

The Generosity Challenge

“Grounded in Gratitude”

[Luke 17:11-19](#)

Imagine the power of a word that can...

- Make you look good and feel good;
- Increase your energy levels and keep you away from the doctor;
- Make you healthier and live longer;
- Help you make friends and deepen your friendships;
- Help you accomplish more and boost your career;
- Make you less self-centered and develop your personality;
- Reduce your materialism and feelings of envy;
- A word that can make you more optimistic and happier.

Does such a word exist? Yes, it does! The website happierhuman.com, which conducted more than 40 research studies on gratitude, says this magic word is “gratitude,” the state of being grateful, a feeling of thankfulness and appreciation.

In the last decade, there have been more studies and books on gratitude than ever before. Marcus Tullius Cicero described gratitude as “not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.” And, modern science has just begun to catch up with the wisdom of the ancient philosopher. Robert A. Emmons, a leading researcher and writer on the benefits of gratitude, says being grateful and expressing gratitude improves our physical, mental, and relational wellbeing. Research on gratitude reveals how it positively impacts the overall human experience and how these effects tend to be long-lasting.

In an article published in *Forbes* magazine, Amy Morin, a psychotherapist and clinical social worker, lists 7 scientifically-proven benefits of showing gratitude:

1. Gratitude opens the door to more relationships. Not only does saying “thank you” constitute good manners, but showing appreciation can help you win new friends.
2. Gratitude improves physical health. Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other people.
3. Gratitude improves psychological health. Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret.
4. Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression. Grateful people are more likely to behave in a prosocial manner, even when others behave less kindly.
5. Grateful people sleep better.
6. Gratitude improves self-esteem.
7. Gratitude increases mental strength. For years, research has shown gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma.

Morin ends her article with these words:

We all have the ability and opportunity to cultivate gratitude. Rather than complain about the things you think you deserve, take a few moments to focus on all that you have. Developing an “attitude of gratitude” is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.

Indeed, we cannot envision a good life without gratitude because gratitude makes life better for ourselves and for others. Research proved that being grateful and showing gratitude are essential for happiness. And, we also know from our own experiences something about the power of gratitude. Grateful people are happier and healthier, and, in general, they live longer. Regardless of their life circumstances, grateful people have an enduring smile and stay hopeful, counting their blessings instead of focusing on what they lack.

Yet, despite the discovery of its immense value, gratitude is “a diminishing virtue in modern times.” In a world of ever-growing consumerism and materialism, we feel entitled to get what we want, so we do not feel grateful as much as we did before. We do not show gratitude to others as often as we did before.

Here is an example. When you are on the road, do you feel grateful when another driver lets you go first? If so, how do you express your gratitude to the person who was kind to you? A common way of showing your gratitude on the road is waving your hand. People used to do it all the time. One time, I let a car cut in front of me. The driver of the car was so thankful that she kept waving her hand to me. While thanking me for my kindness, she slowed down so much, that I almost rear-ended her car! Well, this is a story of the past. Nowadays, I hardly see anyone waving to say thanks, especially here in California. And, I find myself doing it less and less. Truly, the lack of gratitude is contagious.

In the words of the 16th president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Today’s scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke, the story of 10 lepers, is a biblical example of this forgetful ingratitude. Jesus heals 10 lepers of their physical disease, but only one of them returns to thank him for the healing. Often, the 9 lepers who did not come back are labeled as ungrateful people. But, perhaps, they were grateful, too. How could they not be grateful for the miraculous healing they had just received? Back then, leprosy was an incurable disease, which forced people into social isolation for the rest of their lives. I am sure the 9 lepers were really grateful. Yet, they did not take the time to express their gratitude as the Samaritan leper did. Perhaps, once their healing was confirmed by the priest, the 9 lepers were in such a rush to celebrate their good fortune with their families and friends, to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into their society, that they simply forgot about Jesus. It was not anything malicious. They were just focused on satisfying their own immediate needs.

Gratitude is not just a sentiment, but an action of acknowledging and returning a favor. And, gratitude is not something that happens naturally, but a virtue that needs to be cultivated. Being grateful and expressing it requires discipline. Saying “Thank you” to God and to others for the blessings we have in our lives takes an intentional effort. And I believe this was the case for the one leper who came back to thank Jesus and the same can be true for us.

One New Year's Day, John Kralik, a Californian lawyer woke up at a very low point in his life and went out for a long walk. While walking, he decided to find some way to be grateful for what he had instead of focusing on what he did not have. That day, he made a New Year's resolution: He would be more thankful for the people and things in his life by writing a thank you note each day for one year to the people who touched him in some way. Day after day for the next 365 days, Kralik sent a hand-written thank you note for gifts or kindnesses he had received from his family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, doctors, store clerks, handymen, and anyone else who showed him love and care in special ways.

It did not take long for Kralik to receive benefits of writing his thank you notes, from financial gain to true friendship, and weight loss to inner peace. Writing a thank you note each day completely changed the way he felt about his life. A couple of years later, Kralik published a book about his experience: *365 Thank Yous - The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*.

How different would our lives be if we followed the example of the Samaritan leper or of John Kralik? How different would our lives be if we paused for a few minutes every day to count the blessings in our lives and to thank God and thank others in a tangible way?

Jesus said to the leper who returned to thank him, "Your faith has made you well." The Common English Bible translates it, "Your faith has healed you." What did Jesus mean by this statement? Wasn't the man already healed? The Message translation reads, "Your faith has healed and saved you," while the King James Version reads, "thy faith hath made thee whole."

All 10 lepers who had asked for mercy received healing. But, the one who returned to thank Jesus received more than physical healing. He received more than what he was even aware of needing. Gratitude brought him wholeness and salvation. Gratitude helped him become the person God created him to be.

In their book, *The Generosity Challenge*, co-authors McKenzie and Miller ask these questions:

What do you believe about gratitude...? Do you believe all that you have and all that you are, is a gift? (Be honest) Do you intentionally practice or cultivate an "attitude of gratitude?" Do you have a prized possession? Could you ever imagine selling it and then giving away the money? Have you ever experienced the power of gratitude?

May we be open to the nudging of the Holy Spirit as we reflect on these questions.
May we be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we take on this week's daily challenge and seek to live a life grounded in gratitude! Amen.