. Love yourself in the now and be empowered to change. Accept self round or plump or fat or whatever term you want to be labeled. Thank yourself for being you in your body and then be determined to change, if you desire. Love self daily while you are losing those pounds. Don't wait until you have a skinny body to love and accept yourself, because it won't happen. Resist the urge to focus on your faults. If this lesson is not learned, you may be a skinny person one day with self-care problems.

Think of this idea this way. If I were to ask if you were pleased with self, would you list your good or bad traits? If your answer was only listing the negatives, perhaps you need some self-care. If your answer was you're pleased, but there are still bad things, maybe you, too, need self-care. If you can reply with a list of the good, regardless of if you are pleased or not, you are on the way to an acceptance of yourself from a healthy perspective.

If I were to ask if you were pleased with self, would you list your good or bad traits?

The grateful life starts with loving and caring for self. I learned this lesson from my divorce and the words of King David. Hopefully, you will start

being thankful for yourself, as well. This may sound easy, but it is hard to implement; not because it is difficult. Thinking positively takes as much energy as thinking negatively. Showing self-care is challenging because you've probably never done it before.

That's okay because today is a new day. It's time to change for the good. The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me and He will fulfill His purpose for you.

Let this revolution of appreciation start on the inside.

Chapter Six - Rubik's Cube Crisis

When you love and accept yourself, it is natural to want to do things you enjoy. I like reading and beach time. My son, Judah, loves solving some of the most tantalizing puzzles ever created. Actually, it's not normally considered a puzzle, but a common toy. It's one of the bestselling toys of all time.

This popular toy is not some electronic device or comic book-themed action figure. Instead, the puzzling success of the "magic cube" is based on its "beauty, simplicity, and form," says creator Erno Rubik.³² It's from his design that hundreds of millions of children and adults have been stumped to solve a single puzzle. And yes, it's simple in design, but quite the challenge to figure out. Have you ever worked your own magic on this toy?

Solving the Rubik's Cube has become a type of sport for kids and adults. I've never solved the cube (unless throwing it against a wall in anger counts). My son is a different story, though. At the young age of eleven, Judah, figured out how to put the pieces together properly. How? He learned the hard way - from a YouTube video. He practiced for countless hours to improve his speed. He's not a record holder; nonetheless he's impressive with his turns. His average solve time is less than seventeen seconds. Yes, you read that correctly. My son can solve a mixed-up Rubik's Cube in less time than it took you to read this paragraph.

It is normal to look at a Rubik's Cube and see

³² Adams, William Lee. "The Rubik's Cube: A Puzzling Success." Time. January 28, 2009. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1874509,00.html>. Accessed October 16, 2018.

impossibilities and problems. Judah sees something to do for fun. After a rough and grueling day in the eighth grade, he said to me, “Dad, when I get stressed I solve my Rubik’s Cube and I feel better.”

Heck, I get stressed just *thinking* about the puzzle.

One day, when I tried to remove and rearrange the stickers to impress him, all I got was a double eye roll. So, I finally mustered up the courage and asked, “Can you show me how you did it?”

He knew I had already watched several tutorials and couldn’t figure it out on my own. He also knew my patience for puzzles was razor thin.

Judah looked at me and said, “Dad, it’s really simple if you just memorize and follow the algorithm.”

I was astounded. My mouth fell open as I realized that my kid knew what an algorithm was. Not only that, but he had memorized one. However, was he serious that the solution to the puzzle was merely a memorized twist of the wrist?

I had to believe him, but I wanted to curse. I wanted to find Mr. Rubik and have a little chat about his impossible toy that had fooled me for years. While I had overcomplicated the solution, my son easily made specific moves. The answer was easy, yet it felt so difficult.

In life, we often experience a similar Rubik’s Cube crisis. This relic from the 1980s is a fascinating picture of how we overcomplicate, well, everything. With so many pieces and turns to our day, we get busy with moves which often make things worse. Some days, stress and anxiety take control until we’re totally frustrated.

Think about a Rubik’s Cube and your own life for a

minute. Any similarities? Ever struggled with putting it all in place? Sure, it looks easy, but making it come together is almost impossible. Somehow it has become normal to live day-by-day without much thought of a pattern to a life well-lived.

Maybe your marriage has been on the brink or your stressful job is making you question your career path. Or perhaps you've battled an addiction that won't go away. Could a family member's sickness have made you feel helpless recently? Life can be hard. A friend once said to me in sadness, "Life's horrible and then you die." That's a pitiful way to live.

Let me give you some good news: regardless of your circumstances, you can still solve the hardest of puzzles and walk in abundance.

My kid taught me how with his toy.

A few years ago, my son and I attended a World Cubing Competition. Imagine a gathering of neurotic nerds nervously timing each other with various challenges, including a blindfolded cube solve, and you get the picture of what we experienced. At the event, there were young kids working their fingers lightning fast and doing what I could only dream. I had to remind myself they were simply following a pattern over and over and not necessarily immensely smarter than me.

Ever struggled with putting it all in place?

That day, I was surrounded by hundreds of individuals who had figured out the solution. It dawned on me that life is like this toy. It's a puzzle and there is a basic algorithm to put it all together. To experience unlimited greatness, we basically need to learn and apply this algorithm. It can be repeated over and over, and it works every time. This algorithm will lead to results anytime, by anyone and everyone, and is connected to

gratitude.

Call this block logic or some kind of a cube miracle, if you wish. It's so easy, it is often overlooked. We have searched for more difficult answers, yet the algorithm we need is...

***“What you think about
and thank about you always bring about.”***

That's it.

There's life made plain and simple. One quick sentence makes sense of it all. Again...

“What you think about and thank about you always bring about.”

Each major religion has taught this same principle in their own words. Science agrees. It is a universal truth that, “what you think about and thank about you always bring about.”³³ You attract who you are in your thoughts.

Just as the pattern to complete the Rubik's Cube works without fail, so does this principle. Thoughts become things. What you consider, you create. For example, toxic thought patterns lead to feeling bad. Grateful thinking turns into a positive life. Your thoughts determine your everyday world. This is proven true on Friday night at the movie theatre of your home town. People who watch a romantic comedy often feel happy or maybe even mushy all over. Horror flicks hope to thrill you with two hours of jump scares. Action movies give a rush of adrenaline as you watch seemingly impossible feats take place before you. An enjoyable movie will transfer its suspense or sadness. A rotten movie will make you feel, well, rotten.

³³ Byrne, Rhonda. *The Secret*. New York: Atria Books, 2016.

Because your thoughts become things, your feelings originate with thoughts. Extremely nice and pleasant thoughts make you feel amazing. Thoughts about possible horrific outcomes will lead you to feel anxious. Again, what you think about, you can bring about. Tony Robbins said, "Wherever attention goes is where energy flows."³⁴

Your Rubik's Cube challenge is to learn to think about what you think about and then add thanksgiving to your day. Before you grab the puzzle of life and start twisting, it is important to memorize this algorithm. Let me add one more part to the puzzle...

Everything is emotional.

Every single decision you make is emotionally-charged and emotionally-originated.

Thoughts become things and the things in your life are based on emotional desires. I am suggesting every decision you make, from when you wake up in the morning until you lie down at night, is emotional. Even the exact time you choose to rise and shine is emotionally-based. You select your actions because either you do or don't want to feel a certain way. Social media, relationships, work, finances, religion, and even the color choice of your home is emotional. Marketing and advertising companies capitalize on this when they play to your feelings as they urge you to purchase their products. (Do you really think a body spray can make you manlier and more attractive?) Young children toy with your emotions when they have a full nuclear meltdown to get their way. Every item on your to-do list and each activity on your schedule is for some feeling. And, be honest, the pint of ice cream or bottle of beer is

³⁴ "Where Focus Goes, Energy Flows." Tonyrobbins.com. August 30, 2018. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/career-business/where-focus-goes-energy-flows/>.

too often an escape for the emotions of the day.

Everything is emotional.

We are discussing emotions in a book about gratitude because being grateful is a feeling. Being thankful is an act. The feeling comes first. You feel appreciation toward someone and then you express that feeling by thanking them. This is a powerful concept to grasp because it shows gratitude is not about how much stuff you own. True appreciation is an inside-out feeling originating in your thoughts and emanating through your emotions.

“Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for,” said speaker and author Zig Ziglar.³⁵

True appreciation is an inside-out feeling originating in your thoughts.

Your emotions or feelings cause you to respond. Emotions charge every action of every day. You actually go to work for the emotions your work elicits. You pay your taxes (or not) due to the emotional outcome from doing (or not doing it.) The comment you made on a website was posted because, deep down, you wanted to feel something. And, those clothes in your closet are there for your emotions. (Maybe you want to be comforted in a soft shirt or relish the opportunity of fitting into those skinny jeans one more time.) Think about the purpose or the “why” for a moment and you’ll understand how driven we are by feelings. Why do you enjoy certain hobbies? Why do you read books like this? Why do you brush your hair? Why do you live where you do? Why do you do all these things?

³⁵ Ziglar, Tom. "The Gratitude Journey." Ziglar Inc. March 30, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://www.ziglar.com/articles/the-gratitude-journey/>.

Why, why why?

Don't accept that your life is controlled by social norms or genetic programming. And please don't think that a cosmic invisible hand of God is controlling everything you do and say. You aren't a marionette puppet to anything or anyone.

No.

You literally do everything because of the emotional response your actions produce. You have some emotional idea or agenda hidden behind your deeds.

You believe your life will be better when you achieve a goal or date a certain person. So, you go for it. Why? Because you want to feel good. You think if you meet the target or fall in love you will feel accomplished or cherished. The hope to win or the desire to advance often pushes performance. External forces or an internal drive may motivate you.

Maybe you aren't motivated to change, so you don't. Perhaps you think you are safer for not having that hard conversation or for not taking the risk of becoming an entrepreneur. So, you don't step out to take a chance. The emotion of fear can stop you from going after what you really desire. Fear can paralyze you from seeking your best.

Life is totally emotional.

Emotions are basically thoughts working themselves through the body.

The feeling happens because your thinking draws it to you. *You can't emotionally feel something without thinking about it first.* When you are tight or tense, the body tells you it is feeling stressed. A tension headache is a result of thinking through tension. A joyful smile comes from positive thoughts or good cosmetic surgery (which was initiated by the desire for

happy thoughts.) People who are joyful often are that way because they choose to reflect and focus on the positive.

Actions are the result of your desire to feel an emotional response. As a child, you obeyed because you wanted to receive approval. Or, maybe you disobeyed because you wanted to feel rebellious, in control, or wanted attention.

Now, get this... If you are feeling a certain way—good or bad—it is simply because you are choosing to think on something that matches that emotion.

If you are feeling negative, it is because your thoughts are destructive. If you are feeling positive, it is because your thoughts are grateful.

What you focus on you feel.

