



# Gratitude

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# Gratitude

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## Introduction

Adding Gratitude Into Your Life Saying thank you is something that is drilled into all of us at a young age. How many times did your mom nag at you to write thank you notes after you opened your birthday presents? Yet, because we do it so often, it sometimes becomes automatic. We rarely think about what being grateful really means. How does gratitude make a difference in your life? Why is it so important?

In this book, we look more closely at the important role gratitude has to play in transforming our lives. It can touch every element of your being, from your social and working life to your mental and physical health. It may seem impossible to think that letting thankfulness into your life can be so revolutionary, but it can make you happier, improve your relationships and even make you more successful.

Are you ready to learn more about the transformative powers of thankfulness? Then read on to find out all you need to know.



## *What Does Gratitude Really Mean?*

When you think of the word "gratitude" what comes to mind? Do you automatically think of saying thank you when someone holds the door open for you? Or feeling grateful when somebody gives you a birthday gift? While those things do come under the gratitude umbrella, this isn't the kind of gratitude we're talking about in this book.

Here, we're talking about the transformative type of thankfulness that can totally change your life and give you a whole new perspective on the world.

### **Gratitude – Just A Fashionable Word?**

Even if you give the idea of gratitude a little more thought than the average person, you may still fail to grasp the importance of being thankful. We hear a lot these days about being grateful –

Page | 8 so much so, that gratitude is starting to become nothing more than just a buzz word with little or no meaning. If the whole idea of being grateful has lost all relevance to you, it's time to look again, go back to the drawing board, and redefine the meaning of the word.

### **Not Just For Holidays And Gifts**

If you're in danger of only linking thankfulness with holidays and gift-giving, it's time to look again at the entire concept of gratitude.





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So, what does it really mean to feel grateful? Living a life filled with gratitude means, essentially, that you're choosing to spend your time focusing on the things that you appreciate most. That doesn't mean that you have to block out any difficulties that you encounter or problems that you're facing. However, it does mean that you can learn how to approach such difficulties from a whole new viewpoint.

Feeling appreciative can soften you and soothe your mind. It helps you to connect with the things and the people around you, both large and small, that all too often we end up taking for granted.

The key to a thankful and transformed life is to look at the little things rather than focusing on the big ones. Often, the challenges we face can feel entirely overwhelming and they become the center of our universe. Yet, that's where unhappiness lies. Often, the biggest problems are the ones that we can do little about or that take the longest time to put right. Spending all your time focusing on these things can only lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Instead, implement some gratitude. Overlook those huge issues you're trying to overcome. Instead, narrow it down to the little blessings that you've experienced on a daily basis. Something as simple as a sunny day or receiving a card from a loved one in the mail can make you feel grateful, and when you're feeling thankful, your whole body responds positively. You feel lighter, warmer and happier.



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Expressing that gratitude changes your outlook and makes you feel better, even in the face of challenges. Simply put, gratitude helps us to see that not everything is awful all of the time. Even in times of trouble there are little sparks of light that can make you feel better, even if only for a while.

However, developing gratitude is a skill, and like any skill, it takes practice to get it right. That's why you're going to learn how to introduce thankfulness practice into your life so that you can experience the many and varied benefits it brings.

## *Gratitude Practice – An Overview*

So, now you know roughly what gratitude means, but how does it look when put into practice? In this chapter, we look at how thankfulness can manifest itself in your life.

### **Why Introduce Gratitude Practice Into your Life**

Gratitude has strong links to life satisfaction and good mental health. People who are grateful experience more enthusiasm, love and joy. They also have better protection from emotions that have a destructive impact like bitterness, greed and envy.

Not only that, but gratitude can reduce your lifetime risk of developing a substance abuse disorder, anxiety or depression. It can also help those suffering from these issues and many other conditions find healing and closure. Being thankful helps you to understand that there is goodness out there, even if you're suffering or uncertain.

Gratitude isn't just an uplifting and warm feeling; it can also benefit your body. People who introduce gratitude practice into their lives cope more effectively with stress, enjoy better physical health and recover more rapidly from illnesses.

Even better, gratitude extends beyond you. When you experience gratitude, it reaches past you into your wider social circle.

Gratitude has the power of inspiring others to act more kindly, and it can strengthen your bond with others around you. People who are grateful are more likely to be viewed as trustworthy, optimistic, outgoing and helpful. These are valuable characteristics that draw others to you and help you forge positive and strong relationships.

When you introduce gratitude practice into your everyday routine, you'll experience positive effects such as:

- A sense of abundance in your life
- A greater appreciation of how others contribute to your well-being
- Recognition of the small pleasures in life
- Developing a more positive outlook that allows for a happier life experience



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If you start practicing gratitude regularly, you can begin to reap all those benefits for yourself.

## Banishing Negativity, Focusing On Positivity

A key element of introducing gratitude practice into your life is banishing negativity and focusing on positivity in return.

Thinking positively comes with a host of benefits including: □ Happiness – banishing negativity in favor of a positive attitude can awaken happiness in your life. You may not be rich and you may not have reached the career goals you set yourself, but happiness is all about attitude. If you have a positive mindset, you automatically become happy.

