**Choices**

**Quote of the day:**

“Living is a constant process of deciding what we are going to do.” — Jose Ortega Gasset

**Think about it:**

I woke up early today, excited over all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight. I have responsibilities to fulfill today, and I am important. My job is to choose what kind of day I am going to have.

Today I can complain because the weather is rainy, or I can be thankful that the grass is getting watered for free. Today I can feel sad that I don’t have more money, or I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely and guide me away from waste. Today I can grumble about my health, or I can rejoice that I am alive.

Today I can lament over all that my parents didn’t give me when I was growing up, or I can feel grateful that they allowed me to be born. Today I can cry because roses have thorns, or I can celebrate that thorns have roses. Today I can mourn my lack of friends, or I can excitedly embark upon a quest to discover new relationships.

Today I can whine because I have to go to work, or I can shout for joy because I have a job to do. Today I can complain because I have to go to school, or eagerly open my mind and fill it with rich new tidbits of knowledge. Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework, or I can appreciate that I have a place to call home.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor who gets to do the shaping. What today will be like is up to me. I get to choose what kind of day I will have! -- Author Unknown

**No Crying Over Spilt Milk**

**Quote of the day:**

“The only man who never makes mistakes is the man who never does anything.” —Theodore Roosevelt

**Think about it:**

I recently read a story about a famous scientist who had made several very important medical discoveries. He was asked by a newspaper reporter why he thought he was so much more creative than the average person.

He responded that, in his opinion, it all came from an experience with his mother that occurred when he was about two years old. He had been trying to take a bottle of milk from the fridge when he lost his grip on the slippery bottle and it fell, spilling its contents all over the kitchen floor—an absolute sea of milk!

When his mother came into the kitchen, instead of scolding him, she said, “What a great and wonderful mess you have made! I have rarely seen such a huge puddle of milk. Well, since the damage has already been done, would you like to get down and play in the milk for a few minutes before we clean it up?”

Indeed, he did. After a few minutes, his mother said, “Whenever you make a mess like this, eventually you have to clean it up. So, how would you like to do that? We could use a sponge, a towel, or a mop. Which do you prefer?” He chose the sponge and together they cleaned up the spilt milk.

His mother then said, “What we have here is a failed experiment in how to effectively carry a big bottle of milk with two tiny hands. Let’s go and fill a bottle with water and see if we can discover a way to carry it without dropping it.” The little boy learned that if he held the bottle at the top near the lip with both hands, he could carry it without dropping it. What a wonderful lesson!

He then remarked that it was at that moment that he knew he didn’t need to be afraid to make mistakes. He learned from his mother that mistakes were just opportunities for learning something new.

Even if an experiment “doesn’t work,” we usually learn something valuable from it.

**Content Over Form**

**Quote of the day:**

“Don’t judge a book by its cover.” —Author Unknown

**Think about it:**

If we judge a book by its cover, we will never get to know the depths of others, and the true meaning of life’s situations. Not judging a book by its cover means that we can never really claim to understand a person or situation when we only see them or it from the outside or on the surface.

The famous lateral thinking guru Edward de Bono asks in his book *Simplicity*, “Why do books have covers? If the reason was mainly for ‘protection’, we could shed the cover and simply print four first pages and four last pages. When the top page got dirty you would simply tear it off and have a clean page underneath.”

But we know that’s not going to happen. Why? Because, book covers are what sell the book and distinguish it from others. It makes us want to pick up the book and read it. Yet, how many times have we seen a great book cover, picked it up expecting a good read, and then we were

let down.

We do the same when we judge people prematurely. We may never know what experiences they had or what they have been through unless we take the time to get to know them in a deeper way.

It is from the depths of situations and circumstances that we find its essence. For example, if we

admire another’s social position, instead of their true accomplishment, including the values they

subscribe to, we will miss the key to their success, and therefore fail to learn from it. Or, if we are merely evaluating a person from the shallow perspective of their appearance, or quickly come to a conclusion based on a brief acquaintance, then we also miss the deeper and wider

truths behind them.

**Patience**

**Quote of the day:**

“Patience serves as a protection against wrongs as clothes do against cold. For if you put on more clothes as the cold increases, it will have no power to hurt you. So in like manner you must grow in patience when you meet with great wrongs, and they will then be powerless to vex your mind.” — Leonardo da Vinci

**Think about it:**

Break down the word patience and it actually traces back to the Latin “pati,” which means “to suffer, endure.” This is the popular interpretation, and one that leaves us in awe of stories like that of the frail, landless Asian farmer who painstakingly moved a mountain. This man chiseled away solo for 22 years, until he finally created a 1 km long, 16-ft-wide passage connecting his village to vital resources like hospitals. So clearly, delaying gratification and bearing up under pain have their benefits. But a deeper exploration of patience goes beyond risk and reward.

Cultivating patience keeps us from being stuck to preconceived notions, and helps us let go of our fixation on outcomes. We come to accept that we don’t always or immediately know what is best, and learn to recognize that our reality is in constant flux. Patience elevates our understanding of deeper truths and helps us transcend our limited views. And therein lies its virtue. (Adapted from Motivated Magazine)

**Stunted Growth**

**Quote of the day:**

“Beliefs have the power to create and the power to destroy. Human beings have the awesome ability to take any experience of their lives and create a meaning that disempowers them or one that can literally save their lives.” —Anthony Robbins

**Think about it:**

When I was a kid, I saw plenty of goldfish in the houses of my friends, and I remember

wondering why so many people would want to keep such small, unexciting creatures as pets. Then one day, when I was about ten years old, I went on a school field trip to a botanical garden that had a pond stocked with fish. One especially large, brilliantly colored fish stood out to me.

“What kind of fish is that one?” I asked our guide.

“That’s a goldfish,” she replied.

I was confused. “Aren’t goldfish supposed to be small?” I asked with a note of 9-year-old sarcasm.

“Not at all,” she replied. “Goldfish will grow even larger than these. It really just depends on the

size of their environment.”

How often have I been like a goldfish in a fishbowl? How often have I limited myself by my perception of my world? Worse still, how many times have I put others in a small bowl in my mind? How many times have I written off someone as insignificant or unexciting? How many times have I failed to see others’ potential to grow? How much more could I achieve if I forgot my perceived limitations and dared to swim beyond the boundaries I’ve set for myself? And what would happen if I moved others from their small bowls into the ocean of limitless possibilities?

Just imagine a world full of people with that perspective, who truly believe that anything is

possible and reach out to claim it. Together we could do astounding things. Together we could

work miracles.

**The Magic Mask**

**Quote of the day:**

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” —Proverb

**Think about it:**

There once was a king of a vast domain. He was shrewd and powerful and feared by all, but no one loved him. Each year, as he became more severe, he became lonelier. His face reflected the bitterness in his soul. There were deep, ugly lines around his mouth, and deep, permanent furrows on his forehead.

It so happened that in his realm there lived a beautiful girl whom everyone seemed to love. The king wanted to make her his wife, and finally he decided to speak to her of this love. He dressed in his finest robes, but when he looked in the mirror, he saw a cruel, hard face, even when he tried to smile. Then a thought came to him.

He sent for his magician. “Use your greatest skill to paint a mask that looks kind and pleasant and handsome. I will pay any price you ask.”

