

Gratitude

a small book of thanks
for the easy days and the hard ones



Before you begin

✦

This is a book to use, not to finish. Read one section, close it, and try the thing it asks. Some pages will land and some won’t, and that’s fine. Nobody learns gratitude by agreeing with it. It comes the way a hand learns an instrument: badly at first, then less badly, then one day without thinking.

Each section ends with a small practice. At the back there are seven days to walk through, with a page for each. Write in them. A pencil beats a good intention every time.

I

Not a manner, a way of seeing

✦

Most of us were taught gratitude as a manner. Say thank you. Write the card. Don’t forget your aunt. That’s courtesy, and courtesy is good, but it mostly lives in the mouth.

The gratitude in these pages happens further in. It is the moment you notice that something was given — the water came when you turned the tap, a stranger held the door, you woke up breathing — and you let that fact arrive instead of sliding past it.

It doesn’t ask you to pretend everything is fine, and it can’t be switched on like a mood. The nearest word for it is attention: seeing what is here before rushing off to what is missing.

> **Try this**
>
> Pick up one thing within arm’s reach that you didn’t make yourself. Follow it back. Who grew it, built it, carried it, sold it, paid for it? Stop when you have counted five pairs of hands.

II

Watch the one who complains

✦

Before gratitude can grow, it helps to catch its opposite at work. Ingratitude rarely announces itself. It turns up as small habits of mind:

- **Complaint.** The running commentary on what's wrong: the weather, the queue, the traffic, other people.
- **Comparison.** Their house, their marriage, their luck.
- **Entitlement.** The quiet feeling that good things are owed, so none of them need thanking.
- **Hurry.** Too busy getting to the next thing to receive this one.

You don't have to fight any of these. Just watch them, the way you might watch a stranger on a bus. The Gnostic teaching calls this self-observation: seeing something in yourself clearly, without excuses and without punishment. A thing that has been seen starts to lose its grip. A complaint caught halfway through a sentence rarely finishes with the same force.

> **Try this**
>
> For one whole day, count your complaints — spoken and silent. Don't try to stop them; only count. Tally marks on the back of your hand if you must. At night, look at the number and say nothing about it.

III

Before your feet touch the floor

✦

The first minutes after waking set the tone for the hours that follow. Most of us spend them reaching for the phone and letting the world’s noise pour in before we’ve even sat up.

Try something else. While you are still lying down, before your feet touch the floor:

1. Notice that you are breathing. You didn’t arrange it. It happened anyway.
2. Say thank you — aloud if you can, under your breath if you can’t — for the night’s rest, or simply for waking.
3. Name one thing waiting in the day that you are glad of, however small. A cup of tea. A phone call. A walk.

It takes less than a minute. Give it a week before you decide what you think of it.

IV

At the table

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Nearly every tradition on earth pauses before eating. It is one of the oldest gratitude practices there is, and one of the easiest to lose.

Before you eat, stop for three breaths. Look at the food. Think of the soil, the rain, the hands that picked and packed and cooked it. Then give thanks in whatever words are yours: a prayer, a blessing, a plain “thank you.”

Water deserves the same. Before you drink, hold the glass for a moment. Bless it, and drink slowly. It has come a long way to reach you.

> **Try this**
>
> Eat the first three mouthfuls of one meal a day in silence, and taste them properly.

V

Thanks for the hard things

✦

This is the difficult page. Go gently with it.

Nobody should be told to feel grateful for grief, illness, betrayal or loss while it is still raw. Hard things hurt, and they are allowed to.

Yet over time, many people find that their hardest seasons taught them what the easy ones never could: patience, humility, where their strength really was, who their true friends were. Some traditions go further and treat every difficulty as a lesson the soul needed, a debt being settled, a teacher in disguise.

You don’t have to believe that to try this. Only don’t start with what hurts now. Start with something that hurt years ago and has since healed.

> **Try this**
>
> Choose one old difficulty. Write down what it cost you. Underneath, write down anything it gave you, if it gave you anything. If the second list stays empty, leave it empty. Honesty matters more than a tidy ending.

VI

Say it to their face

✦

Gratitude kept private is good. Gratitude spoken aloud changes two people at once.

Most thank-yous are vague — “thanks for everything,” “you’re the best.” They’re kind, and they slide right off. The ones that land are specific: what the person did, and what difference it made.

> *Not: “Thanks for your help.”*
>
> *But: “When you drove me to the hospital that night, I didn’t have to be alone. I’ve never forgotten it.”*

Try this

Think of someone who helped you and was never properly thanked — a teacher, a parent, an old friend. Write them a letter of about a page. Say exactly what they did and what it meant. Then, if you can, read it to them, or post it.

VII

Walk the day backwards

✦

At night, before sleep, lie still and go back over your day in reverse: from the moment you lay down, back through the evening, the afternoon, the morning, to the moment you woke. Take your time. Don’t judge it. Just see it again.

As you go, notice where something was given to you: a kindness, a meal, a laugh, a moment of quiet, a problem that turned out smaller than you feared. Pause on each one and give thanks.

Notice too the moments you missed, when you were too hurried or annoyed to see what was in front of you. No scolding. Just note them, so that tomorrow you might catch one.

> **Try this**
>
> Close the review by naming three things from the day you are thankful for. A different three each night, with no repeats for a whole week.

VIII

When it won’t come

✦

Some days gratitude simply isn’t there. You’re tired, or hurt, or angry, and the list of blessings reads like someone else’s. On those days, don’t force it. Forced thanks sours quickly — into resentment at yourself for failing, or at the practice for not working.

Go smaller instead. Much smaller. Not “I’m grateful for my life,” but “the kettle works.” “My feet are warm.” “It stopped raining for ten minutes.” That counts. On a hard day it counts double.

And if even that won’t come, sit, breathe, and say: “I’m not grateful right now, and this is where I am.” That is true, and truth is the ground gratitude grows from.

IX

Seven days

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A short path for one week. Do the day’s practice, then write on its page.

Day One Five hands (I)

Day Two Count the complaints (II)

Day Three Before your feet touch the floor (III)

Day Four Three quiet mouthfuls (IV)

Day Five The old difficulty (V)

Day Six The letter (VI)

Day Seven Walk the day backwards (VII)

Then, if you like, begin again.

Day One

Five hands

What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Day Two

Count the complaints

What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1.
2.
3.

Day Three

Before your feet touch the floor



What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Day Four

Three quiet mouthfuls

✦

What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1.

2.

3.

Day Five

The old difficulty

What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Day Six

The letter

What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1.
2.
3.

Day Seven

Walk the day backwards

What I did

What I noticed

Three things I am thankful for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Last page

✦

Gratitude won’t make life easier. It makes it visible. The same day that looked grey at breakfast turns out, looked at properly, to have been full of small gifts — most of them given by people who will never be thanked for them.

Start with those. Say thank you. Then keep going.

✦