Depression is often rooted in negative thinking. Sadness comes when you focus on what might have been or wonder what might happen. The “what if” question creates anxiety and fear. And, when you constantly think about what might have been, you will never be thankful for how things are now. Absolutely, all pain and misery come from thinking things should have been different. Sadness comes to mind when expectations are not met. Loss, even the thought of loss, is the mother of all sorrow. Frustration and depression can easily set in when all you think about is loss or:

How it used to be when you...

If only you could have it again...

How it could be if only...

If only I hadn't...

Thoughts are directly related to emotions. Moods instantly change when you receive a text message with some

sad news. It's normal to be concerned if the doctor uses the word "incurable" to diagnose a condition. And, surely, hearing you won millions of dollars from the lottery would instantly raise your mood. Thoughts attract like emotions or feelings. You can't think one way and feel another. It's impossible. It's also difficult to be angry and say something like, "I'm thankful for bubbles," out loud. There's no such thing as angry bubbles. (If you don't believe me, say, "I'm thankful for bubbles" the next time you are furious. You will be laughing before you know it.)

Let's say you receive a gift and respond by feeling gratitude and writing a "thank you" email. Your emotions influenced your actions and decisions. Behavior starts with the thought. You THINK you want a certain EMOTION; therefore, you ACT a specific way.

Work and money are prime examples.

Most people mistakenly think they work to get paid money. That's not right. It is not the paper pictures of dead presidents that make you go to work each day. Money is desired for certain feelings and emotions. You work because you like the feeling of security. Or, maybe you work because you want the sensation of being of value, which some people experience by having employment. Maybe you work because you like the sense of safety that comes from being employed. You could choose to be homeless, but you don't desire the emotions associated with such and so you change your behavior. You ensure you are gainfully employed because you don't want the insecurity of being homeless.

I have two friends who are so startlingly different in regard to security and their emotional need for spontaneity. One plans everything, including her time to be impulsive, into

her schedule. She goes by a detailed list every day of her life. Her budget is her guide and her savings account is a priority. Another friend lives totally by her desires for the day. She doesn't plan ahead more than a few hours. She refuses to worry about, well, anything. All of her belongings fit nicely into her car. They are both wonderful people although they're driven by totally different emotional needs. Interestingly, they both live with a great sense of gratitude.

Often, money is the grand mood changer. It's normal to feel good when you have money and to feel bad when you don't. How you spend your money is telling, as well. The latest iPhone works as well as your current model, but the feeling of having a new, sleek, and shiny gadget frequently pushes people to purchase. How about you?

Impulse purchases are my weakness. I buy too much on impulse whim because I am easily sold on emotional ideas. Feelings are fleeting. That quick emotional high only lasts so long until I want more. Desires give way to more desires. These emotions are particularly strong with food.

***Often, money is
the grand
mood changer.***

Let's say you are craving a steak dinner. Like an amazing thick, rich, perfectly seasoned steak with butter on top served with the fluffiest loaded baked potato with crisp bacon, ooey-goey cheese, a dollop of sour cream and a scattering of fresh chives, next to garlic roasted asparagus. Sure, food is good for the body. Why a steak dinner, though? What is going on inside your mind telling you your life will be better if you choose steak over something else? On a deeper level, a steak dinner may tell your mind the poverty-stricken childhood of eating peanut butter sandwiches daily are over. Or, perhaps a steak dinner may be a way of "treating" yourself for making a

sale at work or reaching a particular goal.

Food is highly emotional. If you are thinking steak, then you are not going to drive to a pizza buffet. Thoughts become things, so you can feel a certain way. As you get to choose your next meal, you also choose your emotions. You don't have to be an emotional eater or an emotional mess. You are in control of your thoughts and can select whatever you desire. Being grateful keeps you grounded. The rich and the poor can both be thankful. Gratitude is a choice starting on the inside and working itself out through actions and attitudes.

Every action you take is so you can feel a specific and certain emotional state. That emotion may not be inherently top-of-mind, yet it is still present. Everything you want in life you want simply because you crave the emotion of having it.

Don't gloss past that last sentence.

**Everything you want in life you want simply
because you crave the emotion of having it.**

Understanding the emotional aspect tied to your desires will help you understand what motivates you and makes life worthwhile. Having an appreciation awakening can help you figure your desires out, as well.

Your desires feel good when you think about them. What you want makes you smile when you think it over. Whatever is easy to be appreciative of is something you crave or desire. If you have ever said, "I'll be happy when _____," then that's your desire. Those desires provoke action. Having a feeling of wanting a desire met will often lead to you doing certain things.

You decide how you will feel and which emotions you will experience by what you think. Nothing external can change

your mood. No thing and no one can cause you to be in a bad mood unless you *allow* it to happen.

Think back to the Rubik's Cube. The turns move the colors to match (or mismatch, if you're me). It's the same way with our thoughts. They turn into emotions and emotions turn into actions. This means you control the power of outcome. Good thinking leads to good living. Poor thinking leads to poor living.

Before you know it, your life can be an endless cycle of out of bed, coffee, work, dinner, television, and then sleep again. Add to the pattern countless hours on social media (often searching for an escape) and no wonder so many people feel their life is not significant.

Karate master Bruce Lee said, "What you habitually think largely determines what you will ultimately become."³⁶ This is both good and bad. It's wonderful if you are thinking about your unlimited blessings and are thankful. It is horrible if you are stuck in neutral or negativity and merely letting life happen.

An intentional consideration of your thoughts will reveal how you create or avoid various outcomes. How often do you express thanks? Do you journal your blessings each day? Well, if you change your thinking, you can change your living. Your thoughts turn into choices. Having a sense of gratitude can give you better control of your thoughts. The abundant life is experienced when you are thankful, even if all hell is breaking loose.

Life does not have to be an emotional roller coaster of dips and turns and loops and free falls. Your day does not have

³⁶ <http://www.bruceleequotes.org/what-you-habitually-think-largely-determines-what-you-will-ultimately-become/>

to be full of drama. Simply decide what you want and go for it. There's an abundance of peace and joy available at all times.

Think about it and *thank* about it.

Have a laser-like focus on your potential. Know about your desires. Feel the emotions that come with those desires. Then, don't let go of those thoughts and feelings. Be determined to figure out the puzzle. Again, it is not the circumstances that make your life "good" or "bad," rather, it's what you think about those circumstances that matters. Few things will pop up without your desiring them in the first place. I believe everything in life is the outcome of your idea about it.

Too often, people have a type of color blindness when

It is not the circumstances that make your life "good" or "bad," rather, it's what you think about those circumstances that matters.

they want to solve their Rubik's Cube problems. They get all the colors mixed up and make their puzzling life even worse. You can't focus on why things are so bad while simultaneously hoping

things are going to get better. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. No problem ever gets better by ignoring it. If you don't have the results you desire in any area of life, then you must first start to think differently about that problem. Don't think about the problem at all. Instead picture the possibilities.

Negative thinking never produces positive results. The "war on terror" only produced more people thinking about terror. That's backwards. Less war comes through more peace. If we want love, we should simply think about what is lovely. Gratitude breeds love. Thinking about the horrible and hateful

only brings more evil. Abundance never appears out of an obsession on lack. Instead, gratitude attracts more gratitude. If you seek less stress, you must focus on the opposite of stress. Don't think about the things that cause you anxiety as this will only manifest more problems. Again, if you want peace, start thinking peacefully. Define what peace means to you. Go to peaceful places and speak words full of peace and encouragement. Be grateful for peace and it will become evident. Thoughts bring emotions, which bring action.

Having gratitude is more than an emotion and being thankful is more than an action. When you have an appreciation awakening, you experience a state-of-being. You can arrive at a place where you are consistently thinking and acting from a state of gratefulness. It can become your natural and normal mindset. This can happen as your mind is set on how good things are now and how much better they can be in the future.

Consider the colored cube again. If the first turn to the cube of life is to know thoughts become reality, the second turn is to know everything is emotional, and then, the third is to do something with this knowledge. A paradigm shift of action is necessary to see the results you want to create. This includes approaching your life from a totally different perspective than most people.

This shift includes:

- Thinking about your blessings on a regular basis
- Living in the NOW – the NEAR, the OBLIVIOUS, and the WISHFUL
- Feeling thoughts of gratitude
- Trusting everything in your life to work out as it should

- Allowing abundance to manifest without worry or forcing something to work

As you think and focus on what you have, what you need will be magnetically attracted to you. What you think about becomes an emotion or an action. The results take care of themselves. Trust in the algorithm that thoughts becoming things. Let the process of the puzzle work. It's a puzzle and it's also a type of flow. As you release a flow of appreciation, it always attracts abundance.

A daily mental inventory of your thoughts helps you stay in abundance and thankfulness. How? Your dominant thought determines the direction of your destiny. What would you say has been your dominate thought during the last twenty-four hours? How often are you saying "thank you" to yourself, to God, or to other people?

Stop *right now* for a moment of silent reflection and consider this idea of thankfulness. Have you had an appreciation awakening yet?

We are upset or frustrated when life or people don't meet our expectations.

Silent reflection offers an opportunity to connect to your inner desires and thoughts. What does a thankful life look like to you? Often, a grateful life is an abundant one. When you pair your desires with deeply held emotions and gratitude, you will see abundance manifest. But, what about your painful past or the horrible issues of today? Well, gratitude solves them.

If you've struggled with feeling disappointment or other emotional pain, it is because you have focused on lack. "All stress comes from your thoughts about a situation and wanting

the moment to be different than it is,” said Eckart Tolle.³⁷ We are upset or frustrated when life or people don’t meet our expectations. We are sad when we focus on lack. For example, I could be sad because I don’t have a brand-new car. The opposite is also true. I could be glad for public transportation or because I own a bike and am saving for a new car. Being glad attracts more gladness to you. Thinking about lack creates more sadness and then more lack.

When our expectations are met, we feel satisfied. As we are thankful for what we do have, we enter the flow of thankfulness. From this flow of happiness comes miracles. If you believe all things are possible. If you don’t believe, then nothing is possible.

Often, all we must do to feel differently is to alter our view of the circumstances. We must turn our expectations into appreciation. The most powerful way to shift your mindset is through gratitude. Sure, things are horrible sometimes. Bad things happen. However, there is always something to be thankful for. There is always good to consider. Don’t focus on supposed lack, which leads to sadness.

Personally, I’ve learned there is no such thing as lack. We have created this idea and used it as an excuse not to be appreciative of what we do have. There is no lack of money or oxygen or ideas in the world. Everything you want or need is available to you. Don’t let the idea of lack distract you from being grateful for all you have access to in the world.

Remember Victor Frankl and the fish soup? Frankl wrote the story down for us and it has been shared with several generations. Writing out your own unique story is so

³⁷ Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, UK: Penguin Books, 2016.

simple. This basic step of gratitude will help you have greatness. Again, a key to abundance is doing something with appreciation. To help, this book includes a Gratitude Challenge which has daily exercises to actually experience thanksgiving.

