

Five Gratitude Practices

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Five gratitude practices are detailed in author Johan Paquette's, *Real Happiness: Proven Paths for Contentment, Peace & Well-Being*. It is recommended that we engage in a couple different types of gratitude practices. This helps to keep the practice fresh and interesting, as well as to prevent burn-out. One or two of these will likely appeal to you. Try to incorporate the additional practices occasionally, or read my blog post regarding Simple Gratitude Practices to find additional ways to incorporate the happiness and health improving practice of gratitude into your weekly schedule.

As your practice of these exercises continues, notice how your overall attitude changes. It's possible that with time you'll be seeking out things you are grateful for so that you can record them in your journal.

Gratitude Practice #1 – THREE GOOD THINGS

This can be one of the most effective of all the gratitude methods you will use. It's helpful to use a gratitude journal of some type, whether it be a physical notebook or an electronic journal. Paquette suggests that it's important to write down our "good things," and that at least two weeks are spent in this practice. Feel free to use this method on an on-going basis.

INSTRUCTIONS: Every night for the next two weeks prior to going to bed, write down "three things that went well for you that day." They can include major things that happen during a day as well as small occurrences that are of significance. They don't need to be monumental events. After recording each positive event, it's vital to address why this good thing happened, including your contribution to why it happened.

Author Johan Paquette offers this example. Perhaps you notice the beautiful day (this is the good thing that happened). Your contribution may be that rather than being inside your head and consumed by the day's agenda, you took the time to be mindful of your surroundings and notice the weather.

Paquette emphasizes that it's important to write about things that happened on that specific day, rather than just things you are generally thankful for. This exercise will be more beneficial if you do not repeat any of the events for however long you engage in this practice. By doing this exercise at the end of a day, it's not a great way to end the day on a positive note, but it is also possible that it will enable you to sleep better.

Gratitude Practice #2 – THE GRATITUDE JOURNAL

This exercise emphasizes the more general sources of gratitude in our lives. The research of Robert Emmons, a gratitude expert, has shown that happiness may be boosted considerably by this gratitude practice. It's possible that this exercise can reduce your stress level and improve your health.

This gratitude practice is best engaged in on a weekly basis.

INSTRUCTIONS: This practice is designed to create greater awareness of where your focus is on a daily basis. There are often many things in our daily lives for which we are grateful. Some are small, and some are great, but all are significant. It can be helpful to focus on things that you might usually take for granted. As you think about the past week, write five things for which you are thankful. Do this exercise once a week for eight weeks. Following these eight weeks, notice how your attitude, mood or level of happiness has changed.

This exercise helps us focus on the good and positive parts of our lives. Over time, this practice will help counteract the negative bias of our brain and improve our well-being. Be careful not to overdo it with this exercise because it could lead to burnout. Doing this once or twice per week has been shown to be more beneficial than on a daily basis.

Gratitude Practice #3 – OUR INNER GEORGE BAILEY

It's a Wonderful Life is a movie that is often aired on television during the holiday season. It is a good movie as well as an example of how important gratitude is in our lives. The movie also provides an example of how we might practice gratitude.

The main character is George Bailey who becomes suicidal due to a financial crisis. He decides to end his life so that his family will benefit from the life insurance money. A guardian angel stops George and proceeds to show him what the lives of the people he has loved and helped will be like without him. He sees his wife, brother and hometown suffering without his help. His beautiful children were never born. The guardian angel gives George the gift of seeing a world in which blessings have never come to pass because he was not there to enable them. The blessings were unique because of George's existence and efforts.

This practice, which first encourages us to acknowledge our blessings, leads us to imagine what life would be like if certain people in our lives had never entered our lives at all. Research has shown that this exercise can result in higher relationship satisfaction and feelings of happiness. This practice can remind us of the special aspects of our relationships, while giving us renewed appreciation for the wonderful people or circumstances in our lives.

INSTRUCTIONS: Think about the happiness and joy that one particular person, opportunity, or experience gives you. Briefly consider all the feelings that arise when you think about this. Write down all the ways in which this person or experience might not have crossed your path or happened to you. For example, if you met your spouse at a party, consider all the events that may have interfered with this meeting if it weren't for perfect timing.

Once you have indulged in these thoughts and feelings, consider what your life might be like if that person, opportunity or experience had never come into your life. How different would your life or life circumstances be? What would be missing? Like a rock thrown into a pond, what ripples effects would not have occurred? Record these things in your journal.

Research has proved this technique to have powerful effects on our happiness and life satisfaction (Paquette, 2015). It is said that we often don't know what we've got until it's gone. When we do this exercise, and write about specific details, we get a glimpse into what might not have been and rekindle the appreciation for the good fortunes we have in our lives.

Gratitude Practice #4 – REFLECTING ON HARDSHIP

Most gratitude practices focus on the good things that have come into our lives. Another way to increase our appreciation for the wonderful things in our lives is to spend time reflecting on our difficult times and hardships. By giving thought to the struggles in our lives, we can perhaps see that they led to better things. Or, we can find meaning in the difficult times that gives us a new perspective on where we are in present day. This is also an opportunity to reaffirm that we have the ability to overcome obstacles and temporary problems. By comparing our current situation with difficulties from the past, we can better appreciate where we are today and boost our happiness level.

Instructions: Think about a tough time in your life when you experienced struggles, difficulties, pain, hardship or heart break. Give yourself a few moments to recall details and what you felt during that time. Pay attention to the specifics and notice everything that comes to mind during this reflection.

Allow yourself time to recall that despite that hardship, you overcame it on your journey to where you are today. Even the most difficult times are temporary. Thanks to your strengths, perseverance, and resilience, you are here today, in this moment.

Author Jonah Paquette recommends using the technique particularly during times of struggles, along with other gratitude practices.

Gratitude Practice #5 – A DAY OF THANKS

When we think of things for which we are grateful, there is often a connection to a person or people. We might initially acknowledge our blessings, but then we realize that these good things usually generate outside ourselves and involves other people. We have all been recipients of kindness from other people. This practice is an opportunity for you to communicate your gratefulness to people in your life who have made the blessings possible. This exercise involves choosing one day each month to take the time to express your thanks.

Instructions: Choose a day during the next month to server as your day of thanks. Take the time on that day to show your gratitude to those who are kind to you, in both big and small ways. The acknowledgement of kindness can be shown any way you'd like. Simply thank people face-to-face for their kindness. How does this feel? How do others respond to you? At the end of this special day, write some reflections on your experiences.

While thinking and writing about the blessings in our lives helps to boost our happiness level, when we express our thankfulness to others, we will not only increase these feelings, but also strengthen our relationships. Some people have found that this day initiates an increase of positivity with others, to the point that expressing thanks becomes a more common occurrence.

In addition to this list of gratitude techniques, be sure to check out my blog posts concerning Tips for Practicing Gratitude and Simple Ways to Practice Gratitude. Once you begin incorporating some gratitude exercises into your routine and experience an increase in happiness and improvement in relationships, you will know the value of establishing these practices as life-long habits.

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Resource:

Paquette, Jonah, Psy. D. (2015). Real Happiness: Proven Paths For Contentment, Peace & Well-Being. Eau Clair: PESI, Inc.

