

THE ONE YEAR®
DAILY ACTS OF

Gratitude

DEVOTIONAL

365 INSPIRATIONS TO ENCOURAGE A
LIFE OF THANKFULNESS



JULIE FISK | KENDRA ROEHL | KRISTIN DEMERY

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Daily Acts of Gratitude Devotional

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**365 INSPIRATIONS TO ENCOURAGE A
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The One Year® Daily Acts of Gratitude Devotional: 365 Inspirations to Encourage a Life of Thankfulness

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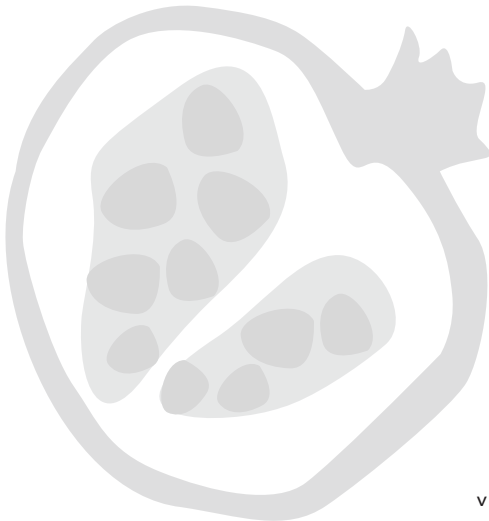
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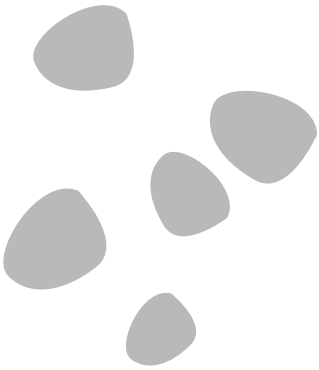


To our wildest cheerleaders:

Aaron, Kyle, and Tim.

*Your unwavering support, vision for what could be,
and superior math skills are why anything we've ever written
has had the chance to be published. We love you.*





Introduction

I (Kendra) looked down the row at my children. We'd just listened to a sermon on the importance of gratitude, and although I fully agreed with everything the impassioned pastor said, I couldn't help but wonder: *Gratitude? Sure, that sounds good, but how do I incorporate those ideas on a practical level? How can I be more grateful for every part of my real, messy life? How might an increase in gratitude change me, my family, and my community?*

Over the years, Kristin, Julie, and I have written about kindness, friendship, and the power of words, sharing our own efforts to intentionally incorporate those principles into our lives. And though we have experienced peace and purpose, we knew there was still work to be done in our hearts. We felt anxious, tired, and a little stressed out, but the hope of “more”—more Jesus, more peace, more appreciation for the people and things in our lives that often go overlooked—tugged at us.

The benefits of having a grateful spirit are undeniable. We will suffer fewer aches and pains and less stress, and we won't experience toxic emotions like envy, resentment, and regret quite as often. Gratitude has been shown to increase happiness, reduce depression, and foster resilience, and it can even help us to overcome trauma. On top of that, grateful people tend to be more empathetic and to have healthier self-esteem and improved sleep. They are even better equipped to resist making social comparisons and instead can appreciate other people's accomplishments.* I don't know about you, but these are all things I want more of in my life.

We know that creating any new habit can be challenging, and developing a

*Amy Morin, “7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude,” *Psychology Today*, April 3, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201504/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-gratitude>.

habit of gratitude is no different. In the busyness of friend and family activities, work commitments, social obligations, and a never-ending to-do list, making and finding the time to help ourselves and our families become more grateful, loving, and kind feels overwhelming.

Yet Kristin, Julie, and I often realize that when we are struggling with something—in this instance, finding ways to be thankful—it's time to pay attention. We wrote this book as we began imperfectly incorporating a habit of gratitude into our own everyday lives. As we intentionally began looking for opportunities to be thankful, our perspectives shifted and our eyes were open to see all of the good God is doing every day.

One of the most beautiful gifts of practicing gratitude and living out thankfulness is that we get to stop focusing only on ourselves. Instead, we become better equipped to see the needs of others while still being thankful for what we have at the same time.