Recognize your happiness doesn't depend on an external cause. Rather, it comes from within. All too often, we find reasons not to be happy. We delay adopting a positive mindset. I'll be happy when I lose weight. I'll be happy when I win the lottery... Banish negative thoughts like "I'm too fat to be happy", or "I'm too poor to be happy". You can make yourself happy right now without any of those things by simply thinking positively.

Motivation – when you banish negative thinking, you can actually become more motivated to accomplish the goals and dreams you set for yourself. Being motivated in itself is a positive characteristic, pushing you forward, encouraging you and helping you to overcome obstacles. Being positive makes you more motivated to succeed and it also helps you believe that you can be successful. As a result, you will be able to achieve more than you ever imagined. □ Self-esteem – when you have a positive mental attitude you'll have higher self-esteem. You will look at yourself more kindly and begin to see your good traits rather than only the bad ones. Ignore negative people and forget about what they say and think. As soon as you adopt a positive mindset, others around you automatically raise their opinions of you and become more respectful. □ Better health – positive thinkers are usually healthier and more energetic than negative thinkers. The mind's effect on the body is a powerful one, and positive thinkers enjoy a healthier immune system with faster recovery times. □ Better relationships – when you think positively, you'll find that other people gravitate towards you. People prefer those around them to be positive since they bring happiness, energy and joy into their lives.

Gratitude – A Skill That Takes Work Although we're all capable of being grateful for so many things in life, it's not something that we all do naturally. This makes it a somewhat alien skill. When you first decide to start practicing gratitude it can be very difficult at first.

You may find yourself struggling to think of things to feel thankful for, or you may try telling yourself to be grateful but not truly feeling it. All of this is normal, and it's something that needs to be worked through to come out the other side and to reap all the benefits that gratitude can bring.

Remember that gratitude is a skill like any other. Remember the old "how do you get to Carnegie Hall?" line? Of course, we all know that the answer is "practice". It's the same for gratitude.

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Practice makes perfect, so keep working on being grateful for the little things. It may be hard at first. In fact, it almost certainly will be. But, with a little effort and time, it will eventually become easier and soon, being thankful will be second nature.





## *The Psychological Benefits Of Gratitude*

It's clear from studies and research that feeling gratitude in your life brings a host of psychological benefits. Simply by feeling more thankful for the things that you have and experience every day, you can improve your mental state and enjoy better psychological well-being.

### **Reducing Depression**

Around a quarter of the population will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime. Depression is one of the most common and it can be seriously debilitating.

Getting professional help to treat depressions very important. Finding the right treatment can be difficult, and often, medication takes a while to work. However, gratitude is a simple skill to practice. It has been proven to reduce depression. But always seek medical advice when experiencing depression.

Depression is a condition that has a neurochemical and psychological base. Both of these can be helped by gratitude.

Gratitude causes your attention to be refocused from problems to their solutions, impacting the neurotransmitters like oxytocin, dopamine and serotonin that help you to feel good. When those chemicals surge in your brain, you feel more motivated and less apathetic, helping to reduce your depression.

Gratitude reduces stress hormones and helps to manage the functions of the autonomic nervous system, thus reducing the unwanted symptoms associated with depression. Feelings of thankfulness, at a neurochemical level, are linked to increased neural modulation in the part of the brain (the prefrontal cortex) that is responsible for handling negative emotions such as shame and guilt. As a result, depression sufferers become more positive and happier as their brain learns how to cope with negativity in a different way.

In fact, gratitude is so powerful that it can even change the brain's neural structures, making depression sufferers feel more content and happy. Appreciating others and feeling grateful helps to trigger the release of good hormones like dopamine and serotonin. It also helps to regulate the immune system's function. Scientists have even gone so far as to suggest that by activating the brain's reward center, it can change how we view ourselves and the world around us.

Being thankful forces you to focus on the positives. When you practice gratitude, your brain will be redirected automatically to focus on the things that you do have rather than the things that you don't. This helps us to be more aware of the here and now and to develop a more grounded attitude.

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Reduced Stress Stress is a common feature of everyday life these days. We have stressful jobs, more pressure on us in our family life than ever before, and less time to get everything done. It's no wonder, then, that so many people find it so difficult to cope.

There have been studies carried out into stress and gratitude and the results have been very interesting. Participants in those studies showed a significant reduction in their stress hormone (cortisol) levels when feeling grateful. They were also more resilient to negative experiences and emotional setbacks.

Gratitude has been shown to help us to handle stress more effectively. By simply appreciating and acknowledging the small positives in life, it's possible to rewire your brain so that it learns how to deal with your circumstances with increased awareness and better perception.

Stress is a natural bodily response to change, both bad and good.

Positive stress (known as eustress) makes us feel happy.

Meanwhile, unforeseen problems trigger distress or negative stress. Gratitude releases your stress hormones effectively while boosting positive emotions such as happiness. If you commit to practicing gratitude on a daily basis, you can reduce your negative emotions, naturally detoxing your body and mind from stress.

Of course, gratitude won't bring immediate relief to those suffering from stress and practicing it won't mean you'll suddenly be overjoyed. Gratitude merely helps you to accept your feelings then work on how to make them less overpowering.

This is how, over time, you learn to combat stress and cope with it more effectively.

## Greater Self-Esteem

Many people suffer from low self-esteem that impacts on every area of their lives. With poor self-esteem, other mental health problems can soon follow. Depression and anxiety can become crippling, and it can become difficult to relate to other people in a social setting. As a result, sufferers become more isolated which only exacerbates the problem.

