

Welcome to Nurturing Gratitude

When it comes to how we should travel through our lives, our culture and religion are clearly at odds. Culture cries, “Accumulate!” Religion counsels “Appreciate!” The mantras couldn’t be more different: The commercials surrounding us scream, “Go out and grab all you can!” The pulpits before us plea, “Learn to want what you have.”

There’s an important reminder here: Gratitude is essential. It’s not simply a nice “extra” to get around to when we can. Or to put it another way, we aren’t built for constant striving and the pursuit of more. Instead, we need moments of pause in which we are filled and replenished by the large and small wonders of this world. As poet and philosopher, [Mark Nepo](#), puts it: “The original meaning of the word “appreciate” means to move toward what is precious. So practicing gratitude reengages our aliveness—they awaken us to what is precious.” The implication here is clear: If we want to be truly alive, we need to pay attention when moments of gratitude arise.

But is that really it? Is that all we need to do? Wait for moments of gratitude to bloom and then stop and let their beauty sink in?

As our packet this month makes clear, many folks have their doubts. In one way or another, the voices within these pages point out that there is a big difference between appreciating the blessing of family and committing to sitting down together for dinner and intentionally sharing the blessings of one’s day. They go on to stress that it’s one thing to notice the beauty of nature; it’s quite another to pull yourself out of the rat race so you have time to enjoy it. And they certainly won’t let us forget that making a list of things we’re grateful for is impactful, but not nearly as powerful as the practice of “[paying it forward](#).”

It’s all a way of gently pointing out that some of us practice gratitude passively and others actively. Or maybe the better way to put it is to say, gratitude needs our help! It can’t always flower all on its own, because there are serious threats out there: busyness, the lure of climbing the ladder, worries about the state of our world. They all work like weeds, suffocating and crowding out gratitude before it has a chance to sprout even the tiniest leaf.

Which means that maybe the most important part of this month’s theme is the “nurturing” part. Sitting back and waiting for gratitude to arise is simply not enough. That’s just not how gardens grow. If we listen carefully to the call of gratitude, we will hear a challenge to **change** our lives, not just appreciate them.

So friends, as we weave our way through this month’s journey, may we carry with us the question of “What do I need to do a better job of noticing?” But may we also not forget the possibly even more important question of “What practices of weeding does gratitude need from me?”

And as we hold *both* of those questions tight, may the blooming begin!