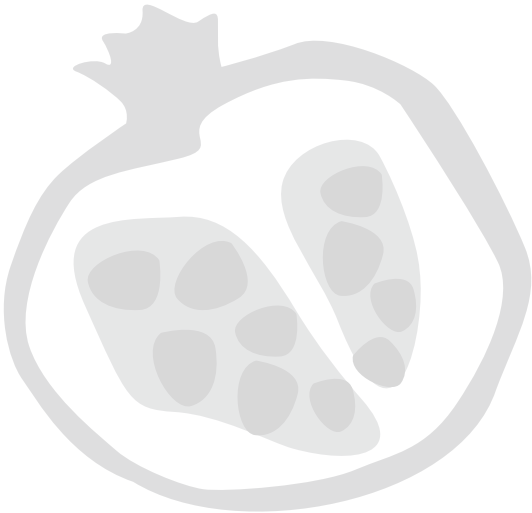
Throughout our gratefulness journey, we rediscovered the excitement of being on mission with God in a million ordinary ways. We learned that once we were intentional in expressing gratitude, it began to spill out onto those around us in the most humbling and beautiful ways.

So, in the pages of this book, we invite you to take the first steps toward incorporating gratitude into your daily life. While it may be challenging at first, we promise you won't regret it.

Kendra, Kristin, and Julie



January



JANUARY 1

Why Be Grateful?

“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.” The second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” No other commandment is greater than these.

MARK 12:30-31

“Why be grateful?” my husband asked one morning as we talked about writing a devotional on gratitude.

I thought for a moment, surprisingly stumped.

“I’m not sure,” I said with a laugh. “I think there are lots of reasons—God asks us to, it’s good for us, I *really* want our kids to have a good example of being grateful. Just to list a few.”

He nodded in agreement. “That’s for sure.” We both chuckled.

As we finished our devotions and I went about my day, I kept pondering his question. *Why should we be grateful?* I prayerfully thought, bringing my question to God.

And as I listened for an answer, I realized thankfulness pulls me out of myself and away from focusing on my life and problems. It frees me up to love others without strings attached. It shifts my focus so I can see another person’s needs and have empathy for what they may be going through in life. And it reminds me to appreciate all I have, even the simplest of things.

Jesus’ two greatest commandments were to love God and to love others. Everything else we do as Christians hinges on these two things. When we go throughout our days with an attitude of gratitude for the things we have, the people we love, and the simple joys in our lives, we will be more inclined to show love to God and others because we won’t be jealous or angry about what others have or stingy with our own possessions. With a grateful heart, we’re able to recognize that there is abundance in the Kingdom of God, leaving us free to share all that we have.

Kendra

Today’s Act of Gratitude

What might God be inviting you into as you consider gratitude this year? Think about three ways thankfulness could change your perspective and how you love God and those around you.

JANUARY 2

Embracing Feedback

*People who accept discipline are on the pathway to life,
but those who ignore correction will go astray.*

PROVERBS 10:17

Ping.

The gentle chime heralded the arrival of an email I was slightly dreading: my student evaluations had come in and were available via a single mouse click.

My cursor hovered over the link to instantaneous statistics in bar graphs and percentages, comparing my teaching to that of other faculty on campus. At a granular level, they would measure student outcomes and my ability to engage learners in the day-to-day grind through the material.

I hate the seemingly long moments between receiving these emails and clicking the link. As a classic overachiever with tendencies toward people-pleasing, I simultaneously long for and dread feedback. My heart races as old insecurities and questions of worth flood my brain, and persistent lies try to resurrect themselves, insisting that I entertain them yet again.

I've learned to pray over feedback (teaching or otherwise), asking first that Jesus would help me filter it through the lens of scriptural truth, but also that I'd receive it with an open heart and mind, without taking offense or becoming defensive.

And as much as I hate receiving anything but the highest ratings, I'm grateful for harder feedback—information that reveals blind spots or shortcomings, suggestions for what I've learned to call growth opportunities. Truthful feedback highlighting a weak spot means someone was brave enough to risk offending or angering me because they see my potential and care enough about my future growth to speak up.

As a woman who loves and follows Jesus, I am continually being refined in my faith and other areas of life—whether that be professionally or in my relationships. If I'm not actively growing—listening to those who love me enough to offer correction—then I'm stagnant, at risk of going astray from the best God has for me and what he's called me to do. Admittedly, this is hard. But the resulting growth and improvement are so worth it.