Yet, gratitude has been shown in studies to make people friendlier and kinder, and when someone is kind and friendly, they are more likely to attract positive people to them and receive help from them.



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Gratitude also increases your ability to spot kindness in others.

For example, if you suffer from poor self-esteem, you may well look at a kind act skeptically, believing that the other person is only being kind to get something back in return. Someone who is grateful, on the other hand, will be able to accept that kindness for its face value since they would believe that they were worthy to receive kindness.

At the end of the day, practicing gratitude helps you to work towards feeling good about yourself. When you think good thoughts and appreciate other people and their actions, you feel positive about yourself, while those who are on the receiving end of your thankfulness also feel good. It's a positive feedback loop that's good for all parties involved.

## *Gratitude's Physical Effects*

We've already looked at how gratitude can impact on your psychological well-being. However, it can also have a positive effect on your physical health. Here, we take a closer look at how implementing gratitude practice in your everyday routine can make you feel better, get well sooner, and maybe even live longer.

**Improved Sleep** Most of us know that sleep is very important to maintain good health. If you don't get enough sleep, your body comes under excess strain. This increases the chances of your developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and other medical problems. However, it can be hard to get to sleep. Many people suffer from insomnia. Yet, studies have shown that practicing gratitude more often is an easy way of improving the quality of your sleep.

A study carried out into patients suffering from chronic pain and heart failure reported sleeping better when they practiced gratitude, even despite their problems, when compared with patients who were less grateful. Those who were most grateful reported being able to fall asleep more rapidly, sleep for longer, have a better quality of sleep and stay awake more easily in the daytime.

The evidence from these studies showed that gratitude helps to improve sleep because it causes people to have fewer negative thoughts at bedtime and more positive ones. It stands to reason that if you're worried and anxious at night, your body's stress level increases and this keeps you awake. On the other hand, if you're focusing on things you're thankful for, the relaxation response in the body is triggered and you can drift off more easily.

**A Stronger Immune System** Interestingly, studies have shown that practicing gratitude regularly can increase the level of the antibody immunoglobulin

A in the body. This is the first line of defense in the body against viruses. For this reason, it's fair to assume that being more thankful could help you to have a stronger immune system and to recover more rapidly from any illnesses that you do develop.

Of course, being grateful won't cure a serious disease like cancer.

However, it can strengthen the body's physiological function. It does this by reducing stress levels in the body through the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. Stress disrupts the healthy functioning of the body by disrupting the immune system. Therefore, being more thankful will reduce your stress and, thus, boost your immunity.

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Gratitude also raises your self-esteem and motivation, thus encouraging more healthy behaviors such as exercising more and paying more attention to possible health risks. This, too, can help to keep you fit and well in the long-term, with higher resistance to illnesses and with a greater ability to combat any diseases that you encounter.

## Less Aches And Pain

Positive emotions like gratitude have been shown in studies to have an analgesic effect in the body. This is achieved by stimulating endogenous opioids to be released. As a result, those suffering from aches and pains report that they experience fewer problems of this nature when they begin to practice gratitude.

They become less sensitive to the sensations of pain that they experience, and they can increase their tolerance to discomfort more effectively.

**Lower Blood Pressure** - When we have negative emotions, a chain reaction is triggered in the body. The blood vessels begin to constrict, the blood pressure starts to rise and the immune system, in turn, becomes weaker.



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If this kind of imbalance is allowed to continue, a strain is put on the organs and, particularly, the heart, leading in the end to major health problems. Gratitude has been shown to help reduce negativity and, so, to reduce blood pressure.

Gratitude doesn't just give you a heart-warming feeling, it also helps to keep your heart healthy too. A 1995 study showed that people who felt appreciated had a better heart rate variability which is a strong indicator of heart health.

Even people who already suffer from heart problems can benefit from practicing gratitude. Those who were more thankful reported less fatigue, better sleep, more confidence in their own ability to look after themselves, lower systemic inflammation levels and less depression, even when they were already suffering from heart failure.

Those who are more grateful also show signs of better blood vessel function after suffering a heart attack, while people who show thankfulness more regularly have lower hemoglobin A1c levels in their red blood cells. Since these levels are linked to a higher risk of heart failure, it's clear that gratitude can have a positive effect in improving overall wellness.



## *Relationships.*

### **Negativity can destroy relationships, both social and romantic.**

Nobody wants to spend time with someone who only sees the bad in life.

Let's just take a closer look at marriages. Once both partners begin to take each other for granted and stop appreciating the things they do for each other, their relationship begins to suffer.

As you become less appreciative, you also become more critical.

Experts have a frightening tool to measure how this can have a negative impact on your love life . The Losada ratio.

The Losada ratio divides the number of positive expressions of appreciation, encouragement and support given by one partner to the other by the number of negative ones including cynicism, sarcasm or disapproval. If the ratio is under 0.9, this means that there were 11percent less positive expressions than negative ones. Once this happens, relationships suffer a serious strain.

Conversely, relationships that are satisfying and long-lasting are those that have a positive ratio that stands at 5.1 or over. It isn't too surprising that marriages become stronger the more both partners express their thanks and appreciation to each other.

Let's not even go there. Counting words! Really??