“This I can do,” said the magician, “on one condition. You must keep your own face in the same lines that I paint. One angry frown, and the mask will be ruined forever and I cannot replace it. You must think only kindly thoughts and do kindly deeds. You must be gracious to all men.” So the magic mask was made, and it looked so natural that no one guessed it was not the true face of the king.

Months passed, the beautiful lady became his bride, and the king fought hard to keep the mask from breaking. His subjects attributed the miraculous change in the king to his lovely wife, who, they said, had made him like herself.

Eventually the king regretted having deceived his beautiful wife and summoned his magician. “Take away this deceiving mask!” he cried. “It is not my true self!”

“If I do,” said the magician, “I can never make another. You will have to wear your own face as long as you live.”

“Better so,” said the king, “than to continue to deceive one whose love and trust I have won dishonorably. Take it off, I say!” The magician did as he was commanded.

In anguish, the king turned to see his reflection in his mirror. Suddenly his eyes brightened and his lips curved into a radiant smile. The ugly lines were gone. His face was the exact likeness of

the mask he had worn so long. When he returned to his beloved wife, she saw only the familiar features of the man she loved.

Yes, this is only a legend, but it teaches a truth: A man’s face portrays what is inside, what he thinks and feels. The wise and true proverb tells us, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”

**The Man Who Planted Trees**

**Quote of the day:**

“Change your life. Change your world.” —Author Unknown

**Think about it:**

“The Man Who Planted Trees,” by Jean Giono, is the allegorical tale of Elzéard Bouffier, a humble shepherd who single-handedly transformed a barren region of southern France by planting nuts as he watched his sheep graze on a different hillside each day.

In the story, that one shepherd’s decades of work resulted in the entire area being reforested, which brought back the wildlife, retained the springs, and improved the soil for farming. Eventually, more people moved to the once nearly deserted region, and it became alive and prosperous.

The story tells us that Elzéard embarked on his mission after his only son and wife passed away. Many people would have retreated into their sorrow, or simply brushed off the idea as crazy, impossible, or not their responsibility. But he put his inspired idea into action and slowly but surely changed his part of the world.

He had a clear goal and a simple plan. He probably didn’t set out to change his world on such a grand scale, but good things have a way of growing when we rise to the challenge. The two World Wars didn’t hinder his work, nor did other seemingly insuperable difficulties and setbacks. When he realized his sheep were nibbling on the saplings, he switched to beekeeping. When the 10,000 maples he’d planted died one year, he switched to beeches the following year, with more success.

Great things are often the result of patient plodding. His task wasn’t especially difficult, but he stuck with it day after day for decades, working in partnership with God, doing what he could and trusting God to do the rest.

What seemingly crazy impossible idea do you have? With God’s help, it may not be as crazy or impossible as you think. Go ahead. Change your life. Change your world.

**The Telephone Call**

**Quote of the day:**

“Seldom can a heart be lonely If it seeks a lonelier still, Self-forgetting, seeking only Emptier cups of love to fill!” — Frances Ridley Havergal

**Think about it**:

The story is told about a big-city policeman investigating a case. He made a phone call, but even before he finished dialing, he somehow knew he had made a mistake. He let it ring, though. The phone rang once, twice—then someone picked it up. “You’ve got the wrong number!” a husky male voice snapped before the line went dead.

Mystified, the policeman dialed again. “I said you got the wrong number!” the voice growled. Once more the phone clicked down.

The policeman asked himself, How could he possibly know I had the wrong number? A cop is trained to be curious—and concerned. So he dialed a third time.

“Hey, c’mon,” the voice said. “Is this you again?”

“Yeah, it’s me. I was wondering how you knew I had the wrong number before I even said anything.”

“You figure it out!” The phone slammed down.

The policeman sat there for a while, thinking. Then he called the man back. “Did you figure it out yet?” the man asked.

“The only thing I can think of is nobody ever calls you.”

“You got it!” The phone went dead for the fourth time.

Chuckling, the officer dialed the man back.

“What do you want now?” asked the man.

“I thought I’d call—just to say hello,” the policeman smiled into the phone.

“Hello? Why?”

“Well, if nobody ever calls you, I thought maybe I should.”

We live in a world of lonely people (many of them, ironically, surrounded by other lonely people). Sometimes, that loneliness expresses itself in gruffness and an apparent attempt to push people away. In reality, there’s an aching desire to know that someone truly cares, that someone loves them unconditionally, and that someone is willing to listen.

Let’s keep our eyes and ears open, and find what we can do to pass on some unconditional love.

**Live a Life of Gratitude**

**Quote of the day:**

"To live a life of gratitude is to open our eyes to the countless ways in which we are supported by the world around us. Such a life provides less space for our suffering because our attention is more balanced.” —Gregg Krech

**Think about it:**

A story is told about a blind boy, who sat on the steps of a building with a hat at his feet. He held up a sign that said, “I am blind, please help.”

There were only a few coins in the hat. A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, “Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?”

The man said, “I wrote what you said, but in a different way. I wrote, ‘Today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it.’”

Both signs told people that the boy was blind, but the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people that they were very fortunate that they were not blind, and generated gratitude for sight—something we often take for granted—and compassion for the boy who could not see.

Should we be surprised that the second sign was more effective? Such is the power of gratitude. Let’s think differently and more positively.

**Falling Trees**

**Quote of the day**:

“We are growing in our character every day. The question is in which direction are we growing? Are we growing in love or selfishness; in harshness or patience; in greed or generosity; in honesty or dishonesty; in purity or impurity? Every day we train ourselves in one direction or another by the thoughts we think, the words we say, the actions we take, the deeds we do.” — Jerry Bridges

**Think about it:**

The story goes that in the Solomon Islands in the south Pacific some villagers practice a unique form of logging. If a tree is too large to be felled with an ax, the natives cut it down by yelling at it. Woodsmen with special powers creep up on a tree just at dawn and suddenly scream at it at the top of their lungs. They continue this for thirty days. Then the tree dies and falls over. The theory is that the hollering kills the spirit of the tree. According to the villagers, it always works.

Ah, those poor naive innocents. Such quaintly charming habits of the jungle. Screaming at trees, indeed. How primitive. Too bad they don’t have the advantages of modern technology, and the scientific mind. Me?. I yell at the telephone and the lawn mower. I yell at the TV, and the newspaper. I’ve been known to shake my fist and yell at the sky at times.

The man next door yells at his car a lot, and this summer I heard him yell at a stepladder for most of an afternoon. We modern, urban, educated folks yell at traffic and umpires and bills and banks and machines—especially machines. Machines and relatives get most of the yelling.

Don’t know what good it does. Machines and things just sit there. Even kicking doesn’t always help. As for people? Well, the Solomon Islanders may have a point. Yelling at living things does tend to kill the spirit in them. Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts. --By Robert Fulghum

**The Boy and the Hazelnuts**

**Quote of the day**:

“No matter how small and unimportant what we are doing may seem, if we do it well, it may soon become the step that will lead us to better things.” —Channing Pollock

**Think about it:**

A little boy happened upon a large, stone pitcher filled with tasty hazelnuts. The boy slipped his hand through the narrow opening and grabbed a huge handful, but found that he couldn’t pull his hand back out of the jar. The boy yanked and yanked, but couldn’t pull his hand out, and so he started to cry.

A man standing nearby said to the boy, “If you were satisfied with less, you could pull your hand out easily.”

