

“Success is doing what you said you would do, consistently, with clarity, focus, ease and GRACE.” Today we’re going to focus on gratitude as the gateway to grace.

Much has been written about the power of gratitude in our lives, in becoming willing to be grateful for everything on our path. Cicero went so far as to say that “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.” Gratitude opens the door to grace, to a recognition that we are not alone in the Universe, that there is a power greater than ourselves at work in our lives.

So, why should we express our gratitude? First, because it’s good for us. Recent research shows that:

- People who describe themselves as feeling grateful to others and either to God or to creation in general tend to have higher vitality and more optimism, suffer less stress and experience fewer episodes of clinical depression than the population as a whole. These results hold even when researchers factor out such things as age, health, and income, equalizing for the fact that the young, the well-to-do or the hale and hearty might have “more to be grateful for.”

- Grateful people tend to be less materialistic than the population as a whole and to suffer less anxiety about status or the accumulation of possessions. Partly because of this, they are more likely to describe themselves as happy or satisfied with life.

- In an experiment with college students, those who kept a “gratitude journal,” a daily record of things they felt grateful for, achieved better physical health, were more optimistic, exercised more regularly, and described themselves as happier than a control group of students who kept no journals but had the same overall measures of health, optimism, and exercise when the experiment began.

- Grateful people are more spiritually aware and more likely to appreciate the interconnectedness of all life, regardless of whether they belong to specific religions.

Sarah Ban Breathnach, author of *Simple Abundance*, also teaches the power of keeping a Gratitude Journal and suggests writing down five things that you can be grateful for every night. She acknowledges that some days they’ll be the “big” things - a promotion, a new car, a birth, or your dog learning a new trick. And some days, it’s hard to come up with five “little” things. Those are the days it’s most important to write in your journal. Those are the days you put down those things that we take for granted - our health, our families, our car starting, the smile of a child or an “I love you honey” as your partner walks out the door for work.

She ends this teaching by saying, “The gratitude journal is not an option. Why? Because you simply will not be the same person two months from now after consciously giving thanks each day for the abundance that exists in your life. And you will have set in motion an ancient spiritual law: **the more you have and are grateful for, the more will be given you.**”

Which leads us to the second reason we should regularly express gratitude - because it completes the cycle of giving and receiving. From Thomas a Kempis, “**Be thankful for the smallest thing, and you will be worthy to receive something greater.**”

One of my personal heroes knew this to be true at a cellular level and lived her life accordingly. That hero was Pollyanna. You know, Pollyanna has gotten a bad wrap. Let me clear up some misconceptions:

Pollyanna was one tough little girl. It's important to realize that Pollyanna wasn't naive or protected from reality. She was the daughter of missionaries, dependent upon the charity of their home church to survive. She wore hand-me-down clothing, and was never guaranteed a meal. **Pollyanna made a choice** to see the good in her life, to view people and situations as opportunities to do good in her life, even when there was a whole bunch of evidence to the contrary.

In a particularly poignant scene in the movie, she happened upon the local minister (played by Karl Malden), a real fire and brimstoner. She showed him a locket worn by her father before his death, with an inscription.

“When you look for the bad in mankind, expecting to find it, you surely will.”
Abraham Lincoln

This led her father to realize that the opposite was also true - that if you look for the good, you will surely find it. He began a search and found over 800 references in the Bible to joy and gladness (826 to be exact). **Expressing gratitude is recognizing the potential for joy in every experience.**

Finally, expressing gratitude helps us to get in touch with **the best** that is in us. Gratitude also helps us recognize that everything that has happened in our life has brought us to now. Kahlil Gibran expresses this so beautifully: *“Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.”* **Gratitude helps us to see that our joy is our sorrow unmasked.**

It's hard to be sad or angry or resentful **when you insist on seeing the good** in every situation, when you insist on being grateful for whatever shows up in your life. This is what helped **the college students** in the study to describe themselves as happy and content with their lives. This was the **power behind Pollyanna.**

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

~ Melody Beattie

So what would we like to transform in our lives? What thoughts are we holding that gratitude could shift? Where do we need to play the Glad Game?

David Owen Ritz: “Every challenge in your life has a gift hidden within it...the bigger the challenge, the bigger the potential we can realize from it. But, merely uttering a comforting affirmation does not call forth the hidden potential. Rather, **you must build a deep conviction that everything in your life is there ultimately to serve you.**”