This is one of the reasons why practicing gratitude more often can be extremely helpful to your personal relationships.

When you're more grateful for the little things in life, you naturally become a more kind, helpful, compassionate and understanding person. Those who practice thankfulness regularly report that they have a closer connection with others around them, were much more willing to help other people and,

most importantly, were also viewed as being helpful and considerate by those within their social networks.

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When you acknowledge the things that your loved ones do for you and demonstrate gratitude for those things, your family members, partners and friends begin to feel good. Meanwhile, you feel good and, so, the relationship between you becomes stronger. Also, when you communicate gratitude, it becomes more likely that you'll work through any concerns or problems, thus deepening and strengthening your relationships still further.

Being grateful creates a positive feedback loop in which you're more likely to be understanding and empathetic of others. In turn, others will feel more grateful towards you and act in a more pro-social manner. Gratitude, therefore, can be the cornerstone of strong friendships, relationships and families.

**Forging New Friendships** As we've already demonstrated, gratitude can make you a more positive and happy person. Happy people are more pleasant to spend time with. It's easy to see why. If you're thankful, you feel cared for, appreciated and loved. This, in turn, makes you treat other people better. When you treat others more kindly, you'll find that other people are keen to be kind to you. Not to mention the fact that positive people will usually be a lot more likable than someone who is grumpy, unhappy and negative all the time.

This doesn't just apply to existing friendships and relationships.

It also applies to attracting new people into your social network.

There are numerous studies that show gratitude can induce pro-social behavior.

If you feel more thankfulness in your own life, you naturally become more inclined to help other people get through their problems. It also makes you more willing to offer emotional support to others in their times of need. Why is this the case?

Simply put, gratitude allows you to perceive kindness and, naturally, we want to reciprocate that kindness. If we don't feel grateful, we often fail to recognize if somebody is helping us.

Gratitude also makes you more energetic and more happy – two factors that are strongly linked with pro-social behavior.

If you're more willing to approach other people and help them out, the more other people will be attracted to you and will want to join your social network. As a result, you'll be able to grow your friendship group and forge stronger and happier relationships with a wider cross-section of people.



## *What Are The Work-Related Benefits Of Gratitude?*

So, now we've looked at how gratitude can make you feel better physically and mentally. We've also looked at how it can improve your relationships and social life. There is another element that can be positively affected by being more thankful – your work life.

Gratitude has been shown to have a vital role to play in helping boost your career. It has been shown to make managers more effective, to help you network more effectively, to boost your decision-making abilities, increase your productivity and even to find new mentors or proteges. In short, showing thankfulness can help you to achieve the career goals that you've set for yourself, not to mention making your place of work a more enjoyable and friendly place to be.

So, how can practicing gratitude more regularly help you to improve your work prospects?

**More Energy To Focus On Goals** Studies have shown that being grateful can give you the energy boost you need to focus on your career goals. In research, participants were asked to write the goals that they wanted to achieve. Those who were more grateful reported greater progress towards meeting the goals that they had set for themselves by the study's end.

As we've already mentioned, being thankful naturally boosts your motivation and energy levels. It can actually change the way in which your brain functions. You'll also be able to enjoy a better quality of sleep. All of these things work together to help energize you and give you the boost you need to focus on your aims.



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**More Positive Working Relationships** We've already examined how demonstrating gratitude can help to improve our relationships and widen our social circle more effectively. This holds true for relationships within the workplace too.

It couldn't be more important to build up strong and effective relationships within the workplace. Whether you're a leader, managing your workforce, or whether you're working alongside other colleagues, being able to communicate effectively and have a greater bond and understanding is the key to working success.

Gratitude, as we've already said, promotes pro-social behavior, and this results in better and increased friendships. Thankful people, therefore, develop greater social capital when compared to their peers who show less gratitude. This allows you to expand your network, strengthen your team's bonds and enjoy a more pleasant working environment.

## *A Can-Do Attitude That Helps You Come Out on Top*

If you can't focus properly at work because you're constantly focusing on the negative, you can't reach the top and meet your targets. Conversely, if you're positive and confident in the workplace, you can be more productive since you can direct more focus towards your work.

We've already looked at how gratitude can reduce your insecurities and boost your self-esteem. When you apply this benefit to the workplace, you can see how it could help you to become more focused and productive. Positive emotions, such as gratitude, broaden the mind and allow you to see more and become more creative. This allows you to find solutions to complex problems and to overcome obstacles that once seemed insurmountable.

**Improved Leadership Skills** If you're a business leader, you'll know all-too-well that you'll need a wide range of skills to handle everything that comes your way. Criticism is something that comes too easily while feeling gratitude and expressing praise can often be lacking.

Sincere, timely and behavior-focused praise can make an enormous difference in the workplace. It can certainly be a more effective way to influence positive change than criticism of employees. There have been many studies that show expressions of thankfulness are very motivating, increasing employee performance while making the workplace a more pleasant place to be.

Unfortunately, culturally we often find that expressing our gratitude is difficult. We're not used to telling other people that they're doing a good job. Yet, it's something that can make an enormous difference at work, and something that can take any organization to a new level of success. If you cultivate an attitude of thankfulness, this can help extend to the workplace too.

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Cultivating a more positive and thankful attitude also helps with decision making in the workplace – something that managers need to do regularly.

