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MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

THE POWER OF BEING THANKFUL

Even when things go wrong

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A story is told about a blind boy, who sat on the steps of a building with a hat at his feet. He held up a sign that said, "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy.

That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"

The man said, "I wrote what you said, but in a different way. I wrote, 'Today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it.'"

Both signs told people that the boy was blind, but the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people that they were very fortunate that they were not blind, and generated gratitude for sight—something we often take for granted—and compassion for the boy who could not see.

Should we be surprised that the second sign was more effective? Such is the power of gratitude.

The stories and articles in this issue of *Motivated* encourage us all to be more thankful for what we have, and to think differently and more positively. After reading through them, I am confident that your heart will fill with gratitude.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

The Power of Being Thankful

Even when things go wrong

By David Kadavy, adapted web reprint

Things weren't going Elise's way. She had had a great career in tech—she had worked for Apple. But she had a flu that wouldn't go away. It lingered for months on end, and she couldn't work anymore.

After spending much of her life savings, she still couldn't get over her "flu." She didn't know what was wrong. As if things weren't difficult enough, her close friend and roommate died of a brain tumor.

At 42 years old, Elise had to move back in with her parents.

"I felt like a complete failure," Elise told me. "If you don't have your health, you don't have anything." Watching television with her mother each night, she'd grip her hand, worried that she'd lose her parents, too.

But Elise focused on the things that were good in her life. "I felt incredibly thankful and grateful that I had these wonderful parents in my life." Her parents loved to cook. Eventually, they let her help, when she had the energy.

She also knew how to code. She started posting recipes online—hand-coded in HTML.

"Every day, I could choose between feeling sorry for myself, or I could just take a deep breath, go with it, and add a recipe to the website...."

Two years after moving back in with



her parents, Elise had a relapse. She was spending almost the entire day in bed, but she kept posting recipes. She connected with her readers and other food bloggers, but she kept quiet about the mysterious illness that threatened to drown her spirits.

Elise told herself, "I'm just going to keep my mind focused on everything that is good and joyful and loving and wonderful in this world and in my life, and see what I can do to bring some of that to other people."

"*SimplyRecipes* was my 'treasure place.' It was where there was just goodness and love.... Everything about that site for me was about love and family and this little bright spot in my life that—if I looked around—just seemed really, really, really dark."

