

## GRATITUDE

Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance.  
— Eckart Tolle

The concept of appreciation and thankfulness is as much an exercise as it is a feeling. Being able to recognize and express what we are grateful for leads to increased happiness and connection with others. Gratitude is derived from the Latin word *gratia* which means grace, graciousness or gratefulness. Research has shown that people who live a grateful life usually have common characteristics. They have a sense of purpose, are appreciative of others and are more willing to take action and initiative. Two researchers, one from the University of California and the other from the University of Miami, conducted a study which showed that those focused on what they had to be grateful for were more optimistic, felt better about their lives and had better health. Another researcher from the University of Pennsylvania showed participants were happier overall. Numerous other studies reveal how gratitude among people demonstrates resilience, how it plays a role in being able to overcome trauma for war veterans, leads to better sleep and more connections with others.

Years ago I received a handout called “The Bank Deposit”. I used it for an exercise in one of my educational groups. The exercise ran in the following manner. I began by asking the group a question - What if your bank offered a new and special account into which \$86,400 would be deposited every morning for you to spend? Then I explain that this account would be subjected to the following rules:

1. You will receive \$86,400 every morning to spend.
2. At the end of each day your special account will be reset to zero. You have to spend this money by the end of the day otherwise lose it.
3. You cannot save any of the \$86,400, you can only spend it.
4. You may not transfer or invest any of the money into another account. You can only spend it.
5. The bank can close your account at any time without warning.
6. Once your special account is closed you are not eligible to receive a new one.

Based on these rules I ask the group members to list five ways they would spend their money for that one day. Usually people get excited thinking about what they would like to buy and easily come up with different ways to do so. Within 10 minutes, most have completed their list with fantasies and dreams of various purchases, payments they owe or donations they would make to family, friends or organizations.

Then I change the exercise. Group members are told that the amount of 86,400 is not dollars but seconds. There are 86,400 seconds in a day. Each morning we receive 86,400 seconds as a gift of life. When the day is gone, any remaining time is gone forever. This amount is not credited to us. What we have not lived up to that day is lost. While the account may be reset with a fresh 86,400 seconds each morning, it can also be withheld and closed without warning. Now I ask group members to make a list of five ways they would like to spend their day today with the time that is left. What would they like to do and with whom would they like to spend it with, not knowing whether they will be given another 86,400 seconds the next day. At this point it takes most people much longer to think about their list. In contrast to how easy it was to think about spending money, spending time seems very different. This is when people begin to feel appreciative for their lives and those around them.

There is a saying, 'live your life as if it were the last day of your life'. Must we be given this ultimatum in order to live our lives to the fullest? Is it that we have taken life and those important to us for granted? Let's reflect on what we have, who we have in our lives and act in ways that show our appreciation for the life we have and those that have been invited to it.

How will you spend the next 86,400 seconds?



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