When managers are well-rested thanks to the extra sleep that additional gratitude practice brings, and when they have a more positive and motivated approach thanks to the benefits that being thankful create, they are in a better frame of mind to make the right choices when it comes to the business and its workforce.





## *The Key To Changing your Life*

Is your life everything you hoped that it would be? It's unlikely, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this book. If you've been looking for ways to make your life better and to implement positive change, gratitude could be the simple tool to leverage to take it to a new and happier level.

If you're ready to use gratitude as the key to changing your life, you need to know precisely how it's going to do this. We already know of the benefits that come with becoming more grateful – the emotional, health, social and work-related advantages that thankfulness can bring – however, how will it work at the most basic level?

**A Change Of Focus** A major reason why gratitude changes your life is due to the fact that it effectively changes your focus. Life centers around focus.

Whatever you are focusing on will be what you'll naturally move towards. If you're living in a negative state, you'll naturally experience more negativity in your life. After all, if you're constantly focusing on negative things, that will be all you see.

It's all-too-easy to see the dilemmas and problems that surround a situation if your thinking is always geared that way.

Although it isn't always as obvious, it's surprisingly simple to see things with a positive slant, even if problems arise. Even if something goes awry, it becomes possible to seek out a silver lining to every bad situation. There usually is at least one, and if there truly isn't it's always possible to believe that something positive will, in the end, come out of the negative experience.

Yet, it isn't all just about being a more positive person. If you have gratitude in your life, it can change everything since it breathes fresh positivity into all the things you do. It's an enormous change of focus, a brand-new way of looking at things, and one that – although it may not come naturally to you – will eventually lead you to become increasingly appreciative of the beauty around you. Essentially, you move away from living in a permanently negative haze to living with abundance everywhere.

While this sounds wonderful, remember that it won't happen overnight. The change in focus will take time and it'll need work to retrain your mind. This is why practice is so important.

However, if you take a consistent and regular approach to practicing gratitude, eventually, you'll notice the change taking place.

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Better Quality Of Life From your wellness and mental health to your spiritual and emotional fortitude, every aspect of your life can be improved by simply adopting a more grateful approach to living. Gratitude changes your life in the most literal sense by improving its quality. We are all the sum of our parts, and gratitude nurtures all of those parts, helping them to grow and thrive.

There are studies that link gratitude with life satisfaction, and it's easy to see why this is the case. People who feel grateful for what they have are much more satisfied with their daily existence. If you're able to appreciate all of the important things in your everyday life, whether large or small, you'll enjoy more stability.

It's important to recognize, too, that having a better quality of life isn't necessarily about being successful. Of course, it's easy to imagine that people who are successful will always find it simple to be grateful since they've got a lot to feel thankful for. Yet, quality of life isn't about jobs, success, money, houses or cars.

Yes, those things could help you to have a better quality of life, but they could also cause you a lot more problems.

Being grateful isn't about being rich. Just look at the many stories of people who have won the lottery and still struggled to find satisfaction in their lives. Gratitude is about feeling appreciative for the things that you do have and overlooking the things that you don't. Once you stop being hung up on the things that you wish you had and start focusing on the things that you've already got in your possession you'll realize just how wonderful your life truly is.



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Fewer Fears, More Happiness Another way in which gratitude changes your life is simply by making you feel happier. Studies have shown that being thankful has a key role to play in making you feel happy with your current circumstances.

One study asked the participants to write about a specific topic every week. While one study group was asked to write about the things that made them unhappy, the other was asked to write only about the things they had gratitude for.

Meanwhile, there was a control group that was asked to write about what had happened during the week but without any focus on either the negative or positive elements. The final result showed that the group that wrote about the things they felt grateful for felt more optimistic and happy about their lives when compared to the other groups. This is because, when we're feeling gratitude, we naturally feel happy as we begin to recognize what we do have rather than the things that we don't.

Once you've practiced gratitude for a while, you'll begin to recognize that it's easy to live in an appreciative state if you're grateful. Of course, it isn't always easy to achieve this. We all have our own baseline of happiness. If we cross that threshold, one way or the other, we automatically become happy or unhappy. Yet, if you spend enough time working on developing your gratefulness skills, you'll spend more time on the positive side of that line rather than the negative side.

One of the reasons why gratitude is able to change your life is because it reduces your fears. It's very difficult to be both grateful and afraid simultaneously. Fear happens if you allow yourself to focus on the things that you can't control. You end up dwelling on the worst-case scenario when you live in a fearful state.

Yet, by practicing gratitude, it's possible to overcome those fears.

If you're able to become entirely grateful for all you have, even including the problems that you face, you'll find that there's very little space left for fear to occupy your mind.

When you're afraid of things, you no longer live in a state of abundance but in one of lack instead. Being grateful will put you back into that abundant state, instilling in you a belief that you are thankful for all you have at the present moment in time instead of worrying about the things you don't have right now and won't have in the future.

All-too-often, we tend to save up all our gratitude for just a few select occasions. Thanksgiving, holidays, birthdays... On that day, we finally give ourselves permission to feel thankful and, in turn, all the positive emotions and happiness that comes with it.

Instead, we should take that opportunity to question why we don't allow ourselves to feel this way every other day. Gratitude isn't just for special occasions; it can be for every single day of the year.



