

## A SIMPLE ACT OF GRATITUDE

Inspired by the John Kralik Book

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Yeah! Well, it's Thanksgiving week everyone, so happy Thanksgiving! The Sunday before Thanksgiving. And it's usually that time of year when we start thinking about who we're grateful for; what were grateful for; maybe memories that were grateful for.

And this Thanksgiving, I was really thinking as we walk into our Thanksgiving dinners -- maybe with family or friends -- you know, it's been an interesting year. And so, I would say that this year -- more than ever -- we need to come armed and filled up with gratitude. This is the year to arrive at the doorstep or welcome your guests filled up with gratitude.

I know you've heard this saying before, but it's from mystic theologian Meister Eckhart. Remember? He says:

*"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."*

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Well, I remember when our boys were young and little ... They're 20 and 24 now. They're over six feet tall, so they're not little or young anymore. [Laughs] But when they were little, we started this practice as a family. Actually, we started with our older son when he was about two years old. He's 24 now. But what we would do is: at the end of the day, each one of us would say three things that we were grateful for that day. And we would write it in our family gratitude journal.

And so, what would happen is: then the boys would go out, and they'd have to start really observing and looking for things that they were grateful for in order to report back that night for our family gratitude journal. And what was so fun was that -- when they got older, like high school -- they'd go back and they'd look at what they wrote when they were two or four or six years old, and they would just start laughing. And it would give them joy. But also it would remind them of something they had been grateful for that is maybe so simple, right? That we can really go back and look at the simple things that give us so much joy and gratitude.

And so, this idea of looking for gratitude -- because gratitude is a spiritual practice. Gratitude is a spiritual practice.

And so, a couple of years ago I found this great book. It's called *A Simple Act of Gratitude* by John Kralik. And it's his life story. It takes place in 2007. He was 52 years old at the time. He had just gone through his second divorce. He's a lawyer in his own law firm, but he has a lot of clients that aren't paying. So he can barely pay his rent; he can barely pay his employees; he can barely pay himself. And so, he's really struggling. He's overworking; he's depressed; he's at a low in his life. He's feeling now disconnected from his two sons from his first marriage. His daughter -- who he shares custody with, who is seven at the time -- he's starting to feel disconnected from her, as well.

And so, he's now living in what he describes as a dump of an apartment in Pasadena, California. Now, I'm from that area, and I know all of you probably see the Rose Bowl -- the Rose Parade -- and think it's beautiful. And it is beautiful; there's a lot of really expensive homes there. But like every town, there's one area that maybe is "sketchy," as he calls it, and that's where he's living. Because he's paying still a mortgage for his ex-wife and the daughter; he's paying his college students' apartment as well. And so now he's in this little dinky, not-so-great apartment. So, he's just really not feeling connected to family, friends, and he feels like he's just failing in every area of his life.

So, it's December 2007, and he's the most depressed he's ever been. And he has a law school friend who calls him out of the blue and says, "How are you?" Now usually what do we say? [Congregants: "I'm fine."] I'm fine. But he said this time he just blurted out, "I'm not good. I'm not good."

So his friend said, "Well, let's get together for lunch." So they go to lunch a couple of days later. And he says, "Everything ..." John says to his friend, "Everything in my life is going wrong. Everything is going wrong."

And his friend says, "Well, you told me that you were starting to date this new woman. How is that going?"

And he said, "She broke up with me last night. Like, everything is going wrong."

So, it's New Year's Day now, 2008, and he's supposed to be hiking with his girlfriend, but they're no longer together. So, he's all by himself. He goes hiking alone. And he realizes -- and I love the metaphor of this -- that he's lost in the woods. He's literally wandering around kind of lost. And as he's wandering lost, he hears a voice. You know that voice that's, it's your voice, but it's not your voice? That still, small voice within? He hears the voice and this is what it says. It says:

*"Until you learn to be grateful for the things you have, you will not receive the things you want."*

Until you learn to be grateful for the things you have, you will not receive the things you want. So, he's really letting that sink in as he's wandering, lost still. And then he remembers that, when he was around five years old, his grandfather gave him a silver dollar coin. Do you remember those? And it was so special to him at the time. But his grandfather told him, "I'll give you another one only if you write me a thank you note, because that's how thank you notes work. That if I give you something and you give me a thank you note, I'll give you another one."

So right in that moment, John decides -- wandering lost in the woods -- that he's going to find one person every day for the rest of that year to write a thank you note to; 365 thank you letters over the course of one year. He says, "If my grandfather was right, I'll have a lot more of what I'm thankful for by the end of the year. And if the voice is right, I'll begin to get those things that I want." Plus, he figures he has nothing to lose at this point. Right? He's at an all-time low.

So, it's at the end of the first day of his new commitment, and he arrives back to his little apartment. He picks up his mail, and he hasn't written a thank you letter yet, but he receives a thank you note. It's from his ex-girlfriend. They had still exchanged Christmas gifts with one another, and so she had written to say thank you. And it was so lovely that he decides, "Wow, I'm going to start right now in my new commitment to writing these thank you letters."