A soul shift can occur when you simply act appreciatively or write down what you are thankful for daily. When you count your blessings, by physically recounting them, you elicit the feeling of gratitude. This strong emotion then draws more goodness into your life. There is power when you use a pen and piece of paper. If you positively focus on what you *have*, more of what you *want* will come. Gratitude and focused awareness changes your thoughts and outlook. Gratitude leads to happiness which then draws more good things toward you.

Your entire day is different when you know you will be completing a journal at night. You live with the end in mind. With the journal exercise, thankfulness can be on your mind minute-by-minute and hour-by-hour. It quickly becomes normal to seek out things to be thankful for during your busy schedule. This awareness is an awakening that changes your actions and attitudes. Gratitude releases greatness. We can understand this idea from the very word “gratefulness.” When you are “grateful,” you are literally “full” of “greatness.” Being thankful is recognizing how great life is for simply being life and then focusing on the positive, regardless of the situation. It’s not the circumstances that determine your emotions; rather it’s your emotions that actually determine your life. Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “The circumstances are how I make them.”³⁸ As you choose to focus on what you have, you can change your emotions, your day, and eventually your life.

³⁸ "Napoleon's Maxims & Quotes." Maxims of Napoleon Bonaparte: On Himself. Accessed October 16, 2018. http://www.napoleonguide.com/maxim_himself.htm.

Life is like a Rubik's cube. You can be like me and look at the toy and see a problem and impossibilities. Or, you can be like my son, who sees a solution in seconds. The algorithm for an appreciation awakening is easier than the solution to the cube. What you think about and thank about you always bring about. Everything is emotional. Thankfulness is an action. A better life really is that simple. It is not too late for your dreams to come to pass. As your thoughts are directed towards your destiny, the idea of lack dissipates, and anything is possible. You might even be able to solve a Rubik's Cube!

Chapter Seven - Appreciation Attracts Abundance

Jitters of nervousness filled the crowd as the 218 graduates gathered on a Louisiana lawn for their commencement. The students at Dillard University had worked countless hours for many years to receive their advanced degrees.

They got a lot more than they ever expected.

The college normally featured famous speakers for their keynote address, such as first lady Michele Obama, who the year before gave a racially-charged speech. This year, the speaker was Hollywood superstar, Denzel Washington. I'm sure people wondered which social cause Washington would champion during his talk.

What took place was more than a ceremony. It was more heart stirring than a normal commencement speech. That day, a tsunami wave of hope swept through the audience. Those in attendance and, indeed, the millions across the world, who watched the viral video were shook with what Washington had to say.

His speech was a passionate plea to the graduates and was full of stories from his life. He spoke of failure, discipline, and helping others. He even recalled how he had a 1.7 grade average and flunked out of college. Washington told how he finally got his head right and wanted to share some simple lessons he had learned. The Tony and Academy award winning actor poignantly shared four basic points:

1. Put God first.

2. Fail big.
3. You'll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse.
4. Say "thank you" in advance.

The speech resonated throughout the crowd and swiftly went viral online. Millions and millions of people have heard the ten-minute talk. It is a simplistic message which happens to be about gratitude. These words may be the most life-altering ever spoken from a commencement podium. Denzel Washington said to those students and to us, "I pray that you put your slippers way under the bed tonight, so that when you wake up in the morning you have to get on your knees to reach them. And while you're down there, say thank you for grace, thank you for mercy, thank you for understanding, thank you for wisdom, thank you for parents, thank you for love, thank you for kindness, thank you for humility, thank you for peace, thank you for prosperity. Say thank you in advance for what's already yours."³⁹

This speech shared one of the greatest powers of fulfillment – appreciation in advance.

Gratitude in advance is a concept known only to a few and practiced by even less. It is the missing link to unanswered prayers. It is how you can have a great life of abundance. From Denzel's words, your life can change. It can change forever. It can change instantly. If you've ever longed for meaning and joy, you have finally found the true clandestine prophecy. The GPS of the universe has led you to appreciation in advance. Why? Because it magnetically attracts abundance.

We've already learned about the amazing benefits of being thankful. We've seen how it helps your health and can heal a broken heart. Now, learn this

***"If you believe
you will receive
anything you
ask for in
prayer."***

_____m/watch?v=BxY_eJLbfIk

ability to create the life of your dreams. It is simple, really. Say “thank you” in advance. Trust appreciation to attract what you need or want. Don’t stress or wonder about how everything will work out. Dream big. Dream often. Let go of the doubt and worry. Take John Lennon’s song and imagine better. Then, call it out by faith and be thankful.

A statement explaining your emotion of advanced gratitude ties the principles taught in this book together and gives you an exact formula for abundance. Remember, what you really want feels good. Whatever you *thank* about you bring about. As you feel the emotions of having what you want, anything is possible. Indeed, Jesus said, “If you believe you shall receive anything you ask for in prayer.”⁴⁰ Visualize having it, act as if, and say thank you in advance. Believe it is done. Thank through it. See it happen. It’s really that simple – say it and then see it.

Say the words...

“I am filled with gratitude because I now have the job of my dreams.”

“My life is better, and I have joy because everything works out for my good.”

“Today, it’s wonderful and I have gratitude that I am joined with my soul mate.”

“I’m joyful and thankful now that I am completely healthy and without sickness.”

“Contentment has awakened in me and I am having the perfect day.”

⁴⁰ Matthew 21:22

"I'm so happy and grateful now that I have more money than I ever dreamed possible."

"Something wonderful is about to happen."

"My life is full of appreciation knowing that _____."

Denzel Washington believed this idea wholeheartedly. He told how he was sitting in his mother's beauty parlor when his journey to abundance began:

"And I'm looking in the mirror and I see behind me this woman under the dryer and every time she looked up – she every time I looked up she was looking at me. She was looking me in the eye, I don't know who she was, and I said you know, she said somebody give me a pen, give me a pencil I have a prophecy," he continued. "It was March 27, 1975, she said, 'boy you are going to travel the world and speak to millions of people.' Now, mind you, I flunked out of college I'm thinking about joining the army. I didn't know where I was going to go and she is telling me I'm going to travel the world and speak to millions of people.

"Well, I have traveled the world. And I have spoken to millions of people, but that's not the most important thing, success that I had the most important thing is that what she taught me, what she told me that day has stayed with me since. I've been protected, I've been directed, I've been corrected, I've kept God in my life and it's kept me humble, I didn't always stick with him, but he always stuck with me."⁴¹

Washington knew what he wanted. Do you? Have you

⁴¹ "Denzel Washington: 'Number One: Put God First', Dillard University - 2015." Speakola. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://speakola.com/grad/denzel-washington-everything-i-have-is-by-the-grace-of-god-full-2015>.

defined it? The actor's talk about two specific ideas begs our attention. Over and over again, he spoke of "dreams" and "desires" in the commencement.

A desire is an innate purpose and longing in your heart. Perhaps you desire to travel or play the guitar. Maybe your desire is romantic love? Or, you desire to feed the homeless down the street or help the hopeless in another country. These desires were placed in you by Source. They must be manifested in your actions. This can happen through an awakening. "True desire in the heart for anything good is God's proof to you sent beforehand to indicate that it's yours already," Denzel continued in his address, "I'll say it again. True desire in the heart, that itch that you have whatever it is you want to do, that thing that you want to do to help others and to grow and to make money that desire that itch, that's God's proof to you, sent beforehand, already to indicate that it's yours. And anything you want good you can have, so claim it, work hard to get it. When you get it, reach back, pull someone else up."⁴²

Dreams are the twin sister of desires. Dreams are the bigger things, the grand ideas. Dreams are what you think about when you are zoned out or bored. Come on. Don't you dream of a better life? Aren't there cravings inside your soul for deep connections? Do you want to make difference in the world? Think about those wishes God has granted you and dream. It's okay to dream and think positive about the future! You may be surprised where your mind takes you when you consider the possibilities are unlimited. Dreamers are doers. Everything in our world originated from a dream or the thought realm. Someone thought about a computer and then created it. Someone dreamed up a pasta dish and then named it Marsala linguini. Thoughts bring about reality. Dreams come

⁴² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxY_eJLBfIk

true.

Every invention was created twice – first in the mind and then in the physical realm. Dreaming, or forward thinking, will give you a definition of your greatest desires. Perhaps, the idea of dreaming again is hard for you. Most of us have had our dreams crushed and desires not come to pass. It's not too late, though. Let me remind you of those words from King David:

“The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.”

Be honest and answer these questions which may allow you to dream more:

What makes your heart beat and your blood race?

What are you doing when the best part of you shows up?

What are you doing when you feel totally fulfilled?

What breaks your heart and stops you in your tracks?

What cause or circumstance urges your inner self to act?

If you knew you could not fail, what would you do?

How do you want to live out the rest of your days?

What gifts and talents do you have?

What hobbies would you like to pursue?

What passions are hidden deep inside your heart?

Your truthful answers may reveal the greater purpose for your life. Yes, your purpose in this world is probably associated with what is on your mind right now. Those desires and dreams have been placed in you by Source. Doesn't it feel good to imagine accomplishing your desires and doing what you've always dreamed? Remember, what you want feels good when you think about it. Don't skip that point. Your purpose is tied to your feeling of fulfillment and happiness.

For too long, I allowed life to stop me from pursuing my own dreams and desires. Now, nothing is stopping me from being what the Source created me to be.

Here's how anything can happen for you as you attract abundance...

- have a mental picture of what you want
- personally define your desires
- be thankful in advance
- act as if it has already happened

By thanking in advance, your mind fills with appreciation and thoughts of your dreams. Then because something is in your thoughts, it will manifest in your world. You will begin to “act as if” and enable your thoughts to manifest anything.

Yes. Anything.

Now, you're probably thinking, “Daniel, I'm four feet eight inches and I love basketball, so are you telling me I can be a professional basketball player?”

Yes. And, no.

When you consider your definitions and dreams, you need to consider what is natural for you. So, sorry, Shorty, the NBA probably isn't for you. Neither is your aging grandma going to make it big in the NFL. That's simply not natural. But, Grandma can be a dedicated fan, meet her favorite players, go to the Super bowl, and maybe even own a professional football team. You go, Grandma. Dreams can and do come true.

As you thank in advance, you change your thoughts and your outcome. Faith in the future brings abundance into alignment. Your emotions and actions follow the established thought pattern.

“Acknowledging the good that is already in your life is the foundation of abundance,” said Eckhart Tolle.⁴³ It is a vital part of living in the NOW by recognizing the NEAR, the OBLIVIOUS, and the WISHFUL.

Let’s say your deepest desire is to travel and experience the world. For years, you’ve minimized this idea and pushed it to the back of your mind because you didn’t think it was possible.

Today is different, though. Today, you have had an appreciation awakening and you can do anything you envision, including travel.

How?

By changing your thoughts on the subject.