The lesson:Pace yourself. There’s nothing wrong with big dreams, but sometimes when you try to grab everything at once, you end up with nothing at all. It’s the same thing with financial goals—slow down, and don’t be afraid to pick out a series of little goals, one at a time, rather than a massive handful of goals all at once.

**The Miser**

**Quote of the day:**

“The secret of prosperity is generosity, for by sharing with others the good that life gives us we open up the well­springs of abundance.” —J. Donald Walters

**Think about it:**

An old man sells all of his goods for a large lump of gold, which he then proceeds to bury in a hole just outside his property. Every day he visits the spot, uncovering the gold, looking at it for a bit, then covering it back up. One of the man’s employees notices this odd behavior and follows the old man. He sees the buried gold, and when the old man returns home, the employee removes the gold and runs away with it.

The next day the old man finds that his gold is missing and cries out in agony. A neighbor hears the old man’s story and suggests that he place a rock in the hole and cover it back up. “It makes no difference, does it? You didn’t do anything with the gold anyway.”

The lesson: Working hard is great. Making money is great. Saving money is fine. But money itself is nothing more than pieces of paper. Don’t forget that money’s true purpose is in service of a happy, healthy life. The size of the lump of gold doesn’t make much difference if you don’t know how to use it to feel fulfilled and to share with others.

**The Chicken and the Egg**

**Quote of the day:**

"You are what your deep driving desire is; as your desire is so is your will; as your will is so is your deed; as your deed is so is your destiny." —Upanishads

**Think about it:**

I read an article called Discovering Your Dharma by Simon Heighwaya that I thought was interesting and wanted to share it with you.

I heard a story once about an eagle's egg that had gotten lost or abandoned and was found by chickens. When the eagle hatched, it was loved and cared for by the chickens, brought up to act and behave as if it were a chicken. It knew nothing else.

One day, the eagle was with his brothers and sisters pecking at the ground, like a chicken, when something made him look up to the sky. High above he saw a majestic sight: a beautiful bird soaring gracefully. Something stirred inside him -- a remembrance, a recognition of 'home.'

He asked the chickens, “What is that beautiful bird up there?” The chickens looked up. “Oh that,” they said, “That's an eagle, king of the birds. But forget about him. You are one of us; you are a chicken.”

I don't know how the story ended and, to me, it is not a case of an eagle being superior to a chicken. An eagle's just different.

As I understand it, it's all just about remembering who we really are, regardless of what we've been told by others or how we have been brought up. A rose will grow into a rose even if it's in the middle of a field of tulips.

There is an ancient Indian word, "Dharma", which has two meanings. The first is, "Your nature: your true, real, essential nature." The second is, "Your purpose in life." To me the two are inseparable. I believe the word literally translates as Truth.

“Whatever we are at our most fundamental level, at our most base, whether that be something metaphysical, or something like DNA, I believe that to discover or remember it is our 'raison d'etre.' And to live in harmony with our deepest selves is the meaning of success.

**The Birthday Tradition**

**Quote of the day**

“A happy birthday is measured not in the amount of gifts one gets, but in the amount one is loved.” —Todd Stocker

**Think about it:**

Paolo, a dear friend and colleague of mine for the last 18 years, has made it a point and a personal goal to remember people’s birthdays either through a phone call or an SMS. He keeps a list and updates it as he meets new people. Business people, politicians, students housewives, lonely elderly people, rich or poor, famous or obscure, everyone’s heart is the same, and everyone has a need for genuine love. I’ve been able to witness it personally by observing people’s reactions to these birthday wishes.

Two years ago, a lonely widow burst into tears when she received that phone call wishing her a happy birthday, and she has brought up that call on many occasions since. To her it represented a turning point in the difficult process of inner healing after her husband passed

away, and she had to live all alone in a remote area. She said she felt so much love and concern in that unexpected phone call that it brought her heart back to life again.

I’ll admit it’s not as simple as it seems, as some mornings you wake up wanting to just think about yourself and don’t feel like making the effort to cheer up someone else on their birthday. I say this because Paolo’s example influenced me, and some time ago I also embraced the

“birthday tradition,” even though my list is still much smaller than his.

Sometimes I don’t feel like making that phone call, but the reaction usually more than repays my effort, and I discover once again that it doesn’t take much to bring a little cheer to someone’s life. A few times, I realized that my simple words really made someone’s day and that I was possibly the only person who remembered. Or I found out they had just experienced some difficult time in their lives, a loss or a sickness. And when I hung up, all I could say was: “Thank God I made that phone call!” — Author Unknown

**The Hobbit**

**Quote of the day:**

“All men have fears, but the brave put down their fears and go forward, sometimes to death, but always to victory.” — The King’s Guard of ancient Greece motto

**Think about it:**

*The Hobbit*, a fantasy novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, is the story of Bilbo Baggins, a comfort-loving hobbit who is thrust into an unwanted quest for dragon treasure with a wizard and a group of dwarves. On the way, he faces all manner of hardships, from goblins to hostile elves to giant spiders.

Finally, the adventurers reach their destination: the mountain lair of the dragon Smaug. Bilbo enters through a secret door in the mountainside to face the dragon alone, while the dwarves wait outside. As he makes his way through the dark tunnel, he hears what sounds like a kettle

bubbling on the stove. That noise grows into what seems like a giant cat purring. Suddenly Bilbo realizes that he’s hearing the sound of the dragon snoring deep in the cave.

Bilbo is petrified. He wants nothing more than to turn back, and he nearly does, but instead he decides to press on. Tolkien writes, “Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterward were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real

battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait.”

We all face challenges where we want to run away before we’ve even had a chance to see what’s ahead. Dealing with dragons (or other scary obstacles) takes a whole lot of courage, and not always in the way we’d imagine. Bilbo’s testing point came in the tunnel. He had to face his fear and self-doubt even before he had to face the dragon.

These “dragons” in our lives don’t always seem like a big deal to anyone but us, and as a result, we often have to find the key to victory within ourselves. C. S. Lewis wrote, “Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at its testing point.” Sometimes we have to simply not give ourselves room to wiggle out of doing what’s right.

If you don’t have a ton of courage right now, that’s okay. Often, courage is simply putting one foot in front of the other, taking small, sometimes even tiny, steps forward. Every time you make a brave choice, you’re strengthening your courage and preparing for the bigger challenges ahead. Courage begins as a decision and grows as you consistently use it.

Bilbo had been building up his courage little by little throughout his journey. He fought fearsome enemies and won. He tackled difficult problems and found solutions. Each time he faced a challenge bravely, it was an investment in courage; and those investments paid off when it came time to face the dragon. So face your dragons boldly. -- Marie Story

**Noble Disagreement**

**Quote of the day:**

“Love never reasons, but profusely gives; gives, like a thoughtless prodigal, its all, and trembles then lest it has done too little.” —Hannah More

**Think about it:**

In the city of Weimar, Germany, there is a statue that was set up in 1857. It is of two of Germany’s great writers, who were also good friends—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805).

While both men were still living, critics and the public often raised the question of which was the

greater writer. If Goethe heard people say, “Sir, you are the master poet of the Germans,” he was quick to rejoin, “You must not forget Schiller!” And when they praised Schiller as the finest German poet, Schiller would say, “But there is my friend Goethe.”