So he thinks, "Well, it makes sense. We just had Christmas. I'll write thank you letters for all the Christmas gifts I received." But he also thinks, "You know, I'm not just going to say thank you for the gift. I really am going to think about how that gift will benefit me, how I'm going to use it. And also I'm going to let them know what they mean to me; what our relationship means to me. And maybe anything else I may have forgotten to tell them over the years. I'm going to share that with them, as well, in these thank you notes."

So, he says, "Before I even sat down to write that first letter," he said, "writing these letters was making me realize that the way I viewed my life and the people in it had to change." Yeah. "That I needed to start thinking about my life and the people in it in a different way."

So, he decides to write his first thank you note to his older son for the Christmas gift he got of a Keurig coffee maker. I'm thinking, in 2007, it was probably brand new then, right? So, he sits down to write a letter and then he realizes -- this is how disconnected he is from his son -- he doesn't have his son's

address. So, he calls his son to get the address and his son invites him to lunch. So, they go to lunch the next day and, not only does his son pay for lunch -- which was good, because John couldn't afford to even pay for lunch -- his son pays for lunch, but also his son repaid a loan that John never expected to get back from him. Any parents out there? [Congregants laugh]

Yeah, so now he realizes he has another thank-you note to write. One to thank his son for lunch; to thank him for repaying the loan that came at exactly the perfect time when he needed that money. And also he says, *"And thank you for the connection and the company, and also for establishing that trust: that I can trust that I gave you this loan and then you repaid it to me. And also, that we can trust each other in our relationship."*

So, he repairs that relationship. He also repairs the relationship with his younger son, who also repays a small loan that John had given him. He goes on to really find more connection and joy with his younger daughter, again, who's seven at the time.

So, it went from, *"Oh, I just have this little dingy apartment, you know, on my weekends with her"* to, *"Let's make forts; let's create fairyland."* It becomes creative and magical and joyful and beautiful.

He then goes on to -- he had written a thank you note to his ex-girlfriend. And she becomes his girlfriend again.

So now, after Christmas he's trying to figure out: *"Now, where do I turn my thank you note to?"* And so, he decides: his employees. So, he starts writing thank you notes to his employees. And now his work environment changes, because not only is there this feeling of gratitude in the office, but now employees are thanking other employees.

He starts writing thank-you notes to the clients, especially the ones that pay on time. [Congregants laugh] And guess what? He starts to get more people paying on time and more clients. His business starts to thrive.

He says that he discovered that writing thank you notes helped change his depression, fear and self-pity to peaceful joy. And he said just by the end of February -- so only two months of doing this -- he said if someone had asked him, *"How are you?"*, instead of telling them about his struggles, what was going wrong in his life, instead he would tell them what he was grateful for.

He said in an unconscious way, he started to notice that he was using the words, "thankful," "grateful" and "blessed" more often. That those words just started to come in and seep into his vocabulary in his conversations. By March -- now three months into writing these thank you letters -- he went to lunch again with that law school friend. And his friend said, *"Wow, what have you been doing? You look like a completely different person."*

And John told him about writing the thank you notes. By 2011, John had written 730 thank you notes. That's an average of two notes a day. Not only was his personal life thriving, his professional life thriving; he became Judge John Kralik. He's a judge of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, serving since 2009 ... meaning, a year after starting to write his letters, he became a judge of a superior court. Remember, he always wanted to write a book? He published his book in 2010, two years after starting to write his thank you letters.

He turned his entire life around from this single, simple practice of writing a thank you card or cards every day.

Because our daily behaviors are what make up our lives. Our daily behaviors are what make up our lives. I know, even for myself, recently I've felt a little wobbly, a little off. And then I realized I had gotten out of my daily behavior of meditation practice. It had been sporadic, instead of every morning. So I went

back -- about a week-and-a half ago -- and I said, *"Okay, every morning my daily behavior, this simple practice of meditation, whether it's five minutes or 15 minutes, that's my day."* Now I feel so much more grounded! Right? It's not that I don't have different emotions, but I can sway with it instead of it knocking me over.

Our daily behaviors make up our lives!

And so, here's what Oprah said, too; it inspired our affirmation for today. It's on the screens here:

*"The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate."*

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate. What is in your life that you can praise and celebrate? What is in your life that you can praise and celebrate? I want you to think of at least two things right now. What is in your life that you can praise and celebrate?

Because what we focus on grows. What we focus on grows! It's our second Unity principle! So, in Unity, we have five basic principles in our teachings. And the second one says that you're an extension of the Divine. You're an expression of God; that extension of the Divine on earth. So when you express gratitude, you're expressing the gratitude of that infinite Presence of love itself on earth ...

Which takes us to our fifth Unity principle, which is about taking action and showing up as the spiritual being that you are: walking your talk. We need to be the Good in the world. We need to be the Spirit in the world. We need to be the Love in the world. Not just sit and listen and read and take another class. Those are all good but, at some point, we need to go out and we need to be it. We need to be the one Power and the one Presence of the universe in action.

