

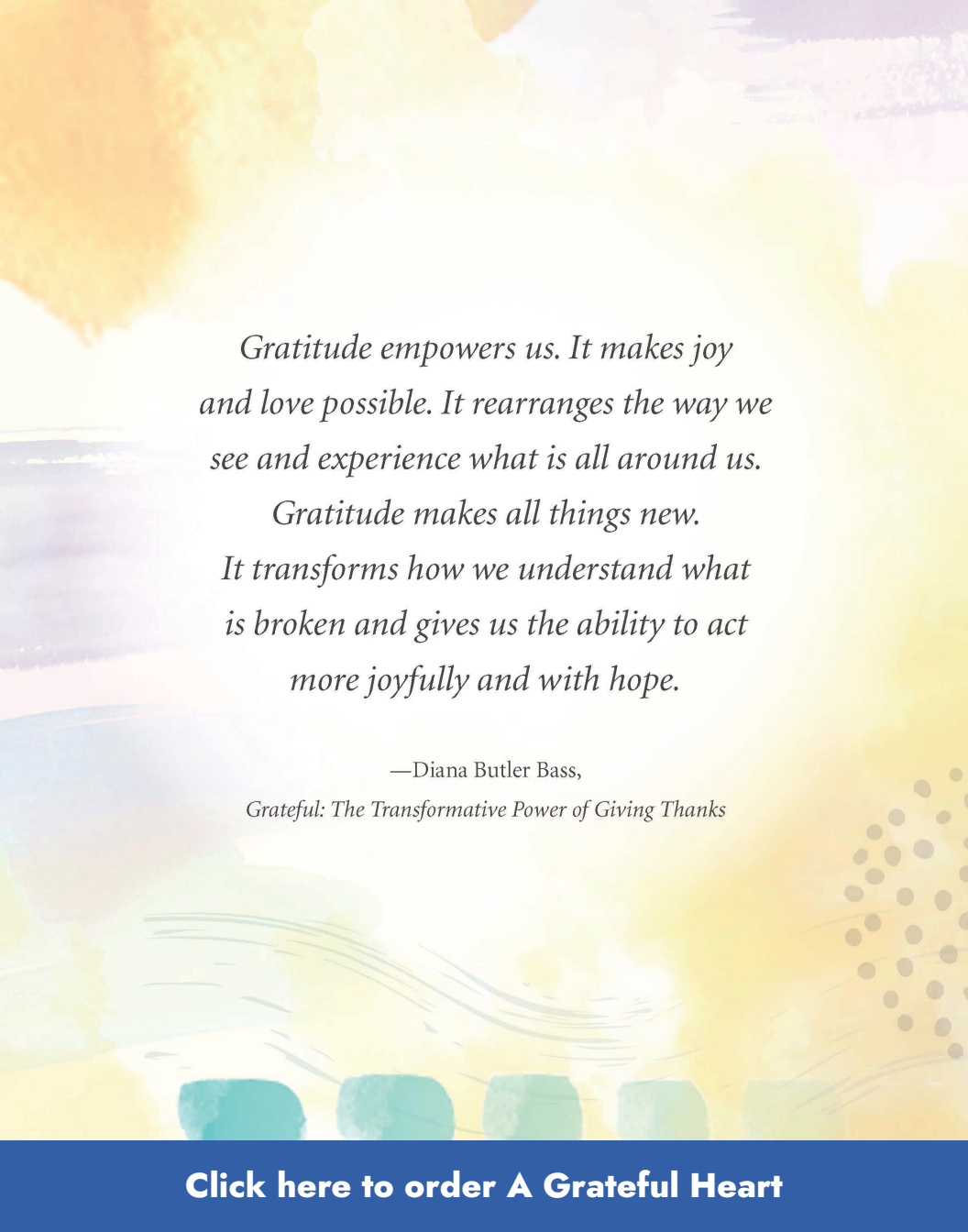


A GRATEFUL HEART

DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL

EDITORS OF GUIDEPOSTS

**FREE
EXCERPT**



*Gratitude empowers us. It makes joy
and love possible. It rearranges the way we
see and experience what is all around us.*

*Gratitude makes all things new.
It transforms how we understand what
is broken and gives us the ability to act
more joyfully and with hope.*

—Diana Butler Bass,

Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks

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GRATITUDE IN BLOOM

For there is hope of a tree, If it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
And that the tender branch thereof will not cease.

—Job 14:7 (ASV)

A SERIES OF late-winter snowstorms had pummeled the Northeast, and the damage to the trees was incalculable. On my morning jog through the park, I was dismayed to see so many fruit trees injured, pruned by nature before they had bloomed. I picked up a branch of a cherry tree that would have been covered by blossoms in another month. I wasn't sure what I would do with it. I couldn't see any buds on the naked branch. Still, out of some instinct to salvage something from the debris, I carried it with me. The branch still had ice on it when I brought it inside. I filled our biggest pitcher with warm water and put the branch in it. "I don't think anything will happen," I told my wife. But four days later, delicate pink-white flowers appeared on the branch and new buds on the tips.