The sculptor of the statue of Weimar expressed their mutual love and admiration beautifully. Goethe has a wreath of laurel leaves in his hand, which he is raising to place on Schiller’s head. But Schiller does not want the crown. He thinks Goethe deserves it more, and is thrusting it back, as if to say, “No, it is more fitting for you to wear it than me.” Thus the two friends nobly disagree, each refusing to be crowned, for they appreciated each other’s talent and valued their friendship more than acclaim.

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**Quote of the day:**

“The *how* thinker gets problems solved effectively because he wastes no time with futile “ifs” but goes right to work on the creative “how.” — Norman Vincent Peale

**Think about it:**

Some friends and I were helping to prepare a beauty salon for opening, and my part involved setting up the in-house entertainment system. The salon’s setup included individual TV sets for each of the stations, complete with sound, etc. I was excited to work on this project, but soon realized there were some aspects to it that were outside my realm of expertise.

For a while, I tried unsuccessfully to solve the rather complex problem of wiring the individual sets to the main set, making the individualized sound work, etc. I hashed and rehashed the problem in my mind, eventually throwing my hands up in frustration and admitting that I needed help. I made an appointment to meet up with someone who specializes in this kind of engineering to see if I could get some advice. The result was that I not only got help with

my project, but I learned something valuable at the same time.

This young man was vibrant and full of life. He relished the challenge and refused to take no for an answer. Every time I threw out what I thought was an obstacle, he found a solution. Sometimes that meant going back and changing something we had originally thought would

work, but eventually, we found solutions to each problem. It wasn’t long before the updated blueprints we’d worked on were before me, making perfect sense. I was able to implement

all the solutions we’d come up with, and the salon now has working individual entertainment centers.

I got to wondering how I too could make life easier for others in the areas I’m proficient in. If

everyone made the effort to discover, analyze, and solve issues, how much easier and more positive our journey through life would be. — Sunil Kumar

**The Perfect Life**

**Quote of the day:**

"Life is like a camera -- focus on what’s important, capture the good times, develop from the negatives, and if things don't work out, take another shot.” — Author Unknown

**Think about it:**

I love photography. When I got my first camera—a cheap point and shoot—I thrilled to the new world of possibilities. I took it everywhere and captured a lot of memories, till the day it fell against a hillside rock and failed me forever after.

Then I upgraded to a bridge camera with more options and a much greater built-in zoom. This was my pride and joy for years, though eventually my skills outgrew it as well. I wanted something that took the photo as soon as I pressed the button. Eventually, I got a DSLR. It was good quality, fast, and presented a huge learning curve. Just what I wanted. No more missed moments. Or so I thought.

As I learned more, I became ultra concerned about getting perfectly in-focus photos. I kept searching for ways to *always* get sharp photos. I’d frantically change settings hoping for a better result, often taking my eyes off the events unfolding in front of me. I’d be frustrated even if I captured what I wanted but the result was anything less than perfectly sharp.

Then one day I read an article by an eminent photographer. He said something profound: “Photography is about feelings, not technical perfection. It’s about showing the emotion you felt at a scene to your viewers, not just showing your skill at controlling the camera.”

Suddenly I understood that it’s really not about the settings, the sharpness, or even my skill. It’s about telling the story. Amateurs want their images to be perfect. Professionals want their images to be poignant, to make an impression.

In our lives, we strive to get our hair, bodies, phone, car, job, food, relationships (and the list goes on) in perfect shape. In the process, we often overlook the joy of life itself. We should use our skills to improve our and others’ lives. But we don’t have to become so focused on overcoming life’s imperfections that we don’t savor the moments all around us.

Life is a massive collage of innumerable moments every day. Does it matter if every moment is perfect? Does it matter if *any* moment is perfect? Not really. They’re all a part of the big picture, and it wouldn’t be complete without even one. So don’t hurry through life, purging moments from attention or memory because they’re “lacking” in some way.

Let’s take time to stop when “we don’t have time.” Let’s take deep breaths when we’re stressed. Let’s live lovingly even when we’re treated badly. Let’s create a life that others will look at and be encouraged by. We can’t always impress those around us, but we *can* leave an impression. We can be poignant. — Chris Mizrany

**Start With the Frog!**

**Quote of the day:**

“The Principle of Priority states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what’s important first.” — Steven Pressfield

**Think about it:**

I’m someone who tends to go by inspiration, and I’ve long been bothered by my scattered approach to setting goals, so I was searching for an effective way to make it through my to-do list. It seems so easy to pick out the things I prefer doing or feel inspired to tackle first, but unfortunately, this strategy often leads to procrastination, especially since those “favorites”

often aren’t the most important or priority tasks. Since the important stuff doesn’t just disappear, I find myself cramming in order to fit everything in. I really want to get a handle on my poor prioritizing skills.

A few days later when browsing through stalls at a flea market, a thin book caught my eye. The odd title, *You Can’t Send a Duck to Eagle School*, peeked out from among a pile of dusty secondhand books crammed into a cardboard box. I pulled it out and cracked it open to

a quote from Mark Twain: “Eat a live frog every morning, and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.”

The accompanying article explained the basic idea of tackling the most daunting task first, likening those tasks to eating a frog before getting to more appealing to-dos. There were many other useful anecdotes on getting things done, but this picture stuck with me, and I realized it could be the answer to my prayer for a strategy.

Since I’ve had a severe back problem from the age of ten, daily exercise and stretching has been a must to help me function through the day, but over the years, it’s become a chore that I sometimes dread. Getting this routine off my to-dos was definitely going to be my first “frog” of the day.

Identifying this and other “frogs” felt strange in the beginning, but this simple tactic has improved my work habits and helped keep procrastination at bay. Even on days when I don’t have time to write a to-do list, I still remember to search out a “frog” or two that need my attention first. – By Iris Richard

**A Tribute to Mothers**

**Quote of the day:**

“My mother was the making of me. She was so true and so sure of me, I felt that I had someone to live for—someone I must not disappoint. The memory of my mother will always be a blessing to me.” —Thomas Edison

**Think about it:**

A partially deaf boy came home one day carrying a note from officials at school. The note suggested that the parents take the boy out of school, claiming he was “too stupid to learn.”

The boy’s mother read the note and said, “My son Tom isn’t too stupid to learn. I’ll teach him myself.” And so she did.

When Tom died many years later, his country paid tribute to him by turning off the nation’s lights for one full minute. They did this to honor the man who invented the first practical light bulb. But that was not his only discovery. Thomas Edison (1847-1931) also invented motion pictures, the record player, and went on to patent over 1,000 other ground breaking inventions.

Not all children become world changers as Thomas Edison did, but we can be sure that every child that has been raised by a godly and loving mother has the potential to be an influence for good in his or her own unique way. Edison’s mother certainly proved the adage true, “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,” but in some way each mother does that as well.

With this story we’d like to pay tribute to and encourage mothers—mothers who see the good and possibilities in their children that others cannot see; mothers who sacrifice of their time and strength each day to care for and pour love into their children; mothers who have the courage to give up their hopes and dreams to see them realized in their little ones; mothers who, in a world where simply being a mother is becoming less and less popular, are determined to make mothering their “career.”

May God bless you, dear mothers! You truly are heroes of the greatest kind! Happy Mother’s Day!