Julie

Today's Act of Gratitude

As we start this new year, take a moment to gratefully consider a piece of honest feedback given in good faith. What change do you need to make?

JANUARY 3

The Morning Shift

*The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

My friend Andy told me that he begins each day with gratitude. For the last several years, he's made it his practice: before he emerges from bed each morning, he sits on the edge and thinks about what he's grateful for. By the time his feet touch the floor, he's already listed several items, including his wife and young children, his business and clients, and his health.

Starting the morning with gratitude focuses him on what matters. He's not grumbling that his preschooler woke him up after a night terror, or that he has a lot to accomplish, or that his alarm sounded too early. Instead of focusing on what has gone wrong, he focuses on what is right.

If I'm honest, the first thing I usually do in the morning is reach for my phone, if only to check the time. Intrigued by my friend's idea, I decided to try it for myself. The night before my experiment began, I wrote GRATEFUL in capital letters on a sticky note and placed it on my phone.

When I woke up, the little reminder was just the push I needed to find reasons to be grateful instead of focusing on my to-do list. Instead of complaining to myself about how chilly the room was in the predawn hours, I was thankful for the fuzzy slippers next to the bed. Instead of becoming impatient with how long my coffee took to brew, I spent those few minutes switching on a heating pad and starting up the fireplace so I'd have a cozy nook to sit in once the coffee was finished. Instead of wishing my daughter had slept just a little bit longer so that I could complete my early morning tasks, I curled her into my side and pulled up a fuzzy blanket as we admired the pink and purple hues of the rising sun.

Within a few days of incorporating my sticky note system, I found myself looking forward to the peaceful daybreaks. The morning shift was just what I needed to refocus my day.

Kristin

Today's Act of Gratitude

Place the word "grateful" on your phone or mirror so that you see it first thing in the morning. Then, list three things for which you're grateful.

JANUARY 4

Honest Emotions

*Be happy with those who are happy, and
weep with those who weep.*

ROMANS 12:15

“I’m so sad,” a dear friend admitted to me recently over the phone. We had been discussing a dream we were pursuing together, and things weren’t working out as we’d hoped.

“I am too,” I admitted, feeling relieved by her honesty that allowed me the opportunity to express the heaviness in my heart as well. “What should we do?” I asked.

“I have a few ideas,” she answered.

We spent the next hour brainstorming ways to keep pursuing our goals together while adjusting and shifting our next steps. I hung up, encouraged and grateful for a friend that I could be truthful with, not having to hide or diminish my feelings. And although nothing had changed—not yet anyway—simply being able to vent and then look for ways to improve our approach felt good because I knew I wasn’t alone in my discouragement.

Hiding harder emotions, especially disappointments, is something we often feel pressure to do. Statements like “It’s no big deal,” “I wasn’t that interested,” or “I’m fine” are all ways we try to dismiss letting others know when we’re sad or discouraged.

But God gave us our emotions, all of them. And to deny our feelings, especially the more troubling ones, is to deny what God has given us to feel as human beings. We’ve all had disappointment, pain, and sadness, and when we share it with others, they can help us carry our burden. It is what God wants us to do. We are to “be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.” To do that, we have to be honest with one another about our joys but also our sorrows and disappointments. It’s not always comfortable, but once we take a chance and let others know how we’re feeling, it allows them the opportunity to show us support and offer comfort. And I am thankful that this is God’s heart for all of us.

Kendra

Today's Act of Gratitude

Share a recent disappointment with a trusted friend and ask for their prayers. Express your gratitude to God for providing such a friend.

JANUARY 5

No Such Thing as Bad Weather

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.

DANIEL 2:20-22, ESV

Surveying the sled tracks that skirted the playground and led directly to the trees edging the bottom of the backyard, I hesitated. I'm more of a read-books-in-front-of-a-cozy-fire mom than a go-sledding-in-freezing-temperatures mom.

But my kids had been begging me to go sledding, and in a weak moment, I'd finally said the magic words: "Okay, I'll go sledding tomorrow."

Well, tomorrow had arrived, and I planned to make good on my promise.