Gratitude is like that. It doesn't need much to flourish. One only needs to nurture it and watch it bloom. —Rick Hamlin

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*"We must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious
faith in the future."*

—Martin Luther King Jr.

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Date | |

Do you yearn for a heart that overflows with gratitude, but you simply don't know how to begin? Consider starting your day by quieting your mind and slowing your breathing. Then, thank God for whatever comes to mind. Beginning each day in thanksgiving is the first step to nourishing gratitude in your soul.

Gracious God, help me to remember that You are my vine. As I start on this journey, I entrust You with my heart, my mind, and my soul. Make me a person of gratitude. Amen

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BASKETS OF LOVE

And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

—Matthew 22:39 (NIV)

I WILL NEVER forget the jovial woman who knocked at the door with a basket in hand. “Hello, I’m Cookie,” she said. “Welcome to the neighborhood!” My mother invited her inside, and Cookie placed the basket, filled with homemade jam, cookies, and fruit, on our kitchen table. She instantly made us feel welcome. At Christmastime, Cookie delivered goodies to our home and the homes of nearby neighbors. She loved the Lord and lived out her faith through her gift of hospitality and her work with charities.

Inspired by Cookie, I asked myself a few years ago, When was the last time I brought a gesture of love to a newcomer or longtime neighbor? When life seems too busy to bake, I can purchase cookies or bread, add a bag of coffee, tuck them in a gift bag, and make my delivery. I can include a note with a Scripture to give to someone who needs hope or is lonely and needs a touch of God’s love. Cookie was the best of neighbors. I’m grateful to her and the examples of kindness she modeled. —Kathleen Ruckman

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“Have you had kindness shown? Pass it on, pass it on! ’Twas not giv’n for thee alone, Pass it on, pass it on! Let it travel down the years, Let it wipe another’s tears; Till in heav’n the deed appears, Pass it on, pass it on!”

—Henry Burton

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Has someone modeled kindness, generosity, or hospitality for you? How did you feel being on the receiving end? Did you feel inspired to “pass it on,” and how did you act on the inspiration?

Gracious God, You bring giving people into my life. Let me be grateful for their bounty of kindness and pass on their good deeds in Your name.

Amen

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How to Get Started

Adopting an attitude of gratitude might seem easy enough, but like any life change, it requires making a commitment. At first, choose a few activities that will be easy to achieve. Early victories will make it easier to build on your success.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **BEGIN THE DAY GIVING THANKS.** The moment you open your eyes in the morning, pause and let yourself appreciate the God-given moment. Say the words *thank you*. Breathe in, deeply, then slowly exhale. Think about the wonder of what just occurred, the oxygen in the air, and how the simple act of breathing allows your whole body to function.
- **PAUSE TO PRAY.** Set an alarm on your phone for a certain time each day and stop what you're doing to say a prayer for the people you're thankful for in your life. Be specific about how they help you. Stretch your mind to think of folks you might normally overlook.
- **TAKE A NEW PATH.** At least once a week, do something totally new. It could be as simple as taking a different route on a regular trip. Science shows that even this small act stimulates our neurons.
- **WRITE A THANK-YOU NOTE.** Set a goal of sending one note a week. Buy some pretty stationery. Think about what a treat your note will be for the person receiving it. And the actual act of putting your gratitude in words will benefit you as well.
- **CHANGE YOUR FOCUS.** When you are facing a challenge, try to find a way to think of it differently. Remind yourself of other obstacles you've overcome in your life and that you are not alone.