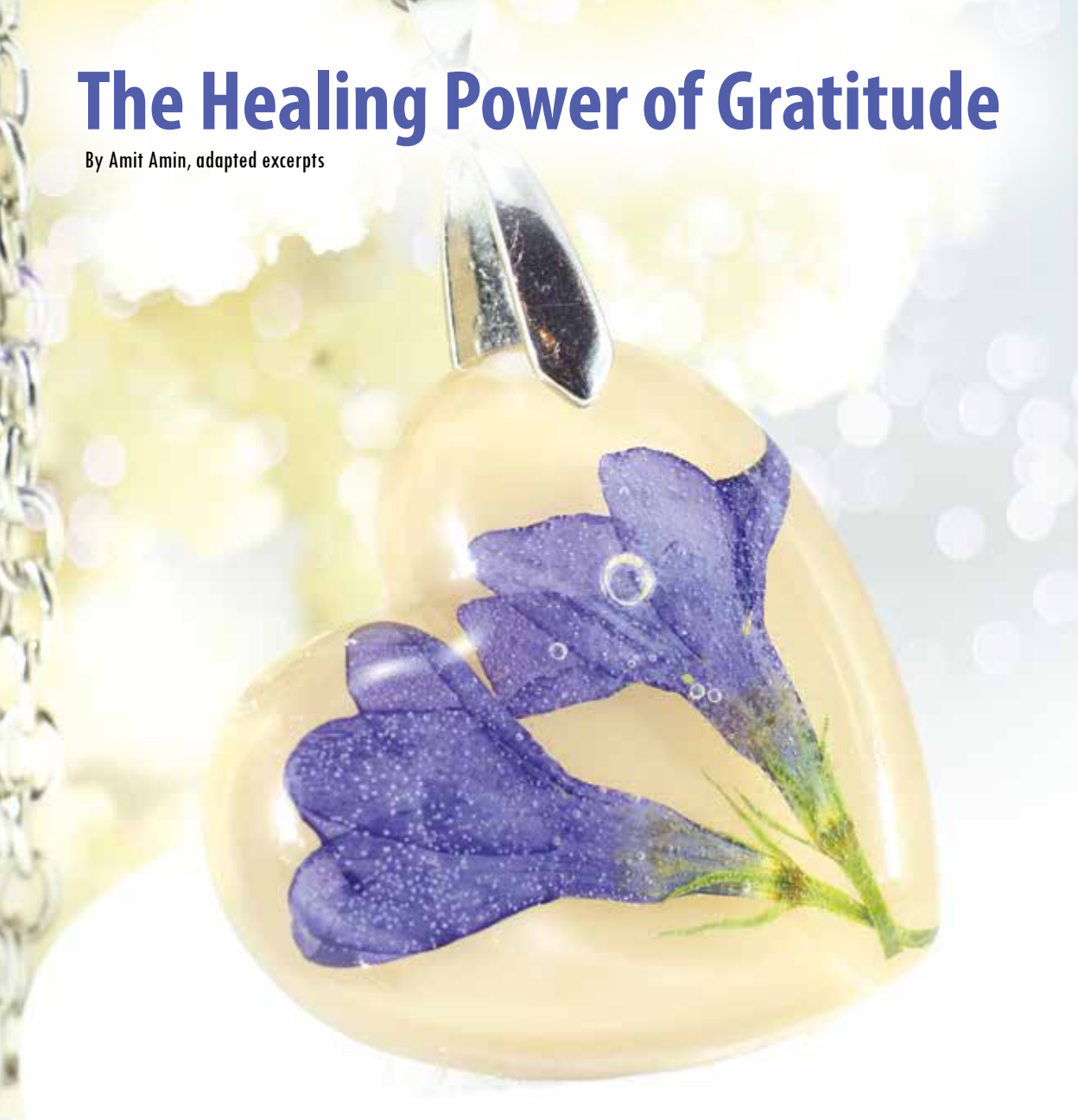
Today, a decade and a half later, Elise Bauer's *SimplyRecipes* is one of the most popular recipe sites on the Internet. Elise has personally posted about 1,600 recipes. And the illness that kept her in bed has passed.

If things aren't going your way, concentrate on the things that are good. Like a crack on a sidewalk, or a snowball tumbling down a hill, they'll grow and multiply. The next thing you know, the darkness will have been drowned out, and you may have built something great.

That's the power of being thankful. ■

The Healing Power of Gratitude

By Amit Amin, adapted excerpts



Do you want more from your life? More happiness? Better health? Deeper relationships? Increased productivity? What if I told you that gratitude can help you in all of those areas?

Gratitude makes us healthier.

Gratitude can't cure cancer (neither can positive-thinking), but it can strengthen

your physiological functioning.

Positive emotion improves health. The details are complicated, but the overall picture is not—if you want to improve your health, improve your mind. This confidence comes from 137 research studies.

Gratitude is a positive emotion. It's no far stretch that some of the benefits (e.g. better coping and management of

terminal conditions like cancer and HIV, faster recovery from certain medical procedures, positive changes in immune system functioning, more positive health behavior, etc.) apply to gratitude as well.

In fact, some recent science shows just that—those who engage in gratitude practices have been shown to feel less pain, go to the doctor less often, have lower blood pressure, and be less likely to develop a mental disorder.

Gratitude improves your sleep.

Gratitude increases sleep quality, reduces the time required to fall asleep, and increases sleep duration. Said differently, gratitude can help with insomnia.

The key is what's on our minds as we're trying to fall asleep. If it is worries about the kids, or anxiety about work, the level of stress in our body will increase, reducing sleep quality, keeping us awake, and cutting our sleep short.

If it's thinking about a few things we have to be grateful for today, it will induce the relaxation response, knock us out, and keep us that way.

Yes—gratitude is a (safe and free) sleep aid.

Gratitude makes you more likely to exercise.