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Take the time to stop, think about what you have to be grateful for, and to truly appreciate it, regardless what day of the week or year it is. You can abolish a lot of the fear that drives your negativity by just being more grateful every day. Make the decision to practice gratitude right now and your fears will slowly dissipate with time.

Stronger Faith Gratitude transforms your life in many ways, but one of the most interesting is the way in which it can strengthen and enhance your faith. Whichever religion or faith you believe in, gratitude can help your belief to grow stronger with each day.

That faith or belief need not necessarily be a religious one. You may be a Christian, a Jew, a Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim but, equally, you may simply believe in a higher link and spiritual oneness binding us all together. Whatever your individual school of thought, being more thankful helps you to develop a deep- rooted appreciation of the little things in life. With practice, it becomes a central part of the way you live your life. In turn, this strengthens your belief and faith.

Gratitude can transform your faith since it instils in you the belief that you aren't alone. Whatever you're trying to get through, eventually, it'll pass and you'll come out of the other end victorious. You develop a stronger belief that you'll be able to overcome the obstacles you face, accomplish the goals that you've set and become a much better person at the end of the day – one who is more empathetic and sympathetic to others.

Gratitude also strengthens your faith by encouraging you to seek out new ways to contribute to society and improve life for other people. Your focus will soon become on helping others and you can embark on a path to spiritual enlightenment.

**Motivation To Reach For Your Goals** Goal setting is something that is essential to live a positive and meaningful life. When you do goal setting correctly, you can achieve literally anything you decide to accomplish. Of course, that won't happen overnight, but it will eventually happen if you take action consistently. One way by which gratitude is able to change your whole life is by giving you the extra boldness you need to extend yourself to reach your goals.

How can gratitude help you to succeed? It does this by building up an internal platform of success. So long as you're healthy, happy and sound in spirit, body and mind, you can work on reaching your goals without external distractions. However, if you're lacking those things due to your unhappiness with your circumstances, you'll be living in a state of negativity and it becomes difficult to move forward.

While you're focusing so closely on the things that have gone wrong in your life you're unable to push on towards your ultimate goals that could, in all likelihood, be years away from coming to fruition. Instead, you waste time, get distracted and end up engaging in pursuits that only hinder rather than help.

# Gratitude

Building up positivity in your life by practicing gratitude every day can help you to switch your focus from the negative to the positive and so, eventually, learn how to move onwards and upwards towards achieving the things you desire most.

## *Begin Practicing*

If you're convinced of the benefits of starting regular gratitude practice to transform your life, you'll need to know how to begin.

It's very easy to say "be more grateful" but putting that into practice can be harder than it seems. Often, we don't naturally focus on the positive, so learning how to do that can be a bigger challenge than you imagined. Here are some top tips to help you start learning to cultivate more thankfulness.

**Start Journaling** One of the best ways to reap all the benefits that gratitude can bring is to notice fresh things to be grateful for each day. One of the most effective ways to put this into practice is to start a gratitude journal.

Gratitude journaling is effective because it can slowly change how you perceive situations. It adjusts what you're focusing on.

You're probably always thankful for having your family, for example, but if you simply write that each day your brain won't stay on alert looking for new things to feel thanks for. Instead, get specific. Write exactly what you're grateful for about your family. So, instead of just writing "I'm thankful to have my family around me" write "I'm thankful that my husband bought me flowers today to make me feel happy" or "I'm thankful that my sister asked me to come to hers for dinner tonight so I wouldn't need to cook after my long day at work".

Open your eyes to the world around you and you'll find that your gratitude practice becomes greatly enhanced. Soon, you'll get a thrill out of noticing brand new things to feel thankful for every day.

**Try Mental Contrasting** If you're excited about all the benefits gratitude can bring that's a positive thing in itself, since it gives you a boost to begin making the changes that need to be made to invite the positivity into your life.

Yet, you need to maintain momentum too. It can become all-too- easy to lose interest or to fall at the first hurdle when practicing gratitude feels too difficult.

When you need to achieve something, using the mental contrasting technique can be just what you need to succeed.

# Gratitude

Mental contrasting involves being optimistic about your new practice's benefits while also staying realistic about how challenging it might be to build that habit. It's something that helps you to put in more effort when it's needed most.

Recognize the obstacles in advance that might get in your way.

Plan for them effectively. If, for example, you know that you're exhausted just before bed, accept that it is not the right time for you to focus on your gratitude practice and, instead, reschedule it for a morning time.

Try New Ways To Express Gratitude Practicing gratitude needn't take the same form for everyone. In fact, learning how to be thankful is a deeply personal thing. So, don't feel limited to just journaling your feelings and thoughts. It might be a good place to start, but soon you might want to move on to try something different. Or, for some people, journaling might not have the desired effect at all. There are many creative and new ways of tracking the things you have to feel gratitude for.

Do you need some inspiration? How about setting up a gratitude jar? Simply take an empty jar and, every day, write one thing you're grateful for and pop it into the jar. At the end of the year, you empty the jar and take another look at all the things you wrote. It's a meaningful way to highlight those key moments of thankfulness and then, when you read them back, you can relive them and reinforce them in your memory.

Taking Gratitude To The Social Level The relationships that we form with other people lie at the heart of our happiness and satisfaction in life. Therefore, it makes sense to consider other people when building our gratitude.