Let yourself visualize and dream a bit. Research the places that interest you. Consider the possibilities, the sights, and the scenes around the globe. You will then magnetically pull travel into your world. This is activated by your thoughts and accompanying emotions. As you focus on what you want and how you will feel when you have it, actions automatically happen. Before you know it, you will be on the pink beaches of Bermuda.

If this sounds too good to be true, it might not be true for you. It was totally accurate for me. Within two short years after deciding I wanted to travel the world, I visited the Bahamas and three different countries. I swam in the crystal-clear waters of Bermuda and walked on the pink beaches. Initially, I couldn’t see how it was going to happen. I chose not to focus on my lack of travel experience or absence of funds. Instead, I saw myself traveling. I learned about life outside the

⁴³ Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, UK: Penguin Books, 2016.

states. I got my passport and I acted as if I was a traveler. Before I knew it, I was.

Our actions must match our desires and dreams. If this doesn't happen, your dreams will turn into nightmares. A nightmare is when your dreams don't match reality, when disappointment enters your world. While we all have negative and horrific nightmares sometimes, you can change your night terrors into pleasant dreams by thanking in advance and then "acting as if."

That's really what it means to thank in advance. It's a way of saying, "Thank you, I am healthy," and then acting as if you are healthy by eating healthy foods and exercising. It's a way of saying, "Thank you, I am blessed and debt free," and then living within your means, saving money, and paying off debt.

For over a year, I said, "I am so happy and thankful because my SUV is paid off." Well, guess what? It is paid off and was paid off overnight. (Now, the vehicle happened to be totally destroyed by an encounter with a runaway deer, BUT it happened. The SUV was paid off just as I thanked it so.)

There is a story told of a church congregation in a farming community who prayed and prayed for an end to a severe drought. The horrible lack of rain caused the dusty ground to go dry and the crops to wither away. No rain meant no harvest and no harvest meant certain demise for the farmers. The town preacher called a prayer meeting at a local farm. All the townsfolk showed up for the event.

As the farmers gathered to pray for rain, the preacher stood atop a big tractor, looked upon the crowd and said, "Thank you for coming to pray for rain, but folks I must ask one question... where are your umbrellas?"

Evidently, the people didn't expect their prayers to be answered immediately.

How about you? Do your actions match your belief? Do you act as if?

With faith anything is possible.

Lean into the idea of abundance and envision it happening. For example, think of being behind the wheel of your favorite automobile. Feel the grip of the steering wheel and the air flowing from the windows as you drive down an empty freeway. If you can see it in your mind and feel it in your body, you can experience it in your world. However, you shouldn't expect to be blessed with a new car if you don't take care of the clunker you drive now.

If this sounds too good to be true, it might not be true for you.

Being double-minded will lead to a twisted life. A person is double minded when they act one way but actually "think" they "think" a different way. This is confusing and impotent. Having doubt counteracts your faith. Be thankful for where you are in the journey today and take care of what you have. Look to the future for better opportunities. Act as if your desires and prayers have been answered so greatness can manifest. Trust things to simply happen, act like they have already occurred, and they will.

A medical student perfectly embodies the ideas of this chapter. My daughter, Rebekah, wants to be a doctor or nurse in the military when she grows up. She dreams of saving lives through medicine and wants to travel the world to serve those who protect our country. So, as she grows, she will learn about medicine every chance she gets. The kid who dreamed of being a doctor will then become a medical student. The student

thinks about medicine, anatomy, and science through study and school until she holds the healing firmly in her mind. Clinicals give the student a chance to “act as if” she is certified as a licensed professional until she receives her degree. Even after this, the doctor “practices” on patients to help provide healing and health.

You can apply these concepts to any idea.

Think of yourself playing the guitar and performing before others (or insert your dream here). That desire to perform causes your dreams to manifest into actions, if you allow. You discover the different guitar chords and learn about strumming rhythms. That inward longing is like a craving that pulls musical knowledge and, one day, possible concert gigs your way.

It starts with a thought and then acting as if. It starts when you prepare today for tomorrow.

Maybe you want to run a marathon? If so, it’s time to act as if it is already happening. Buy the gym clothes and running shoes. Say, “I’m so happy and grateful now that I am running a race.” Watch videos of runners finishing in record times. Then, start to run. Or jog. Or walk. You might have to stop after one lap around the neighborhood because you can’t breathe, but you are doing it. Push yourself to think big and allow your desires to become reality.

If your dream is to be married and have a happy prosperous relationship, you must do something today for the future. Work on yourself while you are single. Purchase a wedding picture frame and put it up in your house. See yourself standing at the altar. Pray and thank God for your partner. Get a vision for the days and years to follow. If you do this, the natural result will be to start dating, read relationship

books, attend marriage seminars, and maybe even propose to your dream partner.

By faith, you can act as if your desires have already come true. Start here with this idea and think on what you really want. Don't get distracted with the "how." Focus on the "what." Be thankful it has already happened. When you align your thoughts with your deepest desires, things will come together. You never have to worry about "how."

One ancient Chinese sage says, "If you correct your mind then everything else will fall into place."⁴⁴

What you think about you bring about.

Positive gratitude will outperform negative doubt every time. You can have the life of your dreams or you can keep dreaming. Your choice.

"Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right," said Henry Ford.⁴⁵

Being thankful sends a magnetic signal out into the universe saying you are open to receive. Live in the NOW for what is NEAR, OBLIVIOUS, and WISHFUL. Appreciate what you have today and be open to receive. Those who are faithful with a little will be given more. The key here is to decide what you want, define what you want and then dream about it. Allow it to happen.

What you want feels good when you think about it. Use your feelings to decide on your dreams. Then, define them. Be specific. Don't just say, "I want a house." Envision the house, think up the address, see the color, and smell the grass from

⁴⁴ Hilton, Jon. "Things Fall Into Place." Jonathan Hilton Mind Connections. August 11, 2018. Accessed October 16, 2018. <http://www.jonathanhilton.com/life-lessons/correct-your-mind/>.

⁴⁵ Ford, Henry. *Quotations of Henry Ford*. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2006.

the fresh cut yard. Imagine yourself living in the house of your dreams. Then, say, "Thank you." Utter that prayer. Remove all negativity. Imagine more and build your belief that life can be better. Consistent positive thoughts full of gratefulness can shift your life to produce abundance and joy.

Another famous actor has his own unique story of being thankful in advance and how it manifested abundance in his own life. Comedian Jim Carrey has told of how he wrote himself a check for "acting services rendered" and visualized earning the money until it happened. Though he was financially broke and struggling for work, Carrey looked to the future. He would drive up to the hills of Hollywood and envision directors asking him to star in their movies.

He said, "I had nothing at that time, but it made me feel better. That's all it was for me, was making me feel better, I did want these things, but I didn't have a hold of them yet, but they are out there."⁴⁶ He said what he wanted was out there, he just didn't have it yet. Carrey said what he wanted was possible and was coming to him in time. He was still dreaming.

Carrey told Oprah Winfrey he wrote himself a check for ten million dollars and gave himself five years to cash it. He dated it "Thanksgiving 1995" and placed it in his wallet. Over time, it deteriorated, but he kept the money in mind.

"Just before Thanksgiving 1995, I found out I was going to make ten million dollars on a movie. Visualization works if you work hard," explained Carrey.⁴⁷ He decided what he wanted, tied his emotions to the desire, was thankful, literally acted as if, and then earned it. That's what gratitude can do for you, as well, even if you are not a Hollywood star.

⁴⁶ "What Oprah Learned from Jim Carrey." Oprah.com. Accessed October 16, 2018. <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-life/what-oprah-learned-from-jim-carrey-video>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Again, this book is not about information, but application. You have discovered the proof about the goodness of gratitude and learned how to be thankful regardless of your circumstances. We've discussed how God wants us to be thankful always and how meals are a wonderful time to regroup and rethink our lives. Science has even proven the power of gratitude and how using a journal or completing gratitude exercise can make a difference.

Now, it is up to you.

Your challenge is not to complete a Rubik's Cube, but to be more thankful (which is much easier.) Your life will change as you are more grateful. These alterations take place as you think about your thoughts and thank through your life. Provided in the next few chapters are tools to help you experience an awakening of appreciation daily.

Chapter 8 is a unique Thirty-One Days of Gratitude Challenge. These exercises have been tested and documented to make a difference in your overall health and happiness. Read the challenge and just do it. Meditate on the quotes and say "thanks" over your life. If you are faithful in completing your challenge each day, you will begin to see your heart soften by kindness. The hearts of those near you will also become more open to goodness. Life will be better.

The next chapter will give you many ideas to be thankful for. It's a basic a collection of objects of gratitude and a few words to help you reflect. This is not a random list. I'm sharing things I have personally journaled. These are people, places, and things to help you have perspective and be more grateful.

The book ends with an appreciation journal. It gives you space for a full month to write down your

***Your can
have the
life of your
dreams.***

own experiences. Each day, there are prompts giving you a starting place to write. I suggest you continue this practice by using your own journal once you completed the first month. Carry on with these prompts or simply write down at least five areas for which you have gratitude. It is important not to list things, but to also document your feelings. Remember everything is emotional, so your feelings are more important than the entity itself. The ideas shared in this book are as ancient as the Sages and as modern as Hollywood actors. You can have the life of your dreams.

When Denzel Washington spoke on that graduation day, he received an honorary degree from Dillard University. Though he had flunked out of college, he was given the distinction of an education of a life time. Truly, he has become the world's teacher. We are all in this school of gratitude together. There's a dream or diploma with your name on it out there too. It is waiting for you to be thankful in advance to receive it. Soon, it will be your turn to walk across the stage to receive whatever you desire. And, instead of the traditional "Pomp and Circumstance" which is played at graduations, I think a tune from John Lennon and Yoko Ono should be appropriate. Imagine the song playing as your dreams come true.

Can't you hear the lyrics now...

"You may say I'm a dreamer,

But I'm not the only one,

I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will be as one."

This is what we need today. This is a real appreciation awakening.

Chapter Eight - Thirty-One Day Gratitude Challenge

You've seen in these pages how an appreciation awakening can stimulate real hope to change our world. Thanksgiving is good for you. It is good for everyone. When you are grateful, you have proper perspective and even the cells in your body react in a positive manner. Knowing about the ability of gratitude to impact your world is only part of appreciation awareness. Now, it's time to do something.

Expressing your grateful feelings is like putting fuel in the engine that powers change. Expression and action don't have to be magnanimous either. You can use small deeds to show thankfulness. The butterfly effect proposes that small deeds on one part of the world can enact great change on another side of the globe. Thanksgiving harnesses this power. Quiet words, an anonymous letter, simple gifts that say, "thank you," or a gentle act of kindness can make someone's day better and spread goodness everywhere.