And we can do that through gratitude. And it's why I see gratitude -- as the minister who oversees volunteer ministry here -- I see gratitude as an extension of volunteering. Because if you're grateful to an organization, your natural inclination is going to be to give back. And as you show up as that expression of the good in the world, you spread more good. You spread that infinite Presence of goodness. You express your true nature; your divine nature. That's what gratitude and gratitude through volunteering can do in the world.

Well, I love science and spirituality. That's kind of my background: of bringing both of them together. So, I looked at this study. It's by Dr. Robert Emmons. He's a psychology professor and gratitude researcher. How many of you want to be gratitude researchers? [Congregants laugh] Yeah. He's out of University of California-Davis.

He says there's two key components of practicing gratitude. The first: we affirm the good things that we've received. That could be a gratitude list. The second: we acknowledge the role other people play in providing our lives with goodness.

Doesn't that sound so lovely? We acknowledge the role that other people play in providing our lives with goodness. That's what John did. It can be thank you notes. It could be a text. It could be a phone call. It could be an email. It could be a voice note. There's so many ways to say thank you these days!

And so, it really is about building our own gratitude mindset. So how do we build a gratitude mindset?

We **OBSERVE**. Right? In order to affirm your good, you need to be looking for it throughout the day, just like our boys did when they were little. Start going through your day: who and what can I be grateful for today? And then write it in a gratitude journal or a pad of paper. It could be scraps of paper. We've got lots of piles laying around our house; why not a gratitude pile, right? [Congregants laugh] Start a gratitude pile.

You know, in my darkest days -- when I was going through my health challenge 2016/2017 -- I had nerve pain and weakness from my knees down. I could barely stand and walk. I went from being very healthy to hardly being able to walk or stand. And then, halfway through 2016, doctors did a lumbar puncture to try to figure out what was going on. And then I had excruciating pain when sitting. I couldn't sit more than five minutes. It took me a year to be able to sit just for an hour comfortably.

So, there were some dark days. And it was on the ones that felt the most lowest, darkest, depressing, that's when I took out my pad of paper and wrote my gratitude. It's easy to do when we feel good, to write gratitudes. It's another thing when we're at our lowest.

And so, I started that gratitude list. I would write at least one thing -- if not two or three -- and it had to be unique. I couldn't repeat myself. So even as I was laying on my bed, I could look out my window and say, *"I'm so thankful for the blue sky and the birds. I'm so thankful that I could hear my husband and my sons say, 'I love you.' I'm so grateful that I can still cuddle and pet my dog. I'm so grateful that I can call or text a friend."*

And then, again, I'd go back and read the whole list. At one point I had over 135 items on the list. Again, all unique. Even if it was, *"I can sit for five minutes,"* cross it out. *"I can sit for 10 minutes,"* cross it out. Right? Every day going in there. And I'm telling you: that gratitude list was part of my healing process. It was part of my healing process was giving gratitude especially at the lowest point in my life.

So the first way to build your gratitude mindset: observing; looking for the goodness; writing it down; capturing it.

The second way to build your gratitude mindset: **SAYING THANK YOU**. Acknowledging others and finding at least one interaction in the day to say thank you. One interaction in the day to say thank you. And then sending a message. Like, we saw how it can change one life to say thank you to someone. To acknowledge another person.

So observing and saying thank you.

You know, our Unity co-founder, Charles Fillmore, wrote this. He said:

*"The act of Thanksgiving, or giving thanks, will keep the heart fresh."*

He said:

*"For true thanksgiving may be likened to rain falling upon ready soil, refreshing it and increasing its productivity."*

Because the more we give thanks, the more there is to be thankful for. The more we give thanks, the more there is to be thankful for!

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"The more we give thanks, the more there is to be thankful for."*

Yeah! You know, a couple years ago I saw this cartoon in the Sunday comics. It was a little girl and her cat sitting on a dock, and they were dropping pebbles in the water and watching the ripples go out. And the girl says, *"It's funny how one little pebble can change the whole pond."* And her cat responds, *"Maybe you'll grow up to be a little pebble."*

All of us have the opportunity to be a little pebble that causes positive ripples in the lives of those around us. So be that pebble! Be the pebble that ripples gratitude across all areas of your life and in the lives of others, just as Judge John Kralik did.

But it starts with building a gratitude mindset. Take inventory of your own life and everything and everyone that you have to be grateful for, and acknowledge it. And then share your gratitude, expressing it to other people.

And then remember that a simple daily prayer can be, *"I am so grateful. Thank you."*

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"I am so grateful. Thank you."*

And now at a whisper: [with congregants] "I am so grateful. Thank you."

And now full voice: [with congregants] *"I am so grateful. Thank you."*

Yes, and I am so grateful to be here. Thank you.! Have a lovely, lovely Thanksgiving, everyone. Blessings!

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