In one 11-week study of 96 Americans, those who were instructed to keep a weekly gratitude journal exercised 40 minutes more per week than the control group. No other study has yet to replicate these results. It could be because other gratitude studies testing this effect have been much shorter—in the range of one to three weeks, or it could be because this

result was a fluke.

Once again, time will tell—but it would not surprise me if being grateful for one's health would increase one's tendency to want to protect it by exercising more.

Gratitude helps us relax.

Gratitude and positive emotion in general are among the strongest relaxants known to man. I was having trouble sleeping a few nights ago because I was too stressed and couldn't relax. I'll be honest, for the few minutes that I was able to hold feelings of gratitude I almost fell asleep, but holding feelings of gratitude is hard! In this case, too hard—and I ended up getting out of bed.

Gratitude may be just as or even more effective than relaxation methods such as deep breathing, but because it is also more difficult, is unfeasible as an actual relaxation technique. Think of it like tea—one or two cups help you relax—three or four make you want to empty your bladder. But it could just be me. Perhaps you'll find practices of gratitude more natural and easy.

Gratitude is no cure-all, but it is a massively underutilized tool for improving life-satisfaction and happiness. In the hustle of to-do lists and work deadlines, sometimes it's (too) easy to block out the details of the day, forgetting that each and every day holds precious gifts. From the air we breathe to the friendships we hold close, there is always something to be thankful for.

Are you a grateful person? Thankful for the good things—big and small—in your life? ■

The Gratitude Jar

By Nicola Jane Hobbs, adapted



Sometimes I wake up and my first thought is I didn't get enough sleep. I get to the fridge to find that I don't have enough fruit

to make my smoothie. And then I look at my to-do list and realize I don't have enough time to get even half way through it.

I get in my car and discover that I don't have enough gas to get to the yoga studio. Later, I come home to a letter from my bank manager telling me I don't earn enough for a mortgage.

And I spend the rest of the day feeling like I'm just not good enough.

The “Never Enough” Problem

Never good enough.

Never thin enough.

Never clever enough.

Never pretty enough.

Never rich enough.

Never successful enough.

We could all fill in the blank of “never _____ enough.”

We spend our lives calculating how much we have, how much we want, and how much we don't have. And we compare this to what everyone else has (or to the visions of perfection we get from the media)—a self-defeating cycle that will always end with the same conclusion: We are lacking. We never have enough. We never are enough.

But there is an answer to the “Never Enough” problem: Gratitude.

Gratitude is what makes the glass half full. It reminds you that you have enough and that you are enough.

I created a *Gratitude Jar* a couple of months ago. It started as nothing special, just an old-fashioned glass jar with a ribbon tied around the rim. Every day, sometimes several times a day, I write down what I am grateful for and add these “Gratitude Notes” to my jar.

And remarkable things have happened.

My outlook on life has shifted. I no longer feel like I am inadequate and lacking from the moment I wake up, or berate myself for not getting through my to-do list. I appreciate the food that I have, the time that I have, the people that I have.

Appreciating yourself for your strengths AND your imperfections (not in spite of them), allows you to find a sense of belonging and to feel more connected to life.

When I have a down day (we all have them!), a quick glance at my *Gratitude Jar* reminds me that life is full of wonderful things to be grateful for and I have the strength and support to overcome anything.

But having gratitude doesn't just happen! It's a practice we have to foster every day. You wouldn't expect a flower to grow without water, and you wouldn't expect your body to get healthier without nourishing it. So you can't expect to feel like you have enough and you are enough, without nurturing a gratitude for life and an appreciation of yourself.

Sometimes it's the simple things that make life wonderful: the beautiful sun rise and the blackberries at the bottom of the garden, to the smile from a stranger, or the encouraging text from a friend.

Taking time to appreciate those moments of joy helps you to cherish your life and yourself. ■

Gratitude Jar Ingredients:

- ✿ 1 jar/box
- ✿ Ribbon to decorate
- ✿ Paper for writing Gratitude Notes on
- ✿ Gratitude

TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE GRATEFUL

PARENTING
FROM THE HEART



By Charlotte Latvala, adapted

Want your children to be grateful for what they have? Here's a roundup of surprisingly simple ways—from sending thank-you notes to feeding pets—to teach them a sense of gratitude.