**The Silver Lining**

**Quote of the day:**

“Remember every cloud has a silver lining.” – Author Unknown

**Think about it:**

I remember my mother often reminding us children to “look on the bright side” and “be thankful for the little things.” If we’d complain about the hot weather in mid-June, she’d point out, “At least we can go swimming, right?” If we’d complain about not having dessert one night, she’d ask, “Doesn’t that make you thankful for the nights we do have dessert?” She tried to teach us to take every seemingly “bad” or “sad” situation we faced and look for something that we could appreciate or be happy about.

She called this concept “looking for the silver lining.” According to the Oxford Online Dictionary, the English idiom “every cloud has a silver lining” means that every difficult or sad situation has a comforting or a more hopeful aspect, even though it may not be apparent immediately.

Our family faced a “storm cloud” of sorts when a friend borrowed our vehicle while we were on vacation and totaled it. Then it seemed the insurance company might not process our claim, because our friend wasn’t on our insurance plan. So you can imagine that we had a very hard time looking on the bright side of this situation. One day, after getting off the phone yet again with our insurance company, I was complaining to myself about our situation: the car, our bills, our health problems, and just about my general sorry lot in life. I then happened to glance over to the newspaper on my desk, and that’s when I saw that compared to so many, I have so, so much to be thankful for:

Even though we had to put a large amount of money into buying another car, and take on a loan, it’s a much better car than the previous one. And the auto insurance company finally agreed to pay toward the damages. Even though I work crazy hours, I have a good job that is providing steady income. Even though we’ve had high medical bills from past health issues both my husband and I had, the physical therapy is working and our health is improving.

So, yes, losing our car wasn’t easy, and being indebted in order to pay for the new one isn’t fun either, but no one said life would be a breeze. The next time I find myself in a tough situation, I’ll try to choose to thank God for the silver lining instead of questioning Him about the unpleasant things He’s allowed to happen.

**The Cork**

**Quote of the day:**

“Be like a postage stamp. Stick to it until you get there.” —Bob Proctor

**Think about it:**

In a factory, an elongated steel bar weighing 500 lb. (about 225 kg) was suspended by a chain. Near it‚ an average-size cork was suspended by a silk thread. “When we come back to this spot later,” a tour guide told a group of sightseers, “you will see something that is seemingly impossible. This cork will have set this steel bar in motion.”

The guide set in motion a mechanism whereby the cork tapped gently and repeatedly against the steel bar, which remained motionless. The visitors watched for a minute or two as the cork struck the iron bar with pendulum like regularity, then they moved on. Ten minutes later, the bar was vibrating slightly, and when the tour group returned at the end of an hour, the heavy bar was swinging like the pendulum of a clock.

So the next time you feel you aren’t even having a feather’s weight of effect, remember the cork. Often, people and situations don’t change overnight. But just keep tapping like another tap of the cork against the steel bar. It may not appear to make an immediate difference, but over time we will see how it has.

**The Bridge**

**Quote of the day:**

"The smallest deed is better than the greatest intention.” — John Burroughs

**Think about it:**

Once upon a time two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch. Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John’s door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter’s toolbox. “I’m looking for a few days’ work” he said. “Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there. Could I help you?”

“Yes,” said the older brother. “I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That’s my neighbor, in fact, it’s my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may

have done this to spite me, but I’ll show him. See that pile of lumber curing by the barn? I want you to build me a fence—an 8-foot fence—so I won’t need to see his place anymore. Cool him down, anyhow.”

The carpenter said, “I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I’ll be able to do a job that pleases you.”

The older brother had to go to town for supplies, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing, nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job.

The farmer’s eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped.

There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge—a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all—and the neighbor, his younger brother, was

coming across, his hand outstretched. “You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I’ve said and done.”

The two brothers met at the middle of the bridge, taking each others’ hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. “No, wait! Stay a few days. I’ve got a lot of other projects for you,” said the older brother. “I’d love to stay on,” the carpenter said, “but I have so many more bridges to build.”

Differences will often arise in human relationships, but building bridges of understanding and respect can overcome differences, and keep them from becoming large obstacles.

**The Encouragement Experiment**

**Quote of the day:**

"One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement. . . . Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word.” —William Barclay.

**Think about it:**

At some point in our lives, we’ve all had someone say a few words of encouragement that

radically changed our day or the course of events, just because of the extra inspiration and change of perspective those words brought. Maybe we were at the end of our rope, and someone’s encouragement opened a whole new horizon of possibilities. Or maybe we’d

simply had a long and tiring day, and a few cheerful words renewed our inspiration and energy.

One day my husband did an experiment that has since served as a reminder to me to be generous in passing encouragement on to others.

We were on a bike ride, following a mountain trail, and as usual we’d brought our dog Iris with us. She loves to hike in the mountains and is also a very fast runner. As we were laboriously pedaling up the hill, she was literally running circles around us, bursting with speed and energy. On the downhill, however, she had a hard time keeping up. We were just a little faster than

she, and although at first she made an effort to run alongside us, she soon got discouraged and stopped trying.

At that point the logical solution was to slow down and let her catch up with us. But before doing

that, my husband said, “Let’s see what encouragement can do.” And continuing downhill he called out to Iris, “C’mon, doggie, you can do it! You’re such a fast dog, you can keep up with us! Run!” Instantly, Iris seemed to be filled with renewed energy and speed, and she caught up with us, happy to be by our side once again. But as the words of encouragement ceased, she started losing that extra momentum and slowed down yet again. A new shower of encouragement propelled her forward once more.

Eventually, we did slow down to make it easier for her, but the experiment will forever remain in

my memory as an example of the power of positive words and the difference they can make. It reminds me to try to give the gift of encouragement to those around me. It’s a simple act that can give people the boost they need to reach their full potential.

Is there a coworker or a family member with whom you are at a standstill in your relationship? Try the power of encouragement and appreciation, and you’ll see your relationship blossom with renewed energy and freshness. -- Irena Žabičková

**Dad’s Advice**

**Quote of the day:**

“Maturity begins to grow when you can sense your concern for others outweighing your concern for yourself.” —John MacNaughton

**Think about it:**

There is one day I will never forget. It happened a week or so before I turned 12, on what started out to be just another day. The prospect of turning 12 seemed challenging, even scary. For the past several weeks, lurking large in my mind were questions and apprehensions that I was facing for the first time. Would being 12 mean that I could no longer do certain things I had enjoyed as a child? Was I supposed to act differently—suddenly “grown up” and “mature”? I wasn’t even sure I knew what those terms meant. I was confused and clueless.

That afternoon Dad and I took a walk, and I finally plucked up the courage to ask those big questions. Dad’s answers, simple but wise, did more than wipe away my birthday fears; they also helped shape my life since. Dad assured me that turning 12 didn’t mean that I would be expected to grow up overnight or that I could no longer enjoy the simple pleasures of childhood. Rather, he explained, enjoying and appreciating the little things in life is a quality of childhood that we should never outgrow, no matter how old we live to be.

And to my surprise, I found out from him that maturity has nothing at all to do with trying to act older or impress others. True maturity, he said, is learning to think more about others than myself; it is looking at the world through unselfish eyes, trying to see how I can build up others and make a positive difference for them, putting myself in their place and showing understanding and compassion. In short, it’s being loving, being “you first” instead of “me first.”

Pretty good advice. How mature are you?

**Growth Is the Goal**

**Quote of the day:**

“All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Think about it:**

I’m sure parents the world over share my dread of wrestling with children’s homework and

preparing for tests. Calming my teenagers’ anxiety before a test or trying to get them to eat breakfast before a benchmark exam are parenting moments I’ll be more than happy

to be done with.