Rather than thinking about material items or different circumstances that you feel thankful for, try thinking about the people you're grateful for instead. This can enhance the benefits you experience.

You can take the social element of your gratitude to the next level by actually involving other people in your practice. Try writing gratitude letters to people who've had a positive impact on your life but who you've never said thank you to properly. Or why not share the moments that you've been grateful for each day with your loved ones at the dinner table?

When you involve other people in your gratitude practice, you spread the positivity, strengthen your relationships, and enhance your own well-being while also boosting others.

## *Nothing to be Grateful for?*

We've said a lot in this book so far about how practicing gratitude frequently helps you to bring more positivity into your life. But what can you do if you feel that you have absolutely nothing to be grateful for?

Sometimes, everything in life can feel like it's just too overwhelming. If everything sucks and you're struggling to find even one thing to be thankful for, how do you move forward?

Although gratitude should be a simple thing to feel, it's surprisingly difficult sometimes. That's because we're hardwired to overlook the good things we experience and, instead, put our focus primarily on everything that goes wrong. It even has a name – negativity bias. When we take it at its most basic level, this means we tend to pay more attention to the things that are bad because they threaten us.

We can safely ignore the good things since they won't cause us any harm. However, bad things may be dangerous and therefore, we fixate automatically on them. This may be a primitive human response, but we don't need to be controlled by it. Once you know that negativity bias exists and how it works, you can work on overriding your biological programming. You can choose to concentrate on the good things over the bad because, after all, there's always something positive to think about, even when it seems otherwise.

Even in the most desperate and darkest times in your life, rest assured that there will still be something, however small, to feel grateful for. It's especially important to focus on the good things when you feel like there's nothing left in life to be thankful for.

That's the time when gratitude will make a huge difference. So, make a point of looking for something you're thankful for every day and, eventually, you'll begin to see more and more positive things around you and focus less and less on the negative.

How do you begin to find things to be thankful for if your life feels like it's going down the tubes? Here are a few starting points to get you going.

**Start Small** As when tackling most challenges in life, it's best to start out small when you're trying to start implementing gratitude practice in your life. You can't run before you can walk, and you can't climb Everest before you can climb a hill. When things are really bad, you shouldn't just fake being thankful for something you don't really have. That's pointless and defeats the whole object of this exercise.

Instead, look for the smallest thing that you can genuinely say you're grateful for. Perhaps you heard a bird sing when you left the house this morning. Or perhaps the sun came out and dried your laundry on the line. Even these tiny things are a good place to start. Find anything at all that you feel gratitude for then take yourself a moment to truly feel it. Even say the words out loud – "thank you".



# Gratitude

This is where your gratitude journal can come into good use.

Start recording the things you're feeling grateful for each day.

You should aim for three at least, but when you feel as if there's nothing good in your life, a single thing to feel thankful about is better than none. When you've thought of something, write it down then read it over a few times. Really feel that gratitude while you say, "thank you".

The more comfortable you become with practicing gratitude you'll begin to find more things you're feeling thankful about.

You then have two choices. You can either increase the number of things you feel gratitude about every day or refine your practice by making a point of reflecting further on the good things that have happened to you.

Choose your top three and record them fully, going into depth about what those things meant to you and why they made you feel so thankful. Again, once you've recorded your thanks, take the time to re-read it several times and truly feel the emotion behind it. This is the most important element of this exercise. If you don't really feel grateful, all you're doing is writing down words.

**Think Of Others** We've already mentioned the importance of other people when it comes to feeling gratitude. While a lot of thankfulness comes from within yourself, extending that gratitude to the other people around you can make a huge difference to your overall happiness (not to mention the happiness of other people).

As well as focusing on the other people in your life when you implement your gratitude practice and how they've made you feel thankful for their presence, you should become more aware of others who have less than you do. All you need to do is switch on the TV and watch the news. You're sure to soon see countless others all over the world whose lives are worse than yours and who are in more dire straits than you. Focus on those people and feel grateful that your life isn't as bad as you thought.

If you're ready to take this element of your practice to the next level, become involved with a cause you feel an affinity with to help others. Perhaps volunteer to visit elderly people suffering from dementia or help out at a homeless shelter. Once you start helping others who have less than you do, you'll rapidly begin to recognize and appreciate the things that you do have, even if those things aren't the things that you'd like to have in your life.

**Forget Long Lists** As we already pointed out, sometimes it feels impossible to think of lots of things you feel grateful about. In fact, it may seem impossible to even think of one. If you set yourself a challenge of writing a long list of things you're thankful for, you'll soon give up on your practice because it will feel like an insurmountable task.

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Instead, try to identify one thing you feel grateful for in your life.

If you can, try to push it to three.

If you're wondering where to start looking for those things, here are a few places to begin: □ Identify something you appreciate about your life. It could be something you have now, something you had in the past or something you know will happen in the future. Nothing is too small, but the more specific you can be, the better it is for your practice.