A few years ago, my son A.J., then 4, was obsessed with getting a robotic dog. Whenever we drove past a toy store, he started his pleading. Convinced that nothing would make him happier than that dog, my husband and I broke down and bought him the most expensive version on the market. “He will be so thankful when he opens this gift,” we told ourselves. And yes, A.J. was thrilled—for about a week. Then, we noticed the dog spent most of its time in his closet, as A.J. begged for other, even more expensive toys—a drum set, a riding mini-Jeep, a huge playhouse. “You’d think he’d be grateful for what he has,” I complained to my husband, Tony. “The more we give him, the less he appreciates it.”

The Art of Appreciation

Gratitude is one of the trickiest concepts

to teach toddlers and preschoolers—who are by nature self-centered—but one of the most important. Sure, thankful children are more polite and pleasant to be around, but there's more to it than that. By learning gratitude, they become sensitive to the feelings of others, developing empathy and other life skills along the way. Grateful kids look outside their one-person universe and understand that their parents and other people do things for them—prepare dinner, dole out hugs, buy toys, etc. On the flip side, kids who aren't taught to be grateful end up feeling entitled and perpetually disappointed.

When Do Kids Get It?

Still, children as young as 15 to 18 months can begin to grasp concepts that lead to gratitude. They start to understand that they are dependent; that Mom and Dad do things for them to make them happy (from playing peekaboo to handing out cookies) even if kids that age can't articulate their appreciation. By age 2 or 3, children can talk about being thankful

for specific objects, pets, and people. By age 4, children can understand being thankful not only for material things like toys, but for acts of kindness, love, and caring.

How to Teach It

Model it. Children model their parents in every way, so make sure you use “please” and “thank you” when you talk to them. (“Thanks for that hug—it made me feel great!”) Insist on their using the words, too. After all, good manners and gratitude overlap.

Work gratitude into your daily conversation. When you reinforce an idea frequently, it’s more likely to stick. One way to turn up the gratitude in your house is to pick a “thanking” part of the day. Two old-fashioned, tried-and-true ideas: Make saying what good things happened today part of the dinnertime conversation or make bedtime prayers part of your nightly routine.

Have kids help. It happens to all of us: You give your child a chore, but it’s too agonizing watching him a) take forever to clear the table or b) make a huge mess mixing the pancake batter. The temptation is always to step in and do it yourself. But the more you do for them, the less they appreciate your efforts. By participating in simple household chores like feeding the dog or stacking dirty dishes on the counter, kids realize that all these things take effort.

Find a goodwill project. That doesn’t mean you need to drag your toddler off to a soup kitchen every week. Instead, figure out some way he can actively participate in helping someone else, even if it’s as simple as making cupcakes for a sick

neighbor. As you’re stirring the batter or adding sprinkles, talk about how you’re making them for a special person, and how happy the recipient will be.

Encourage generosity. Frequently donate toys and clothes to less fortunate kids. When children see you giving to others, it inspires them to go through their own closets and give something special to those in need, as well.

Insist on thank-you notes. Always have children write thank-you notes for gifts. When they are toddlers, the cards may just be scribbles with your own thank-you attached. As they grow, they become drawings, then longer letters. Younger children can even dictate the letter while you write. Just the act of saying out loud why they loved the gift will make them feel more grateful.


Practice saying no. Of course kids ask for toys, video games, and candy—sometimes on an hourly basis. It’s difficult, if not impossible, to feel grateful when your every whim is granted. Saying no a lot makes saying yes that much sweeter.

Be patient. You can’t expect gratitude to develop overnight—it requires weeks, months, even years of reinforcement. But trust me, you will be rewarded. Four years after the robotic dog fiasco, I can now report that A.J. is a grateful, cheerful boy who delights in making other people happy. Sure, he asks for lots of gifts during the holidays, but he is just as excited about requesting gifts for his sisters. “They’ve both been good girls and deserve something special,” he’ll say.

That’s when I’m the one feeling grateful. ■

Give Thanks in All Things!

All things? You're kidding, right?