After many struggling sessions, I’ve realized that more than prepping them, I need to change our approach to testing. The issue is in our view of scoring and failure. If my kid brings home a 60% score on a test, I’ll try to say something like “That means you understand 60% of the material. What do you think you need to learn next?” We now use the scoring more as a “you are here” marking on a map, not as a determination of success or failure. We try to make growth the goal.

Focusing on growth puts a new spin on making mistakes, asking questions, reworking a problem, and even failure. Growth is exciting and rewarding, and always pursuable and attainable. Even if they haven’t fully mastered the material, they can learn one more thing. And progress becomes a lifelong pursuit. I don’t want fear of failure to hold them back. I would rather have them try, fail, see where their weaknesses are, strengthen those weaknesses, and try

again.

This has led me to find out a lot about myself. I realized that I’d hit my ceiling of growth because I wasn’t venturing out of my comfort zone. I was terrified of failure, speaking up only when I was 100% sure I was 100% correct, only attempting things I knew I was proficient in, and generally holding back. Recognizing that in myself was uncomfortable. When it comes to growth there’s no such thing as simply maintaining; you’re either going forwards or backwards. And who wants to go backwards? Who wants to be less wise, less healthy, and poorer today than you were yesterday?

Since I’ve made the choice to grow, I’ve found endless opportunities— harder workouts, uncomfortable conversations, new recipes, “scarier” investments, applying for promotions

at work, signing up for training courses. Oh, and backing into the driveway! Each step of growth has made me want to keep going. -- Marie Alvero

**Learning**

**Quote of the day:**

“Learning is like rowing upstream: not to advance is to drop back.”--Chinese proverb

**Think about it:**

The other day I read a very interesting article about the Feynman Technique, which promises to help you learn anything in four steps. It intrigued me, as I enjoy learning and jump at any opportunity to make the process easier. In the article, it says that Feynman tried to always explain complex ideas in the simplest terms. Here are his Four Steps of Learning.

1. Pick a topic you want to understand and start studying it. Write down everything you know about the topic on a notebook page, and add to that page every time you learn something new about it.

2. Pretend to teach your topic to a classroom or group. Make sure you’re able to explain the topic in simple terms.

3. Go back to the books when you get stuck. The gaps in your knowledge should be obvious. Revisit problem areas until you can explain the topic fully.

4. Simplify and use analogies. Repeat the process while simplifying your language and connecting facts with analogies to help strengthen your understanding.

**Love in the Workplace**

**Quote of the day**:

"Love is a better teacher than duty.” — Albert Einstein

**Think about it:**

No, I’m not talking about coffee break romances, but rather about whether it’s possible to run a successful business with love. An article in the *Harvard Business Review* suggests that it is. [“Can You Really Power an Organization with Love?” Duncan Coombe, *HBR*, August

1st, 2016] It uses the analogy of the computer. Love should be the *operating system (OS)*, and the other business strategies—sales, marketing, distribution, etc.—the *apps.* The apps are the most visible working part of the computer, but they’re only stable if there’s a strong OS.

Here is a success story using that principle. The famous Peruvian chef and restaurant entrepreneur Gastón Acurio says, “We don’t want to be the most avant-garde. We just want to make people happy.” [Interview with Bárbara Muñoz for *El Mercurio*, Chile, July 2nd, 2016] Though Gastón has won international awards, he teaches his cooks not to only be goal-oriented. He believes that if his cooks enjoy their work, serve in love, and seek to make others happy, the customers will enjoy the results.

People know when they’re genuinely cared for, and employees need to feel that their work is valued. We all do a better job when we’re appreciated. Even challenging an unmotivated worker can be a type of “tough love,” if it lets them know you trust in their abilities and believe in their potential.

Generosity is another attribute of love in the workplace. Among the many ways to express love in a professional setting, this is one that seems counterintuitive. One of the most common suggestions for achieving your own goals is to help other people be successful in *theirs*. As we reach out to help others, our own world gets larger.

By endorsing Peruvian and Latin American ethnic foods, Gastón Acurio became well known for promoting his country’s unique cuisine. As a result, Lima has become famous in recent years for its gastronomical tours. If Gastón Acurio had considered the other Lima restaurants only as competitors, his world might still consist only of his own local restaurant; but through his working with other chefs to promote Peruvian flavors overall, Lima’s cuisine has obtained international fame, and so has he. -- By Sally García, adapted

Why not try a little love in the workplace?

**Opportunities for Love**

**Quote of the day:**

“The best portion of a good man's life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.” —William Wordsworth

**Think about it:**

There’s an important and easily missed form of love that’s manifested in the small matters. For example, helping a person in need, preferring them over ourselves, showing sympathy when someone is stressed or worried, offering a prayer, or being a listening and sympathetic ear.

When we choose to take the time to stop and help someone in need, when we show love and concern for someone hurting, when we give of what we have, we become more loving. We leave a legacy of love behind us as we pursue our path of life.

On the other hand, when we choose to focus only on our own goals, responsibilities, and concerns, ignoring the people around us, we become more self-centered and isolated, and we can end up wandering aimlessly about in our own universe. In the end, we’re the sum

total of the choices we make on a daily basis.

Each of us has opportunities to make choices based on love for others, on wanting to help humankind. Each day, we can do kind deeds. Putting ourselves in others’ shoes and taking time to think about why people do what they do is a lot more fulfilling than criticism, and it breeds sympathy, tolerance, and kindness. As a wise man once said, “God Himself doesn’t propose to judge man until the end of his days. So why should you and I?”

There are many ways of showing love, and it will be up to each of us to take the time to reflect on how we can personally show more love. We may want to get a notebook or journal and ask ourselves a few questions, such as:

* How much love and self-sacrifice do I show on a daily basis?
* How do I stop and show love to those who need it?
* In what situations can I show pure love and unselfishness, even if it involves sacrifice, and even if there would be little or no return?
* When I don’t feel like stepping out, when I feel the other person should be the one reaching out to me, am I still willing to take the first step?
* Am I willing to listen to others and show concern for their thoughts, ideas, and preferences?
* How can I incorporate this more into my life?
* How can I reach out more to others and add meaning to their lives?

**No One Starts Out as a Hero**

**Quote of the day:**

“Be willing to launch in faith, with no guarantees of success. This is the mark of personal greatness.” —Brian Tracy

**Think about it:**

Maybe it doesn’t seem like a big deal once a person achieves their goals, but no one starts off as a hero. They all had to risk looking silly in order to accomplish something great.

Bestselling author John Grisham’s first novel, *A Time to Kill*, was initially a flop. The book was rejected by 16 agents and a dozen publishing companies. Finally a small company printed 5,000 copies, and Grisham purchased 1,000 of those to sell personally. He did his own little book tour, promoting his book in his hometown library, then in various libraries across the state. And it took a good few months before he sold off all those books. I imagine he felt nervous and maybe even silly trying to sell his own book to strangers. I wonder if he ever got hit with thinking I should just call it quits. During this time, however, Grisham didn’t give up on writing and worked on a second novel, *The Firm,* which became an instant success. His determination paid off.

It takes strength to risk looking foolish. It takes strength to fail and keep trying. It takes strength to try something that seems crazy or unrealistic. Is there something you’ve been avoiding because you’re scared of failing? Are you running away from some challenge in your life because you don’t want to look dumb if you mess up? If you are, stop! Turn around. Face that

challenge, dare to look goofy, and win!