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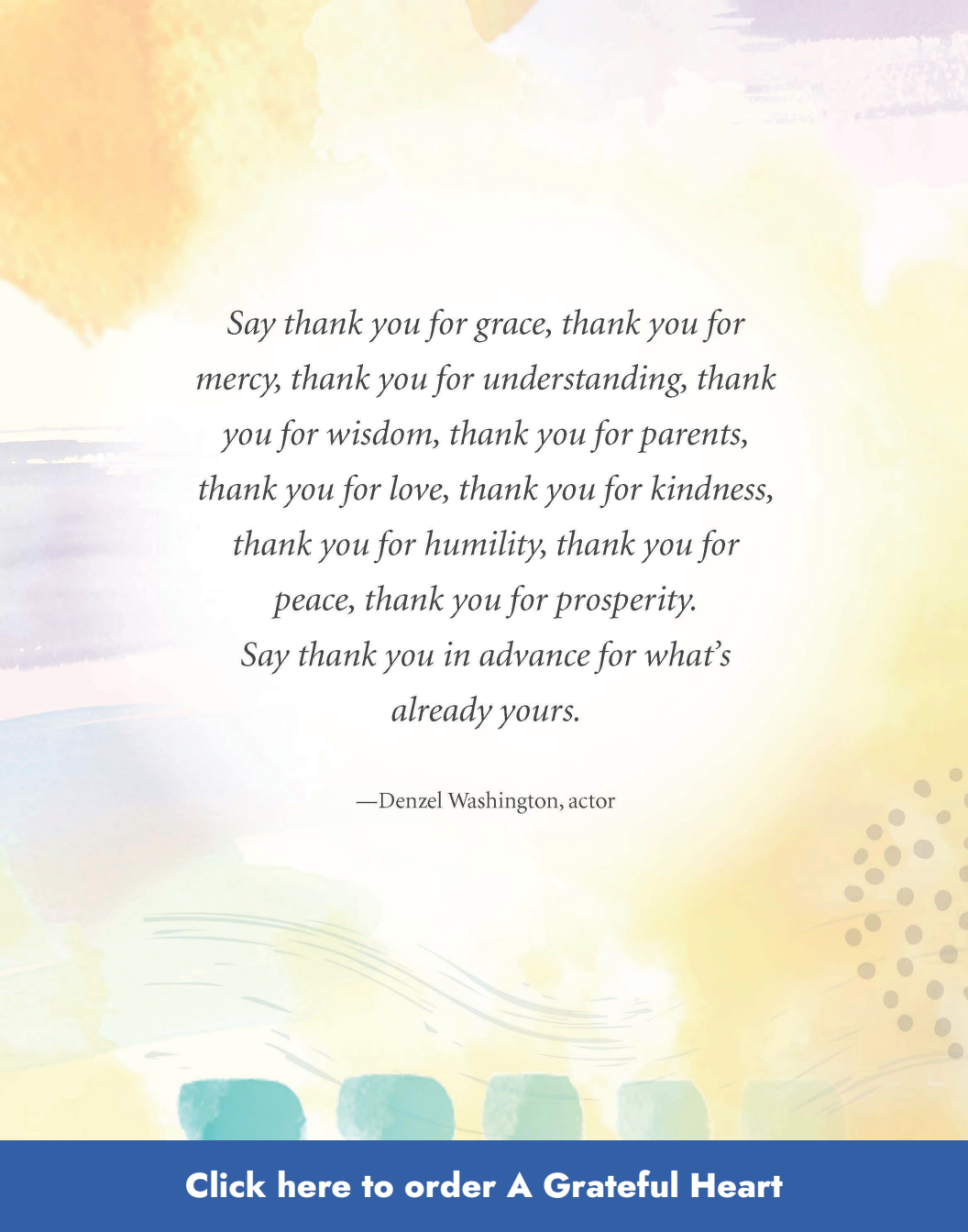
Prayer of Thanksgiving

Prayer allows you to quiet your mind, to direct your thoughts, and put into words all that you are thankful for. Just as when we take time to thank others in our lives, your spirit will feel lighter for having thanked God. There's a release that comes from expressing appreciation, a reminder that for all of life's challenges, there is much to be grateful for. A prayer of thanksgiving also acknowledges that you are not in control, that everything good comes from God. Here's a prayer, author unknown, to spark your own reflections:

THANKFUL FOR TODAY

We thank You, God,
for creating the world
and for preserving it until now.
We thank You for the regular return of day and night,
and of the seasons,
and for the dependability of nature and of time.
We thank You for memory,
which enables us to build on the experiences of the past;
for imagination,
which admits us to a wider world than we could otherwise know;
and for foresight,
by which we plan for the future.
We thank You for Your patience with us in our failings;
for friends and family with whom we can celebrate our successes;
and for those closest to us who support us in our times of need.
We ask this in Your name.
Amen

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*Say thank you for grace, thank you for
mercy, thank you for understanding, thank
you for wisdom, thank you for parents,
thank you for love, thank you for kindness,
thank you for humility, thank you for
peace, thank you for prosperity.
Say thank you in advance for what's
already yours.*

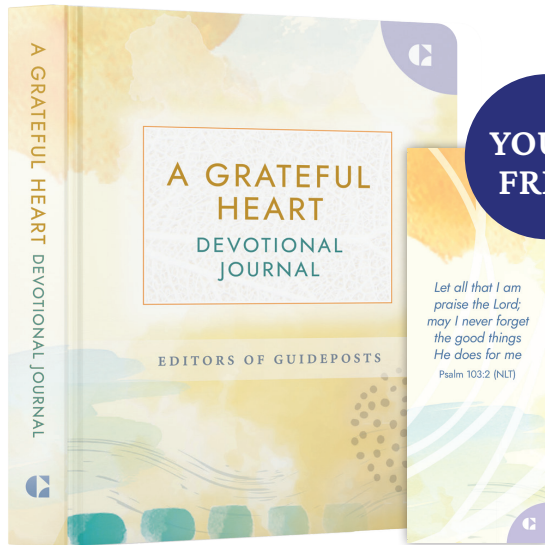
—Denzel Washington, actor

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