A recent scientific study found a basic good deed can chemically alter your body to give you more happiness. When you do something kind, it releases a burst of serotonin in the person on the receiving end. Serotonin is a natural mood enhancer found in your body. It is serotonin that is usually depleted in people who suffer from anxiety or depression. By saying thanks, you can help lift someone out of the pit of despair. You actually affect someone's chemical makeup when you act out of abundance. You have the power to change other people by your gratitude.

Here's another amazing fact about that study - the

serotonin level rises in both the giver and the receiver. The person who offers the gesture also gets a boost. Your thankfulness cycles back and immediately thanks you on the molecular level. By giving thanks, you can make yourself and another person better. But, that's not all. Scientists took this study an extra step and discovered if someone watches or learns of the kindness, their levels of "happy" chemicals spike, as well. Yes, your gratitude shown by kindness matters and makes a difference. Using the principles in this book you can change your world and maybe even the whole world. When you take time to be thankful, you are setting in motion a chain of events, that has no end.

Being grateful can transform depression into joy, give you beauty for ashes, build strength from fear, and turn weeping into happiness.

Your challenge is to do it. Change your world. Be living proof of how giving thanks works. The results won't come with the snapping of your fingers. Gratitude is best experienced when practiced daily. Be intentional with saying thanks. Give one act of gratitude after another.

Your challenge is to use the daily exercises in this chapter to inspire you to give thanks. Over the next thirty-one days, come back to this book each day for a unique action item and journal entry. Say thanks every day to someone different and in a different way. As the thirty-one days progress, you will probably note small changes in the people near you and in yourself. Hearts will be softened as you plant the seed of appreciation. You also will probably come to realize how blessed and prosperous you already are, as well.

Say thanks every day to someone different in a different way.

Brother David Steindl-Rast said in his popular TED Talk:

“When I was in Africa some years ago and then came back, I noticed water. In Africa where I was, I didn't have drinkable water. Every time I turned on the faucet, I was overwhelmed. Every time I clicked on the light, I was so grateful. It made me so happy. But after a while, this wears off. So, I put little stickers on the light switch and on the water faucet, and every time I turned it on, water. So, leave it up to your own imagination. You can find whatever works best for you, but you need stop signs in your life. And when you stop, then the next thing is to look. You look. You open your eyes. You open your ears. You open your nose. You open all your senses for this wonderful richness that is given to us. There is no end to it, and that is what life is all about, to enjoy, to enjoy what is given to us.”⁴⁸

Appreciation is something you do and not only something you learn about or feel.

This isn't a book to read and place on a book shelf to forget. Here is your path to improve your life through the cycle of thankfulness.

This is a challenge worth accepting.

So, go ahead.

Be thankful.

Change yourself.

Change the world around you.

Change the entire planet.

⁴⁸ From TED Talk website

https://www.ted.com/talks/david_steindl_rast_want_to_be_happy_be_grateful?language=en

Daniel Rendelman

There is an awakening of appreciation taking place and you can be a part of this movement. You can join this revolution today.

Gratitude Challenge One

Keeping a journal gives you a written stream of thanksgiving. Each evening, starting today, you should journal three to five areas for which you are thankful.

- Write about things that went well and on events that didn't turn out as expected. Place in your diary how you felt when you recalled the day.
- Use a favorite pen—or several—to make it personal and yours.
- Remember to express how you feel.
- Keep the journal on your bed near your pillow so you don't forget to use it.
- Use the guided journal provided in this book to get you started this month.

Gratitude Challenge Two

Today, your goal is to help others be thankful by paying compliments. This is reverse gratitude and it works every time. Intentionally compliment as many people as possible. Be genuine and sincere. Look the person in the eye and tell them how special they are to you or how beautiful they look. Compliment kids by talking about their skills. Find something positive in everyone. Encourage the employee at the gas station who is having a horrible day or the teacher who might be struggling. When you show gratitude by pointing out others' uniqueness, they will then thank you for being vocal. This is the cycle of gratitude in action. Be prepared to be thanked all day as you compliment throughout your day. Those you'll speak to will be blessed and you'll be encouraged. What could be better?

Gratitude Challenge Three

Another way to show gratitude is to offer your time. We only have twenty-four hours in each day. Today is a day to give some of your time away. Do it in some of the following ways:

- Listen to a friend.
- Volunteer at church.
- Say “yes” to a business presentation you’ve been avoiding.
- Show you are thankful for a relative by organizing a get-together.
- Set some of your personal time apart to give it away.

Gratitude is made loud and clear when you share quality and quantity moments. Say, “I am thankful” by being selfless with your schedule.

Gratitude Challenge Four

Today’s challenge will require you to be crafty. Make something called a “gratitude jar.” To do this, simply cut up slips of paper and choose a cup or jar you can fill with those slips. Write one thing you are thankful for on each slip of paper and place it in the jar. The next time you are feeling down or frustrated, pick a slip out of the jar and be reminded of something for which you should be thankful. Keep the jar in a visible place so that when you look at it, it’s full of blessings and reminders of being surrounded by many reasons to feel good about your life.

Gratitude Challenge Five

Just say it. Say, "I'm thankful." Or better yet, answer, "I'm thankful." Use this phrase to answer the small talk question of "how are you doing?" when you are asked. Without thinking, we usually respond, "fine," and politely ask about the other person. What a waste of breath and words.

Reply differently today. Say something declaring your thankfulness. This will probably catch people off-guard, so be ready to share something specific. Here's how your day could go...

"How are you doing?" Bob asks.

"Man, I'm grateful and thankful," you respond.

"Really?" Bob asked. "What are you so happy about today?"

That's how you can change small talk into a meaningful conversation.

Gratitude Challenge Six

Prayer or silent meditation is a practice which brings peace and comfort. When you take a few minutes to be still, it gives your mind and body a hard reset. Imagine unplugging an electrical device and restarting it to get it to work and you can understand the effectiveness of being still for a few minutes.

Your challenge today is to do just that.

Set ten minutes aside to be calm. Sit comfortably, focus on your breathing, be quiet, and listen. Place your fingers on your wrist and feel your pulse rush through your body. In this moment, what can you feel and sense appreciation for? Think about the sensation of your heartbeat and be thankful. Don't

allow sounds or rogue thoughts to distract you. Pray and ask for gratitude.

Then, see what happens.

You might find your mind is filled with reasons to be thankful. You might find nothing at all. Both are okay. A quiet heart is often a thankful heart.

Gratitude Challenge Seven

Pay it forward. You've probably heard of this idea before. Basically, do something kind to someone anonymously. Pick something you would like done to you, like having your order paid for at a restaurant. Pay it forward. Or, backwards. Pay for the order behind you at a drive-thru window. Whatever you choose, do it in a way where you won't receive any credit or thanks. Trust that the person receiving the gift will be grateful and one day will repeat the favor. Unexpected gifts are the best.

Gratitude Challenge Eight

For today's challenge, you need to find a small item like a rock, a coin, or a trinket. Make sure it's tiny enough to fit into your front pants pocket. Take this item, hold it in your hands, and consider all the reasons to be thankful.

Ask yourself a few questions...

- Who are the people in your life?
- What are some deeply treasured memories?
- What struggles are you currently facing?
- When was the last time you felt despair or relief?
- How has gratitude changed your world?

Now, place the item in your pocket. Keep it there to remind you throughout the day of thankfulness. Each time your hand rubs against it or you happen to notice it, simply take a quick moment and be graciously grateful. This easy reminder has the power to turn ordinary moments into times of thanksgiving.

Gratitude Challenge Nine

Just as being calm and quiet is good for the soul, so is exercise. Far too often, we prove the scientific theory of how an object at rest tends to stay at rest. How? Well, we move from sitting in front of a computer all day at work to sitting in front of the television at night. A bit of movement (dare I say the “exercise” word?) can make a difference in your life. Daily exercise will make you healthy and daily gratitude will make you happy.

A simple brisk walk down the street can get your heart pumping. Doctors have proven walking at least twenty minutes a day can improve your immune system and have tremendous health benefits. Walking is also good for your soul if you use it to your advantage. Take a simple walk outside and look around for objects of gratitude.

Be thankful for the wind, the grass, the trees, the sky, the concrete, the cars, the birds, the electricity in the power lines, the water, the safe drivers on your street, the shoes on your feet, etc. Exercise takes you out of your comfort(able) zone and places you in a different arena, where you can still be thankful. If you are a gym rat or already active, then add gratitude to your routine. Turn your workout session into a thankfulness session.

Gratitude Challenge Ten

The alphabet is one of the first things a young child learns in school. Letters and their order are important to move forward with reading and speaking any language. Like primary school, today's challenge is basic. Simply write out things or people you are thankful for in order of the alphabet. Start with the letter "A" and end with the letter "Z." This is much easier than it seems. Sounding your letters of gratitude is actually fun. Write, "I'm thankful for airplanes, baseball, cats, dreams, energy, flowers, grasshoppers, heights, ice, etc."

Gratitude Challenge Eleven

Yesterday, you made an alphabetical list of things you are grateful for in your life. How did that exercise go for you? Was it a difficult task or was it easy to complete? Today's challenge is to make a similar listing. Instead of writing about your life, you are to write about yourself. Make another list from A to Z regarding yourself. List things you are grateful for like, "age, beauty, charisma, determination, errors, fear, goodness, health, kindness, etc." Being thankful is personal and it's as easy as A, B, C.

Gratitude Challenge Twelve

Take it social today. Post several times on social media about something or someone that makes you thankful. Tag friends who mean something to you. Praise a family member who could use extra encouragement. Try to go all out with your posts. Do them often and make them fun.

Here are a few things you can be thankful for online...

- a challenge you have overcome
- traditions you enjoy
- the feel of your bed at night
- your favorite smell
- something someone gave you
- your best friend
- music you love
- your job
- education
- a book or movie you've enjoyed recently
- a place you've visited
- a core value you have

Going social with gratitude makes the day better and spreads your happiness over an entire network of friends. If you don't want to be so personal, find some quotes, memes, or pictures on this subject and post them. Be socially interactive with thanksgiving.

Gratitude Challenge Thirteen

Your dare is to be active with your gratitude. Use your wallet or pocket book to prove your thankfulness. Today is the day to be extravagant. Look for an opportunity today to bless someone financially. Go all out. Give until it hurts.

- Don't tip just twenty percent; instead, tip one hundred percent of the cost of the meal.
- Send a large check to a loved one who is in need.
- Use money from savings to give it to a charity.

- Visit a local boutique and go overboard for a purchase for someone less fortunate.
- Pledge a donation to an organization.

Most importantly, when you donate from your finances you must release the gift with thankfulness. If you are on a tight budget, give what you can. Be thankful you have the money to give. Feel the pain of letting go and be appreciative you can release the money to someone needy.