**Reaching Out**

**Quote of the day:**

“Find one needy person each month to help. Do something special for them to cheer them up.” —Jim

**Think about it:**

There had been an accident and the husband had died, leaving a young wife and a three-year-old child. One day in the midst of her deep grieving and feeling that life wasn’t worth it anymore and that she didn’t know how she could go on, she was reminded of a list of goals and dreams she and her husband had made together for the next five years—things they would do with their son, places they wanted to take him, a cruise they would go on together, etc.

As she looked over the list, her eyes fell on a goal that her husband, Jim, had come up with. His face had lit up when he thought this one up: “Find one needy person each month to help. Do something special for them to cheer them up.”

They had had only one chance to do it, but it had brought such a wonderful response that they had been eager to repeat it. Jim had said, “Sweetheart, it takes so little on our part to bring great happiness to others.”

But now, what could she do? “I’m the one in need. I’m the one hurting,” she thought to herself. She heard Jim speak again in her mind something he had always told her: “If you’re ever feeling blue, always remember there may be someone more needy than you.”

That day she made the decision to look for the needs around her and bring encouragement to those whom God laid on her heart. She knew that God had given Jim to her as a special gift of His love and care. She knew that she had been privileged to live with him for several wonderful years, that his passing wasn’t to mean an end of her joy, nor was it a sign that God had now withdrawn the gift that He had given her. The gift of Jim’s love was meant to forever live on in her heart, and, in fact, would grow as she gave it away.

Her grief was gradually replaced with a purpose through which she was able to bring much joy and the love and knowledge of Jesus to many others who were lonely and needed a friend.—Source unknown

**Pancakes and Pudding**

**Quote of the day:**

“Thinking you need to change or control other people is a hidden cause of stress in many areas of life. This is just as true for relating to a group as it is for relating to your friends, spouse, children, or other acquaintances.” – Author Unknown

**Think about it:**

My nine- and ten-year-olds came whining to me again. “Mommy, Chalsey’s taking all the LEGO blocks!” “Davin always gets the best pieces!” Kristy, my five-year-old, was crying. “It’s not fair! I want to build an airplane, but they won’t let me.” This had been going on all afternoon, one thing after another. No matter how many toys they had, they couldn’t just have fun together. I shot up a quick prayer for an illustration that would help us to get a grip on the problem.

“Who likes plain, dry pancakes?” I asked. The kids froze and looked surprised at my sudden change of subject. “Plain pancakes with nothing on them—just dry, get-stuck-in-your-throat pancakes?”

“Not me!” they all cried in unison.

“I see. So when you asked me to make pancakes yesterday, you didn’t want plain pancakes. You wanted pancakes and pudding.” It had been a special Father’s Day breakfast of hot pancakes smothered in creamy chocolate pudding. “And when you’re playing, you don’t just want to play with plain toys, any more than you wanted plain pancakes. Just like the pudding made the pancakes delicious, your friendship is what makes the games fun. Even if you got every LEGO piece you wanted, your playtime could still be no fun. What makes it special is when you all play together. That’s when you really have a good time. You need ‘pancakes and pudding.’”

The children understood the illustration perfectly and decided to play a game together. It worked like magic. We were stuck in the house for the next few days due to bad weather, but no one seemed to mind. Any time tempers flared, I’d tell the kids, “The pancakes need some more pudding.”

As I thought more about it later, I realized that lesson wasn’t only for my children. I sometimes work so hard to accomplish the goals I set for myself that I view everything else as a distraction.

I want plain, uninterrupted work time, and then I wonder why my work feels so dry and unenjoyable.

If you too sometimes find that your day is crowded with worries, stress, and work, if you feel you’ve lost that spark, if you’re feeling a little dry, perhaps what you need to make your day complete is a heaping scoop of sweet, fresh “pudding.” -- By Misty Kay

**Recipe For Happiness**

**Quote of the day:**

“Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Think about it:**

By Gabriel García V.

Before you begin, put on a strong stain proof apron to protect against the drips of bitterness and the sourness of life. In a bowl of resilient material, able to withstand blows, falls, and chipping, mix the following ingredients:

– 2 heaping spoons of gratitude

– 1 1/2 spoons of satisfaction

– A dollop of generosity

– 3 drops of concentrated optimism syrup

– A wedge of sunny smile

– A seed of faith

– A cup of Joy Elixir

Season with a generous dose of good humor. Blend all the ingredients together with enthusiasm, and serve on a wide and joyous table, big enough to share with all you meet.

**Reliability**

**Quote of the day:**

“Don't be afraid to give your best to what seemingly are small jobs. Every time you conquer one it makes you that much stronger. If you do the little jobs well, the big ones tend to take care of themselves.” —Dale Carnegie

**Think about it:**

I’ve been watching the TV series *The X Factor*, in which singers across the United States participate in a huge talent show contest where the winner will be awarded a multimillion-dollar recording contract. For those unfamiliar with the show, in each episode the judges choose who will move on to the next level in the competition, based on talent, of course! But there’s another trait that they’re also looking for. They want someone who will reliably deliver. Of course, performing artists aren’t the only ones who need to be reliable.

Coach John Wooden—considered one of the greatest basketball coaches of all time—talks about some of his basketball players who had reliability and what that meant to him. In the book, *Coach Wooden’s Pyramid of Success*, he wrote, “Curtis Rowe was one of my most consistent players. Although he wasn’t usually spectacular, he consistently played at a very high level and made it look easy. I could have almost penciled in his stat line before the game began.”

*Merriam-Webster* gives this definition for reliability: “1. Suitable or fit to be relied on: dependable; 2. Giving the same result on successive trials.”

Understanding this better has made me realize that the people whom I treasure both in my work and my personal life are those I know I can rely on, whether it’s with deadlines or when I need the comfort of a trustworthy friend.

Coach Wooden describes the characteristics of a reliable person in this way: “When we are reliable, others know that they can depend on us. They know that we will make the effort to do our best, whatever the situation might be. They know we won’t run, cower, or become paralyzed by fear. They have learned to count on our consistency and trustworthiness. We’ll still be there making the effort to do our best long after the weaker ones have faded.”

Reliable people are treasured wherever they are found. You may love that you can count on a certain best friend to always show up when you need to vent or whatever, but can that someone count on you in the same way? Do you want to be the person that people count on? Do you want an edge in almost any sphere of your life? Try reliability and see what it will do for you.

**For Everything There is a Time and a Season**

**Quote of the day:**

“Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.” — James Bryant Conant

**Think about it:**

The Art of War, an ancient Chinese text by the military tactician Sun Tzu, gives an overview of how change and innovation occur in societies, businesses, nations, and individuals.

It presents the phases in the growth of an idea, project, innovation, organization, or nation, as five stages or “seasons”: metal, water, wood, fire, and earth. In the metal phase at the start, there is discontent. The need for change is apparent, but someone has to get the ball rolling.

In the next phase of water, imagination comes into action. We play with possibilities and try to picture what the ideal future for us would look like. We flow and splash around with ideas until we find the best one(s). In the wood stage, we’ve picked the idea to implement and begin to assemble our resources. We build a team and make a plan. At this stage, effort often seems to overshadow results.