Identify something you usually take for granted but when you think about it, it makes you feel thankful. Perhaps you're physically healthy. Take the time to say thank you for that blessing. □ Identify something you like about yourself. It could be anything from your personality or qualities to your actions or your appearance. This will help you to boost your self-esteem and focus on your own positive traits. □ Identify something you feel gratitude for in your current situation. Be present in the here-and-now. Perhaps you're grateful to just have the time to sit and think about your life rather than having to rush about and get jobs done. Or perhaps you're grateful for the sofa you're sitting on and the comfort that it provides. The small things are just as significant as the big ones. □ Identify someone who has had a positive and significant impact on your life. It could be a family member, a friend, a manager, a professor or a mentor. Think about that person and the way they changed your life for the better. Why not write a gratitude letter to that person? You don't need to actually send it to them, but by constructing a letter thanking them, you can connect with your appreciation for them.

Once you've pinpointed the thing that you're grateful for today, write it down, re-read it and feel the gratitude in your heart. The entire point of this exercise is to feel the thankfulness through your being. Read your statement, pause then breathe deeply, allowing the love, warmth, gratitude and appreciation to wash right over you.

Doing this practice every day increases your feeling of gratitude and that appreciation won't just improve all your relationships with others, but it'll also bring love back into your life. Practicing gratitude regularly connects you to the world around you and to the past, present and future. While you're taking the time to practice gratitude, you can forget all your responsibilities, tune into your emotions and focus on the way you feel, just for a moment. It can make an enormous difference to your whole life and transform your existence for the better.

# Gratitude

## *Guide to Practise*

Are you ready to begin your first gratitude practice? If you're convinced that practicing gratitude will make a transformative difference to your life, you could benefit from this step by step guide to take you through the process. There are five helpful steps for you to follow.

Practicing gratitude will gain momentum with time and practice.

Yet, no matter how much you might want to experience all the benefits that being more grateful can bring, there will sometimes be days when you just can't be bothered to think about things to feel thankful for. If you're busy or just feeling too depressed it can just seem too difficult to fit in your practice session for the day.

No matter how discouraged you feel, it's important to stick with your commitment. If you give in to the temptation to let it slide for one day, you may never go back to it. Rest assured, though, even if you have to force yourself to sit down and write in your gratitude journal, you'll reap the benefits once you get started.

Once you've committed yourself to gratitude practice, you have to actually get down to doing it. Sit down with your notepad or at your laptop and begin with "I am thankful for..." Nothing may come to you straight away, but that's ok. Stop and wait for a minute to reflect. Enjoy the moment of peace and soon you'll find yourself thinking of the first thing to add to your list.



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**Writing** Although you don't always have to write a gratitude journal, it's often the best way to start. When you put the things you're thankful for in writing you have the power to read them back over again and again. That allows you to experience that feeling of thanks repeatedly and reinforces the emotions behind it in your mind. Repetition is the key to success.

The written word has power. After all, the pen is mightier than the sword. Writing your thoughts down or writing a gratitude letter has more energy than simply phrasing your thanks and saying it out loud. Putting pen to paper physically turns the thought process in a more positive direction, helping you to accept things and learn from them.

**Feeling** There will, no doubt, be days when you start writing in your gratitude journal and you feel like you're on autopilot. You write without feeling any gratitude at all. Although that's not the aim of the exercise, begin by writing it all down anyway. That's a good place to begin. The feeling will come later.

Read again what you've written and keep reading it until you finally start to feel the sensation of thanks in your heart. Once it's there, allow it to flow through your whole body. Whatever is happening around you, surrender to that feeling and embrace it to the full.

**Sharing** The final step in your first gratitude practice is to share your grateful thoughts with another person. The best results can be achieved by partnering up with someone else who wants to instill more thanks in their life. You can both act as each other's motivation and, when you know you have to report back to your partner about your progress, it will give you a push to carry on and stick to your commitment to practice gratitude even on days when it feels too difficult. Sharing positive thoughts about someone with that person is a great way to double the benefits of your practice. Both of you will be able to experience the advantages of boosted self-esteem and a greater sense of well-being overall.

**Conclusion** Gratitude is something that many of us take for granted. We are so used to the concept of saying thank you that, in many cases, it has lost all meaning. We need to reconnect with what being thankful actually means. When you're aware of what gratitude involves, you can cultivate your own thankfulness and bring it into your life on a daily basis to boost your happiness and well-being in every aspect of your day-to-day living.

Thankfulness brings with it a host of benefits. It improves your physical health, your emotional and mental well-being, your social life and even your working relationships. Being thankful, even for the smallest things, can help you to be happier and more successful in every area of your life.

However, just saying that you're grateful isn't enough to reap the benefits of gratitude. You have to genuinely feel it. That can be easier said than done. Saying you feel thankful about something in your life isn't the same thing as really experiencing that thanks. You have to commit yourself to allowing that feeling to seep in and to flow over you. Once you surrender to the feeling of gratefulness, you'll be overwhelmed by the benefits that it can bring.



# Gratitude

Even if you're struggling to find the positives in your situation, practicing gratitude is something that can turn your life around for the better. By looking for even the smallest things, even something as tiny as the sun coming up in the morning, you can start to refocus your attention on the things that really matter rather than the negative things that are threatening to take you over completely.

Happiness is, in the end, a matter of focusing on the right things, and those right things are the positive ones. Look for the good in every situation, find that silver lining in every cloud and share your joy with the others around you. You can be happier than you ever imagined and enjoy greater joy in your personal and professional life by simply embracing the possibilities that gratitude can bring you.

Seize the opportunity now, open your mind and heart to the possibilities that gratitude can bring and allow your thankfulness to transform your world for the better.