Gratitude Challenge Fourteen

Look in the mirror and say “thank you” to the reflection. If you have a struggle with self-worth, this activity might be difficult. Thanking your reflection is a good time to point out the nuances of your appearance, like those bushy eyebrows or sweet dimples. Thank your reflection for always being there for you. Thank your face for giving your image to the world. Then, do something strange. Say, “I love you” to the mirror. Do it. Say, “I love you and I accept you” to your reflection. We often glance in a mirror and complain about what we see. Or, we use the mirror to fix our hair into a new style. This time, use the mirror to be grateful. Don’t change anything. Simply thank your reflection.

Gratitude Challenge Fifteen

We’ve seen how a meal is a wonderful time to be thankful. What about all those people in the world who don’t have food to be thankful for today? Your gratitude exercise is to personally feel their pain today. Skip a meal. Or two. Or three. Fast and be thankful. Let your growling stomach remind

you of how blessed you are to have food easily accessible. Of course, if you are under medical care you need to consult a doctor before an all-day fast; however, you can skip something that will remind you to say, “thank you.” You are so blessed.

Gratitude Challenge Sixteen

It is easy to be thankful when you are connected with other people. We naturally say, “thank you” when love is shown through gift giving, physical closeness, acts of kindness, quality time, or words of affirmation. Today’s challenge is five-fold. You need to be thankful in five different ways if possible...

1. Send an email or text message with words of praise.
2. Look for a way to connect with a co-worker or neighbor by giving a small gift of appreciation.
3. Take time to reconnect with a friend or loved one.
4. When appropriate, a hug can heal wounds and express care. So, put your arms around someone special and let them feel your care.
5. Be kind all day and show the universe you are thankful

This five-fold challenge may be one of the hardest to implement in a day. Be focused to get it done. By the time you are finished, you will be glad you stepped out to connect in these ways.

Gratitude Challenge Seventeen

Write a thank you letter to yourself. Yes. Do it. This is an odd idea, but it will make a difference in your life. Thanking yourself in writing releases a swell of positivity. Thank yourself for the wonderful events you have been a part of in the past. Live in the NOW and think of what is near, oblivious, and wishful. Say “thank you” for the struggles you’ve faced. Thank yourself for the mistakes you’ve made. Thank yourself for all that is you. Be real with your comments. Point out that you have unlimited greatness inside. Tell yourself you are one of a kind. Express gratitude for the lessons you’ve learned and how you’ve grown as a person. Then, place the note in your sock drawer or somewhere around the house where you can read it in the future. Leave it and then forget it. Open it in the future and remind yourself of your appreciation awakening.

Gratitude Challenge Eighteen

Author David Platt suggests if you have running water, shelter over your head, clothes to wear, food to eat, and some means of transportation, then you are in the top fifteen percent of the world’s population for wealth. In fact, it is well accepted that more than one billion people live on less than one dollar per day. With these facts in mind, shouldn’t we all be more thankful? Today’s challenge is to feel thankfulness. Pause throughout your day and be thankful. Perhaps set a reminder to stop once an hour and feel thankfulness for even the little things. Live in the NOW. Remember how good you have it every time you go to spend a buck, eat hot food, get dressed, use water, or travel somewhere. Perspective is important when it comes to being thankful.

Gratitude Challenge Nineteen

This exercise ties with the first challenge, when you were supposed to start journaling your thankfulness. Your goal is to read the past eighteen journal entries. Be reminded of how blessed you are and take nothing for granted. Look over your journal and say “thank you” for all you have already recognized. The more thankful you are the more you will attract what you desire into your life. Let today be a day of reflection.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty

Happiness is a sure sign of true gratitude. When you are appreciative, it is easier to be happy. This challenge is easy. Find something that elicits true happiness and do it. Then, be grateful as you are happy. Relish the moment and enjoy the experience. If you like sports, go see a ball game. If you enjoy gardening, get out and revel in it. Do some self-care and be thankful you can be happy.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-One

Your quest is to complete a thanksgiving scavenger hunt of photos. Use your phone or a camera to snap as many shots that elicit the emotion of gratitude. Take the picture of anything and anyone you appreciate. As you stop for the photography it will bring to mind gratefulness. A photo scavenger hunt will help you with your overall awareness. It creates a photographic diary of your gratitude. Make it a goal to collect at least twenty-one pictures today. You’ll be glad you did.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Two

Share your gratitude with someone. Literally, give away something today that you would normally keep for yourself. Whether it's a chocolate bar or your personal time during a quick lunch break – share. When you share, you should share about gratitude. Talk about the lessons you have learned from this book. Discuss how these thankfulness exercises have made a difference in your life. Express your thanks for the people who have made impact. Inspire the other person to be thankful. As you encourage someone else, you will also be encouraged yourself.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Three

Be vocal with your feelings today. Let the emotions of thankfulness fill your mind and body as you say aloud the following statements.

Answer these prompts honestly:

- I am so happy and grateful for two things I taste...
- I am filled with joy that my prayer for _____ has been answered.
- I'm grateful and smiling for these two friends and two family members...
- I realize how blessed I am, so I am thankful for these three things in my home...
- I will say "it is good" about these five things about myself, even if it is uncomfortable...
- I have had an appreciation awakening, so I am thankful for these two events...

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Four

Show appreciation by giving from your abundance. Go through your cabinets, drawers, pantry, or closet and find items you can donate. Look for food, household items, or clothing to give to others. Contribute these items to a local shelter or thrift store. Feel appreciation when you give the items away and maybe say a prayer of thanks when you drop them off. Be grateful to Source for having such abundance. Hope that others will be blessed with your giving.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Five

Oprah Winfrey said, "The single greatest thing you can do to change your life today would be to start being grateful for what you have right now."⁴⁹ That's a powerful statement on appreciation. Today's exercise is to find a quote like this about thanksgiving and use it. Write it out and post it somewhere to remind you to be thankful. Share it on social media with a post of what you are thankful for. Use those wise words to get people thinking. Flip through this book for some ideas or do an internet search for gratitude quotes.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Six

Make a dream board with your desires and goals. Include pictures of the places you want to visit, the sights you want to see, and the people you'd like to meet if money wasn't an issue. This is better than a bucket list because it is a visual for you to glance at regularly. In the middle of the dream board, write the words, "I'm so happy and grateful now that..." Then,

⁴⁹ "Thought for Today - Gratitude." Oprah.com. Accessed October 16, 2018. https://www.oprah.com/spirit/thought-for-today_18/all.

place your pictures around this important phrase. You will be thanking in advance and pretty soon you will be acting as if these things have already occurred. The results will happen naturally. Your dream board will soon become a reality board.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Seven

Today's challenge will get you in touch with your inner child, the young kid still living within. Write a letter to your former self.

- Thank yourself for making the decisions and choices which have gotten you to this place in life.
- Celebrate the good times and stretch yourself to be thankful for the hard things that have happened.
- Give your younger self one piece of advice you wish you would have known way back when.
- Express appreciation for how the younger you protected the older you as well.
- Don't stress over what to write – enjoy the experiment of writing to your younger self and let the thoughts flow.

Start with, "Dear Younger Me, Thank you for..." and then don't lift the pen from the paper until you are finished.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Eight

See what you've been missing. Take time to go unplugged. Take the battery out of your cell phone and cut off the wi-fi. Unplug your television. Take off the smartwatch. Literally, disconnect from everything technologically-based for a while and enjoy life. Be mindful of life in the now. Sit with your thoughts. Look around and consider what you don't see because you are often glued to a screen. Notice the sights and sounds of your house when it's not so noisy. The Old Testament says, "Be still and know that I am God."⁵⁰ Connecting with Source is often as easy as disconnecting with everything and everyone else. If you find benefit from this exercise, consider making it a part of your normal week. You'll be amazed at the difference being still brings.

Gratitude Challenge Twenty-Nine

How much is your life worth? If you were to list the top ten most valuable belongings you own, how much would they total? Now, think upon your top ten memories. How much are they worth to you? Or, consider your top ten relationships. Are they priceless? Your body itself is full of worth, as your healthy organs and strong body parts are beyond compare. Your value is full of memories, relationships, belongings, and so much more. You are literally worth millions. Be thankful for what makes you you. Do this today each time you see a mirror. When you glance in the rear view of your vehicle or the mirror in your bathroom, stop and be grateful for you. You are one of a kind amazing and special.

⁵⁰ Psalm 46:10

Gratitude Challenge Thirty

Most of us enjoy three meals a day, if you count the granola bar you scarfed down while rushing out the house in the morning as one. Why not make your meals into a specific time for thankfulness?

For millennia, people have said “grace” or given a blessing before enjoying their food. Today’s challenge is to go one step farther. Yes, it’s nice to say a blessing before dinner. How about sharing how blessed you are during the meal? Have a time of thanks with a friend. Or, do something special for your family members. While eating, each person could share something or talk about someone they are grateful for and why. Say nice things about each person at the table. Begin and end with a quick prayer or moment of thankful silence. If you don’t have a family you can eat with, no problem. Simply find someone and make the most of this unique opportunity. Turn chow time into a time of saying thanks. Meals are wonderful opportunities to stop and be grateful.

Gratitude Challenge Thirty-One

Well, you’ve made it through a month of challenges. Whether you feel differently or not, you can trust the science that your life is better, thanks to thanksgiving. For today’s final exercise, your challenge is to repeat this entire series. Start over today on day one. Revisit your journal and all the activities. Keep this process going and you will continue to experience the difference an appreciation awakening makes. Today isn’t day thirty-one, it’s actually day one.

So, return to your journal and make it a special writing. Live in the NOW – the NEAR, the OBLIVIOUS, and the WISHFUL with your writing and this challenge.

Chapter Nine - Thankful Thoughts

There are so many people, places, and things to be thankful for that picking a few can be overwhelming. What should you choose? Dr. Wayne Dyer said, “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”⁵¹

What this means for us is when you have an appreciation awakening, you begin to see everything as an opportunity for thanks. Slowly, even the things you look at begin to change as you feel gratitude deep in your soul. Instead of saying, “I’m thankful for music,” you will say, “I am so happy now because I can enjoy the music of Kelley Clarkson.” (Or, whoever it is you listen to on your iTunes.) Associating emotions and being specific with gratitude takes thanks to the next level.

Yes, you can supercharge your life when you are specific and even detailed with your gratitude. To help with this part of your appreciation awakening, I have written a collection of “Thankful Thoughts.”

These are items I have journaled over the years. Use these as a guide to get you started or peak your interest. As you read through, you will probably find a few of these items are negative. Or, they could at least be considered negative. I’ve found it beneficial to say “thank you” for the seemingly bad or negative and the happy or positive. When I release the bad to my Source I have found He can bring forth good in the end.

My suggestion is to feel your feelings as you express thanks. Be exact in your language and remember to “thank as

⁵¹ Dyer, Wayne W. *The Essential Wayne Dyer Collection: Includes the All-time International Bestsellers: The Power of Intention; Inspiration and Excuses Begone!* Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2013.

if" whatever you want has already happened. Your journal may be a good place to start your own list like this one.

Say with me...

"I am so happy and grateful now that I have..."