All three of my children came to life when I started to layer up indoors, and they raced to get on their own gear. By the time I finished adding dry-wicking clothes, a heavy coat and snow pants, and cozy boots and gloves, I was overheated. As I made my way to the backyard, I was reminded of a Scandinavian saying: "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes." And as I zoomed down our backyard hill, I couldn't help but agree.

Because I'd forgotten how magical it all was: the sparkling snow, the joy on my kids' faces, the excellent workout of trudging up a hill again and again. Taking a moment to breathe in the crisp air, I flopped into the snow and surveyed my surroundings. I took note of the swaying trees, the flitting birds, and the whispering wind. The world felt reverently still, almost holy, the silence broken only by my kids' happy shouts.

There is beauty to be seen in all seasons—in nature and life—if only we're willing to look for it. Yet our preparation is vital. Just like I need to put on the proper layers of clothing for sledding downhill, I need to store God's Word in my heart. That way, when storms or hard seasons come, I'll be ready to thank God for preparing the way.

Kristin

Today's Act of Gratitude

Spend time outside. Take notice of five things you usually wouldn't pay attention to, thanking God for them.

JANUARY 6

The Heart of Worship

With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever, for your love for me is very great. You have rescued me from the depths of death.

PSALM 86:12-13

Having plugged my destination into the navigation system, I readjusted my seat, turned on the seat warmers, and took a deep breath. I had a ninety-minute drive before me on twisty country roads, and I was alone, a relatively rare occurrence for such a long drive.

What to do with myself? I mentally ran through several podcasts and novels I had been listening to before deciding on a favorite playlist. And as I pulled out of the parking lot, having turned my car toward home, I cranked the volume to levels no mother would approve of and began belting out the lyrics in all of my tone-deaf and off-key glory.

When I tell people I cannot sing, they assume I'm being falsely modest or, at the very least, exaggerating the utter woefulness of my singing voice. And I'm too embarrassed to prove to them just how honest I am when I confess that I. Cannot. Sing. I'm awful. You don't want to stand next to me at church because I'll pull you out of key and off the beat if I sing above a whisper.

Despite all of this, I love singing. I have a deep, desperate, lifelong desire to sing beautifully, especially to God. And I know it's something I won't accomplish this side of heaven.

But this is the thing: it is my heart that God will find beautiful when I loudly croak along to worship songs. He is not put off by my inability to find the key or the beat. He cares more about my thoughts, motivations, and intentions. These are the things that reveal my love and awe for him. When I pause amid busy days to acknowledge the enormity of what God has done for me, that is what he finds pleasing, no matter the sound of my voice.

Julie

Today's Act of Gratitude

Sing a song of worship to God, turning off all distractions so that your heart is fully engaged. "Amazing Grace" is a lovely choice if you don't have a favorite.

JANUARY 7

Secure in God's Love

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.

ROMANS 8:38

As we were driving home from school, my daughter Jasmine exclaimed, “Mom, Sara is so boy crazy. I feel bad. She has a different boyfriend every week. She’s always talking about a new boy that she likes, and she’s only in sixth grade.”

I nodded, understanding. “And why do you think that is?” I asked.

Jasmine shrugged. “I’m not sure. Why do you think?”

“Well,” I responded, “Sara only has her mom. Her dad was an alcoholic and doesn’t have much to do with her, and her sister died last year. She’s been through a lot in her life. Sometimes when people are looking for love, they think romantic love will fill them up when really, they’re probably just missing those other people and relationships.”

“That makes sense,” Jasmine said.

“Just be a good friend to her,” I advised. “Encourage her that she doesn’t need a boyfriend to know that she’s loved and valued. Let her know that you are there for her.”

“Okay. I will,” Jasmine responded.

It can be easy to look at the surface of someone’s life and make judgments about them based on their behavior or choices, but often if we take a step back, we can see a trail of pain or hurt that led them there.

Everyone wants to be loved. God put that desire in us, and it is good. But sometimes that desire gets twisted when we experience pain or hurt from those around us, and we can go looking to gain love in ways that aren’t healthy. The good news is, whether the people in our lives love us or not, God’s love for us never changes. It never ceases. And there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from his love! We are always and forever secure in him and his love for us.

Kendra

Today's Act of Gratitude

Thank God for all the ways that he’s shown his love to you.