A wooden canoe is shown on a dark, stormy sea with white-capped waves. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, creating a dramatic and somewhat ominous atmosphere. The canoe is positioned in the lower half of the frame, facing towards the right.

By Susan Stamberg, adapted

Saint Paul said, “In everything, give thanks.”

Yea, right? Who does that? Give thanks for everything? Really? You’ve got to be kidding,

For pleasures? Well, of course! For friends and family and good times? Yes. Yes. Of course, I give thanks for all those things and lots more.

That I have a job and my health? Yes. That the children seem to be doing well and the grandchildren are healthy and happy? Yes, yes. For all of this, I give thanks.

How could I not? But give thanks for everything? Come on!

Who does that? Who gives thanks for pain? For disappointments? Like what two friends of mine must be feeling this morning? Their two-year-old daughter is being buried today after losing her two-year fight with leukemia.

Talk about a disappointment. Talk about a confusing and unfair turn of affairs. The audacity to suggest, “In everything, give thanks!” I hold my grandkids and smother their faces with my kisses and affection and think, “What if we were

having to bury one of them today?” Even the thought is repulsive.

And yet, even as I think this, my mind goes back almost two decades ago. I was giving the eulogy at my father’s unexpected passing. I was trying to pretend I was able to handle it. I pretended to be strong and to have strong faith. I succeeded in holding it together for the weaker souls around me. But, all the while, I was raging inside. Screaming out at the unfairness of life. Cursing fate, and close to cursing God, and doing almost anything inside but give thanks. I had nothing for which I felt thankful.

So, how does anybody make sense of the senselessness of Saint Paul’s words? How do you give thanks in all things? For all things?

Maybe there’s help here...

1. Deny not what you feel right now.

If you’re in no mood to be thankful for all things, no need to pretend otherwise. Know what it is you’re feeling right now about the situation you face. Give it a name. But, by all means, do not pretend to be thankful if you’re not.

2. Accept that you are not now at the place where you can give thanks for much of anything. Do not shame yourself either. Accept instead who you are and what you’re feeling now.

3. And, give yourself time. Time is a great healer of all wounds. I badly burned my hand as a child, for example, when I disobeyed my mother’s warning to not put my hand on the electric stove. It was still scorching hot, she warned, even though the glow had turned gray. In

defiance, however, I did anyway. I cannot tell you how excruciatingly painful it was, and it lasted for days. But, in time, it subsided and my hand healed. So will you.

4. This I know. You cannot imagine it now but, if you will permit yourself to feel whatever it is you feel today... if you will not judge yourself for feeling less thankful than Saint Paul, you may... in time... begin to see the hand of the Divine in and through everything that happens. This is what happened to me.

Something began to change in how I felt. There came a day when I found myself giving thanks for the very thing that once caused me the greatest trouble... the deepest sorrow.

There is a mystery here that I can neither explain nor explore. I just know it to be true. A mystery that I turned away from in fear and trembling, with questions and confusion; but, and this is the irony, what I turned away from at first, I turned toward later. I cannot explain this. I just know it to be so.

If you are not able to give thanks, then...

Know today... you don’t have to pretend. You do not have to wear a smile you really don’t feel, just so everybody else will be comfortable. Know that it’s okay to not feel so grateful today...

My guess is, for some of you, just knowing this is enough to make you feel a little more grateful...

It is, isn’t it? Enough, I mean.

Think of this as the first note in what will someday be a song...

A song of thanksgiving. ■

Thankfulness

NOTABLE
QUOTES



Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for.—**Zig Ziglar**

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.—**William Arthur Ward**

When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around.
—**Willie Nelson**

Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough.—**Oprah Winfrey**

“Thank you” is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. “Thank you” expresses extreme gratitude, humility, and understanding.
—**Alice Walker**

Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts.—**Henri Frederic Amiel**

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.—**Albert Einstein**

Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.—**Charles Dickens**

None is more impoverished than the one who has no gratitude. Gratitude is a currency that we can mint for ourselves, and spend without fear of bankruptcy.
—**Fred De Witt Van Amburgh**

Some people grumble that roses have thorns; I am grateful that thorns have roses.—**Alphonse Karr**