- **Homes:** I often take it for granted that I have a roof over my head. There are so many homeless, refugee, misplaced, and poor people in the world that don't have this basic need. When was the last time you were grateful for shelter?
- **Sight:** Think of all the beautiful sights you see each day. The sunrise, your dog's tail wagging when you get home, or an oil painting in a museum which makes life colorful. It is difficult to imagine a world of pure darkness once you've seen the faces of your loved ones or viewed the power of Niagara Falls. Yet, darkness is all the blind recognize as they have never seen what we take for granted. Have you been appreciative for your sight?
- **Butterflies:** The lifecycle of a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly is a crown of creation. The metamorphosis which takes place is simply amazing. Be thankful for butterflies today.
- **Your appendix:** Doctors are still baffled as to why our body has this part. Some have hypothesized the appendix is left over from ancient cavemen. Other scientists have suggested it is needed for balance or other functions. This is a mystery of the human body that still stumps medical experts.
- **School:** Education systems make our lives better. Our little ones learn the basics from their teachers and grasp

social skills from other students. School is an environment of structured learning that also gives order to our society. Higher education provides the opportunity for specialized knowledge. Even though student load debt is hard to handle, I am thankful for school.

- **Water Puddles:** You might walk around a puddle in the parking lot that's been left over from the last rain, but kids enjoy the water spots. The joy on the face of a child jumping in the middle of a puddle of water is unforgettable. The next time it rains and there are puddles around town, be thankful and maybe even jump in one yourself.
- **Beethoven and Bach:** Who hasn't been touched by the classical works of music these men (and others) composed? If their tunes aren't your forte, be thankful for the talents of other musicians. Say thanks for Elvis, Beyoncé, or whoever you enjoy.
- **Alone time:** If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, this may be the solution to some of your problems. Too often, we are so busy being busy and busy being with other people to the point we seldom have time to only be with ourselves. Are you your own best friend? You can get there if you can get alone.
- **Pets:** Our goldfish or lizards give us entertainment, comfort, and support. You don't have to be a "dog person" to enjoy the smile of a husky. Pets (even cats) are fun. They are also helpful. Therapy animals are now used to help treat various sicknesses. We can all be thankful for the well-trained pup who can sniff out drugs, helps a blind person cross the street, or chases

down a criminal.

- **Your favorite food:** Come on, you know there's something you love more than all the other delicacies you have ever tried. Be thankful for your favorite food and go enjoy a bite of it sometime soon.
- **Holidays:** Times of celebrations are wonderful occasions to stop and reflect upon your virtues and values. Holidays have a way of breaking down walls and bringing people together. They also are a huge source of memories. Be thankful for the holidays and their gift of closeness.
- **Big Foot:** Seriously. Are you grateful for this hairy monster? You should be. Legends like the story of Big Foot or the Loch Ness Monster make life fun.
- **Chairs:** Wouldn't it be inconvenient and frustrating to have to stand all the time? Chairs give us rest and a seat to relax. Don't take a chair for granted.
- **Government:** Sure, I like to complain about taxes and politics, but a strong government gives me infrastructure and protection. I would not want to live in a world without any stop signs or laws. I don't want to imagine the anarchy of a world without governmental rules and regulations. Good, bad, and ugly – I'm thankful for the government.
- **Cell phones:** It's hard to believe a few decades ago the cell phone wasn't used for texting or surfing the internet. They weren't used at all, as they hadn't been invented. The technological advancements within wireless devices mean we can be in touch and informed always. When was the last time you even saw a phone booth?

- **Sun screen:** This invention keeps your skin from burning to a crisp during a hot day outside. Before high SPF ratings were given to our sprays and lotions, people used natural oils to stop the sun from cooking their skin. You might think it's silly to be thankful for sunscreen, but a person who burns easily knows it's a fantastic product.
- **Trees:** Palm trees are so graceful as they sway in the wind during a sunny beach day. The giant red woods are majestic as they remain tall and strong through the ages of man. Trees give us beauty and sustenance. Without these, we would have little shade and even less oxygen. Let the trees talk to you.
- **Backpacks:** Who wants to carry everything you need in your hands while you're on a long journey? A purse, laptop bag, or backpack makes things easier. This is one more thing we take for granted.
- **Pain:** Without pain or problems, we wouldn't have anything to measure the value of gain and comfort. It's hard to be thankful during a painful experience. However, as you are grateful for the hard times, your appreciation works like a boomerang and will bless you in the future.
- **Touch:** Get this...The human body has millions of nerve endings. Your sense of touch sends messages to your brain about everything your skin encounters at each moment. In a split second, your brain quickly distinguishes between hot and cold or rough and smooth. Source made you with an amazing sense of touch. Are you grateful for your senses?
- **Books:** President Harry Truman said, "readers are

leaders.” There’s so much to gain from a good book – entertainment, education, inspiration, and more. Writing is a classic way to express ideas. Fiction masters like John Grisham and Stephen King can make you feel as if you are in the plot with their characters. And, who hasn’t enjoyed a Dr. Seuss book as a kid? As you read, even books like this one, be thankful for this way to communicate.

- **Veterans:** Military veterans have given their time, talent, dedication, and often, their lives, to ensure our safety and freedom. Thank a veteran today and be grateful that someone took your place in service to the country.
- **Love:** Love is patient. Love is kind. Love doesn’t envy. It doesn’t boast. Love never fails.
- **Medical Care:** Over the past one hundred years, the advancements in medical care has helped raise the quality of life considerably. Diseases and sickness that were once a sure death sentence are now easily treated. Doctors and nurses swear in the Hippocratic Oath to preserve life and then do all they can to help us be whole. Thanks, Doc.
- **Children:** Children are living hope for a better future. If you ever doubt the goodness inside of mankind, simply look into the eyes of a toddler and see their bewilderment at the world. Kids are innocent and fun. Being thankful for children is being thankful for tomorrow.
- **Paper:** We use it so often and in so many ways that it’s easy to overlook. We often can’t see the forest for the trees or the paper from the trees. Bathroom tissue, notebooks, or medium sized cups... paper has so many

uses.

- **Music:** Movies are boring without a soundtrack in the background. Life is a bore without music, as well. There are so many genres and so many ways to be thankful. Again, the hum of your favorite tune is something else we take for granted. God, please forgive us for not thanking You for our favorite songs.
- **Healthy kidneys:** Your kidneys are like super filters purifying your blood. They work automatically without your effort, day-in and day-out to keep you alive. Source made you with automatic kidney function. Be grateful for your healthy body and kidneys.
- **Money:** Love of money is the root of all evil. There is nothing wrong with the tool of money itself. Notice the word used in that previous sentence... money is a tool. It can be used for greed or good. Don't make your tool your focus. Don't love it so much to where you can't go without it. Don't be fooled by the tool. Be thankful for it.
- **Smells:** The sense of smell is an amazing and helpful ability we often take for granted. Have you ever been grateful you could smell a flower or skunk, for example? Smells trigger so much in our brains. They can bring us back to forgotten memories and even lighten the mood. Stop and smell the roses, the food, the anything... even the skunk.
- **Legacy:** Your life is not just for you. There will be a legacy and remembrance left after you move on from this world. Is this something that is important to you? Do you want to make a lasting difference?
- **Safety:** Life could be so much more dangerous than it is today. We can be thankful for universal laws like gravity

which keeps us from floating away. I'm even grateful the meat-eating dinosaurs are extinct. Safe surroundings and safe people give us freedom.

- **Insurance:** This modern idea helps us when things turn tragic. Whether it is a car accident or natural disaster, insurance comes through to help rebuild or make life right. No one likes paying the deductible, but we all enjoy the claim assistance.
- **The Moon and Sun:** It's sad how many sunsets and sunrises we miss. When was the last time you woke up early to watch the glory of the sun peak in the east? The experience is magical. Or, if you are a night person, the moon is a stunning rock illuminating the night.
- **Restaurants:** Isn't it nice to be able to order the food you are craving, have it prepared freshly to your liking, and then served to you by someone who is literally paid to wait on your every need? There's no mess to clean up and no dishes to wash. This idea sounds ridiculous, but it has become a normal part of life. Some people even complain when the service is slow or if the food is cold. How about you? Are you thankful for restaurants?
- **Deodorant:** Be appreciative for the stick which keeps your body odor at bay and stops you from smelling others. I'm happy to use antiperspirants. Every day, your friends are grateful you use deodorant, as well.
- **Those in your past:** Who in your personal past has helped you become the person you are today? Foes and friends have influence over our lives. They often help us develop our character and virtue. How can you thank those who have helped you for what they have done?
- **Goals:** Ambition looks ahead for things to be better.

Targets keep us focused and help monitor progress while we are on the way to greatness. What are your goals today? This week? This year?

- **Light bulbs:** We'd still be in the dark if it wasn't for this bright illuminating invention. Today's bulb conserves more energy and costs less to manufacture than ever before. I'm so happy and grateful for indoor lighting.
- **Funeral home directors:** Here's to those who do a really difficult job. Funeral home employees help us through some of the hardest of times of our lives. They must have tough skin and a soft heart. Life would be so different without them.
- **Barbies:** I am thankful for Barbie and GI Joe toys. And, all those make-believe figures I had as a kid which were so much fun. The imagination of children is so important to cultivate with blocks or books. By the way... have you seen Barbie lately? She is glamorous and even has her own Instagram account.
- **Medicine:** The body's power to heal is aided by the different types of medicine. Vaccines, antibodies, and probiotics are a few of the breakthroughs to help us experience optimal health.
- **Answered prayers:** It really is wonderful when things work out as we desire. However, all prayer is answered. Sometimes, our Source says, "yes." Sometimes, Source says, "no." And, sometimes, Source says, "not now." There is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. Have you thanked your Source for hearing your prayers?
- **Family:** This seems so basic you might think it's not necessary to list. However, being thankful for family is often challenging. Those in-laws (or outlaws) often

cause stress. Be grateful for your family. Source gave you to them and them to you.

- **Homeless people:** Those less fortunate, who are often begging at a stoplight of city streets, are a reminder of how bad things could be for any of us. They also provide an opportunity to “pay it forward” and be kind to someone who can’t pay us back.
- **Dreams:** Nearly one third of your entire life is used resting your body. How boring sleep would be without dreams! While some dreams are more exciting than others, our dream world exposes much about our true self. Famed painter Vincent Van Gough said, “First, I dream of my painting and then I paint my dream.”⁵² How have dreams affected your life?
- **Time:** Another classic Beatles song says. “Time is on our side.” Well, yes and no. We each have twenty-four hours in a day, yet you don’t know when your days may be up. These minutes can be used to make your life better or you can squander them away with idleness. How you use your time shows your priorities. There’s so much more to time than the digits on a clock. Use it wisely. Be thankful now and for the next 86,400 seconds.
- **Roses:** Should we give thanks for the flower or for the thorns on the stem? How about both.
- **Taste:** Sweet, sour, or spoiled – the sense of taste is super. Can you imagine having to eat without taste buds? All the fun of a flavorsome meal is taken away without taste. The next time you eat something, make sure to say “thanks” and savor the moment. Thank your taste

⁵² As quoted in *Marry Your Muse: Making a Lasting Commitment to Your Creativity* (1997) by Jan Phillips, p. 176

buds for working properly and thank your brain for distinguishing between salt and pepper. Bon appetit!

- **Electricity:** The ability to use electricity changed the entire world less than one hundred years ago. Today, we are so used to flipping a switch and letting the power flow that it is hard to imagine anything but life this way. We make it stream to the phone charger and computer without a blink. We take power for granted until a storm knocks the power out and we don't know what to do without it.
- **Parents:** Your parents probably did the best they could to raise you. Honoring them means recalling the good they did and being thankful for them. Have you done this?
- **Clean water:** A high percentage of the people in our modern world do not have easy access to clean drinking water. While we let our faucets run, there are over a billion people who wish they could be so lucky. As we water our lawns with gallons of clean, potable water, there are people dying of dehydration because they can't get to good water.
- **Yourself:** Yes. It's odd to be thankful for you, but you should do it. Being grateful for yourself comes from a healthy self-image and overflows to others. As you treat yourself like a superstar via self-care, you will do unto others in a most prestigious way.
- **Receipts:** Those irritating little print-outs are helpful. Receipts are images of ownership. They help you with returns and record keeping. Life would be chaotic without them.
- **Heartbreak:** It is so difficult to face the reality of a broken heart. It hurts so badly when relationships fail, or

dreams die. Pain comes when life doesn't work out as we had expected. Bad dreams become reality when things don't happen as we planned. There will come a time when you can look back and be thankful for the lessons learned as your heart was broken. Trust Source.

- **Coffee:** What else needs to be said?
- **Planes, trains, and automobile:** Modern transportation makes the globe a small place. You have choices to travel in ease thanks to the advancements and accessibility of airports and superhighways.
- **New friends:** Talking to strangers leads to making new acquaintances and friendships. Sure, it's a bit scary to put yourself out there and take a risk to get to know someone, but there is so much to gain. Make a new friend today. It will be worth it.
- **Pest control:** Again, here's something we wouldn't want to do without. Bug spray means no gnats, no wasps, and no diseases spread through cockroaches and mosquitos. Say thanks, today, for pest control.
- **Pleasure:** Hello! It comes in many shapes and sizes and each person has their own pleasure points. Pleasure comes when desires and expectations are met or exceeded. Jim Rohn said, "Success is measured through pleasure."⁵³ When you have pleasure then you have success in life. Would you consider yourself pleasurable?
- **Fishing:** Some of my fondest memories from my childhood are when I was wetting a hook and hoping for

⁵³ Fishbein, Mike. "John Wooden: Success Is Becoming the Best That You Are Capable of Being." MAQTOOB For Entrepreneurs. September 29, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2018. <https://entrepreneurs.maqtoob.com/john-wooden-4d68c1a42348>.

a bite. My parents and I would fish in a lake, off a dock, or even in the ocean. Fishing time is thankful pastime, even if you don't catch anything.

- **Fresh fruit and vegetables:** The taste of a vine-ripened veggie or freshly-picked fruit is simply amazing. There is nothing like it in this entire world. These foods also give us the essential nutrients we need. Source has given us an exhilarating variety of fruit and veggies all waiting for you to taste. Branch out and taste something different soon.
- **Board games:** Hours fly by when family or friends gather around the table for some interactive entertainment. Board games are good for competition and communication. Have you had a game night lately? Maybe you should plan one!
- **Indoor heating and cooling:** This is one of the most convenient of all inventions. Indoor climate control allows you to be cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Those who service the units work hard so we can enjoy life with ease. We don't realize how dependent we are upon it until it's miserably broken.

Chapter Ten – Gratitude Journal

Day One

I am grateful for...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 memorable things that happened today...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I am so happy and grateful. Here is what gratitude means to me...

“Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity; it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all,” William Faulkner

Day Two

I am so thankful for these three people...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 things that made me smile today are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I love myself. One thing I appreciate about myself is ...

“I began to realize how important it was to be an enthusiast in life. If you are interested in something, no matter what it is, go at it at full speed. Embrace it with arms, hug it, love it and above all become passionate about it. Lukewarm is no good,” Ronald Dahl

Day Three

I am blessed because of these events from my past...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 things that I remember from my day are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today good things came my way. This is something that made me laugh...

“The roots of all goodness lie in the soil of appreciation for goodness,”
Dalai Lama

Day Four

I say thanks for these things that are often taken for granted...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 family members or friends that I cherish are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today was a mix of good and bad. Here is how it all mixed together...

“Let me fall if I must. The one I will become will catch me,”
Baal Shem Tov

Day Five

I am fortunate I have faced these challenges and overcome...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3 of my favorite holidays and I celebrate them are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I used technology and here's how it made my day better...

“When we are no longer to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves,” Victor Frankl

Day Six

I am can't imagine my life without these...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 of my favorite television or movies and why are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today was a day I can't forget. Here's something that I will always remember...

“When the bridge is gone, the narrowest plank becomes precious,”
Hungarian Proverb

Day Seven

I think these of people and my mind is filled with gratitude...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 spiritual beliefs I have and why I am grateful for them are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I accomplished so much. Here's what I did and why I'm proud...

“Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of the overcoming of it,” Helen Keller

Day Eight

I am grateful for these animals or pets...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 reasons I enjoy living where I do are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today could have been better. I am thankful for the struggles of my day like...

“The glory of God is the human being full alive,” Saint Irenaeus

Day Nine

I can't imagine my life without these people...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 freedoms I am grateful for are...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Today I remembered to be thankful for the following...

“We have thousands of opportunities every day to be grateful: for having good weather, to have slept well last night, to be able to get up, to be healthy, to have enough to eat... there’s opportunity upon opportunity to be grateful; that’s what life is,”
Brother David Steindl-Rast

Day Ten

I am grateful for these tastes...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 products I take for granted are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I remember these sights and scenes...

“Happiness is the absence of striving for happiness,” Chuang-Tzu

Day Eleven

I am filled with joy because of...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 abilities I have appreciation for and why are...

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

Today helped me realize...

“Every time we feel satisfied with what we have,
we can be counted as rich, however little we may possess,”
Alain De Botton

Day Twelve

I realize how blessed I am because of...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 things about myself I will say "it is good" about are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today was a day of answered prayers. Here is what happened...

"In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous," Aristotle

Day Thirteen

I am thankful for these 3 things in my home...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 activities I enjoy and why they make me happy are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I have had an appreciation awakening and I am so thankful for...

“Whenever the waves close over me, I dive down to fish for pearls,”
Masha Kaleko

Day Fourteen

I celebrate these people who I can always rely on...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 wonderful childhood memories are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I learned something, which made me think of my favorite teacher...

“The only way to live is to accept each minute as an unrepeatable miracle,” Margaret Storm Jameson

Day Fifteen

I am thankful for these aspects of my health...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 things I am looking forward to in the next year are...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Today I remembered some of my mouthwatering tastes which are...

“Appreciation is the highest form of prayer, for it acknowledges the presence of good wherever you shine the light of your thankful thoughts,” Alan Cohen

Day Sixteen

I am grateful that these mistakes have been forgiven...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 places I want to visit in the near future are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I had a shower or a bath. Here's why I made that choice...

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around,”

Leo Buscaglia

Day Seventeen

I say “thank you” today for...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 people who have had a huge impact on my life in recent years are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I made this decision and here’s why it was a good one...

“We’ve got the gift of love, but love is like a precious plant. You can’t just accept it and leave it in the cupboard, or just think it’s gonna get on with itself. You gotta keep watering it. You’ve got to really look after it... and nurture it,” John Lennon

Day Eighteen

I need to show appreciation for these people today...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 of my favorite songs or singers are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I enjoyed my life. Here's how...

“Loss makes artists of us all as we weave new patterns in the fabric of our lives,” Greta W. Crosby

Day Nineteen

I have happiness because of...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 times when I genuinely felt at peace were...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Today I stopped to live in the NOW - the NEAR, OBLIVIOUS, and WISHUL for...

“To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance,” Oscar Wilde

Day Twenty

I am grateful these mistakes have been forgiven...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 ways I choose to thank in advance are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I remembered a painful experience that has made me stronger...

“Wanderer, there is no path, the path is made by walking,”
Antonio Machado

Day Twenty-One

I am at peace because of...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 amazing things about my job are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I acknowledge the people in my life who have made me who I am...

“The fragrance always remains in the hand that gives the rose,”
Heda Bejar

Day Twenty-Two

I have true contentment in these areas...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 memorable experiences when people have helped me in the past include...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I know the rest of my life will be the best of my life.
Nothing can stop me from...

“The little things? The little moments? They aren’t little,”
Jon Kabat-Zinn

Day Twenty-Three

I am a person of virtue and live the following values...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 meaningful gifts I have received are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today was memorable because...

“Love the moment, and the energy of the moment
will spread beyond all boundaries,” Corita Kent

Day Twenty-Four

I am so pleased because...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3 positive affirmations I believe are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I made these choices to make a difference in the world...

“At some point in life, the world’s beauty becomes enough,”
Toni Morrison

Day Twenty-Five

I take care of and love myself by...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 of my favorite books or authors are...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Today I look forward to...

“This is a wonderful day. I’ve never seen this one before,”
Maya Angelou

Day Twenty-Six

I am blessed and content because I...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3 of the best parts of my life are...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I tap into the abundant life through appreciation. I'm thankful for...

“There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground,” Rumi

Day Twenty-Seven

I appreciate these organs and body parts...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 times I have seen goodness come from horrible situations are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Today I am grateful for the oxygen I breathe. Other things I take for granted are...

“Grant me daily the grace of gratitude, to be thankful for all my many gifts, and so be freed from artificial needs that I might lead a joyful, simple life,” Edward Hays

Day Twenty-Eight

I am greatly blessed and highly favored in these areas...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 of the most important times of my life include...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I declare I am blessed, prosperous, healthy, wise, chosen, happy and...

“Joy is the simplest form of gratitude,” Karl Barth

Day Twenty-Nine

I live in abundance because of...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 tangible ways I can show gratitude to others include...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Today I realize how good life is for me. Here's how...

“In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that is only with gratitude that life becomes rich,”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Day Thirty

I know Source always provides because he has come through in the past for...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3 of my favorite hobbies which bring me peace and entertainment include...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Today I can't believe...

“The more grateful I am, the more beauty I see,” Mary Davis

Day Thirty-One

I am so grateful for ...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 amazing things about gratitude are...

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Today I acknowledge I have been selfish in the past. Instead, I will now be...

“If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul,” Rabbi Harold Kushner