When we enter the fire phase, our innovation or project breaks out, and we begin to burn. We have to keep the heat and get others interested—spread the fire to others as well.

Earth is the last phase before the cycle repeats itself. Once our project is running, we have to make it sustainable and ensure long-term growth without running out of steam. We must fight deterioration with more innovation or we will begin to lose what we’ve gained.

Each of us may be at a different season or stage. That’s healthy. Discontent can be helpful to find new directions of growth. Water and new ideas are always needed to keep improving. Wood is needed for structure and putting landing gear on our ideas. Fire is a sign that people are getting something done and giving heat and light. Earth is needed for stability and to build walls of defense against possible setbacks and adversity. When all of these are present, we find ourselves in an ideal place to prosper and bear fruit.

**True Honesty**

**Quote of the day:**

“It has always seemed strange to me… the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest, are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.” — John Steinbeck

**Think about it:**

Most people associate honesty with “telling the truth,” but real honesty is “feeling” the truth as well. If you say something one way and feel different inside, then there is no true honesty. It’s somewhat like putting fancy packaging on a poor product.

Whenever a person moves from just telling the truth to both telling and really meaning what he says, life immediately responds to that change. By moving toward true honesty, we can create the life responses and breakthroughs to success that we are seeking.

Some people believe that by being fully honest we somehow lose in business and life. The truth is, not being fully honest blocks energy. True honesty lets energy flow into our work and life.

**Discipline**

**Quote of the day:**

“Many of life’s circumstances are created by three basic choices: the disciplines you choose to keep, the people you choose to be with, and the laws you choose to obey.” —Charles Millhuff

**Think about it:**

That quote reminded me of a story. During the fourteenth century in what is now Belgium, there lived a man named Reynald III. Reynald was a nobleman, the rightful duke over his ancestral lands, but his younger brother revolted against him and usurped him. Reynald's brother needed the duke out of the way, but he didn't want to kill him. So he came up with an ingenious plan. Because Reynald was a very large man, his brother had him put in a room with a smaller-than-average door. If Reynald would simply lose some weight, he would be allowed to leave. In fact, the usurping brother promised that if Reynald left the room, his freedom and his title would be restored.

But Reynald was not a man of discipline, and his brother knew that. Every day, the brother had trays of delicious foods delivered to his older brother's room. And Reynald ate. In fact, instead of growing thinner, he grew fatter and fatter.

Have you created some circumstances you don’t like because of your lack of discipline? A person lacking discipline is in a prison without bars. Are your habits making you a prisoner?

**Dreams Out of Reach**

**Quote of the day:**

“Everyone who achieves success in a great venture solves each problem as they come to it. …They keep going regardless of the obstacles they meet.” —W. Clement Stone

**Think about it:**

When you’ve worked as hard as you possibly could and yet you failed to make the grade, your dreams remain out of reach, and you feel you just can’t do it anymore, you can feel like giving up.

When you’re getting pounded and slammed again and again, how do you get through it? I know how. You do too. You keep going, no matter what! As Winston Churchill said: “If you’re going through hell, keep going.” Okay, that might be oversimplifying a complex issue, but really, in order to accomplish anything significant, you have to keep fighting day after day, no matter what roadblocks you run into. In the face of disappointment or even failure, that’s the time to try again, work harder and study more.

Automobile genius Henry Ford once came up with a revolutionary plan for a new kind of engine, which we know today as the V-8. Ford was eager to get his great new idea into production. He had some men draw up the plans, and presented them to the engineers. As the engineers studied the drawings, one by one they came to the same conclusion. Their visionary boss just didn’t know much about the fundamental principles of engineering. He’d have to be told gently—his dream was impossible. Ford said, “Produce it anyway.”

They replied, “But it’s impossible.” “Go ahead,” Ford commanded, “and stay on the job until you succeed, no matter how much time is required.”

For six months, they struggled with drawing after drawing, design after design. Nothing. Another six months. Nothing. At the end of the year, Ford checked with his engineers and they once again told him that what he wanted was impossible. Ford told them to keep going. They did. And they discovered how to build a V-8 engine.

Keep going and discover your dreams.

**Making a Life**

**Quote of the day:**

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” —Author unknown

**Think about it:**

Blaise Pascal was an influential French scientist who lived in the 1600s. He completed important works on mathematics and experimental physics. Pascal was also a devoted Christian. He wrote books on grace and the life of Christ, as well as other Christian works. Through all this Pascal realized that his faith, though intensely personal, could not be merely individualistic.

His love for God drove him to love for the poor. “I love poverty,” he said, “because he (Christ) loved it. I like wealth because it gives a means to assist the needy.”

Increasingly Pascal deprived himself so that he could give more. He sold his coach and horses, his fine furniture and silverware and even his library in order to give to the poor. When he received an advance of 1,000 francs for his bus [a horse-drawn carriage that could carry several passengers], he sent the money to the poor in Blois, who had suffered from a bitter winter. He then signed over his interest in the company to the hospitals of Paris and Clermont.

When Pascal died at the age of 39 on August 19, 1662, his funeral was attended by family, friends, scientific colleagues, worldly companions, converts, writers, and the back of the church was filled with the poor, each and every person there someone Pascal had helped during his life.

**Roadblocks**

**Quote of the day:**

“Determination gives you the resolve to keep going in spite of the roadblocks that lay before you.” —Denis Waitley

**Think about it:**

There are many different approaches to facing setbacks and disappointments. I don’t think there’s one perfect formula for overcoming difficulties. There’s no set list of “must do’s” if you’re looking to muster up courage and strength to endure fear, stress, heartache, frustration, or any of the other challenges that accompany the dry spells in our lives. I often find inspiration from true stories about people who have accomplished great things in the face of hardship or handicap. Sports provide some great examples along these lines because they’re such public examples and there’s a clear means of measuringtheir accomplishments.

For example: During a football game between the Chicago Bears and the New York Giants, one of the announcers observed that Walter Payton, the Bears’ running back, had accumulated over nine miles in career rushing yardage. The other announcer remarked, “Yeah, and that’s with somebody knocking him down every 4.6 yards!”

Walter Payton, the most successful running back ever, knows that everyone—even the very best—gets knocked down. The key to success is to get up and run again just as hard.

**Kindness**

**Quote of the day:**

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” -- Aesop

**Think about it:**

One of my favorite books, which I often recommend to others, is *The Power of Nice* by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval. In the book, Kaplan Thaler and Koval illustrate the surprising power of nice with an array of real-life examples from the business arena as well as from their personal lives. Most important, they present a plan of action covering everything from creating a positive impression to sweetening the pot to turning enemies to allies.

Filled with inspiration and suggestions on how to supercharge your career and expand your reach in the workplace, *The Power of Nice*, transformed the way I live and work. Putting their ideas into practice has resulted in some amazingly positive experiences, not just for myself, but also for those with whom I’ve interacted nicely and kindly. From having to call customer service with a complaint to interacting with a difficult student, the power of nice never failed to perform. It’s literally changed my life, as well as the lives of others.

Here’s a story from the book I thought you might like.

For years, we have loved a particular security guard in our Manhattan office building. In fact, most of us at *The Kaplan Thaler Group* think the world of him. A large, jovial man in his mid-fifties, Frank brightens people’s days by giving everyone who walks into our building a huge, warm greeting. “Hello, Linda!” “Hello, Robin!” he’ll say. “Happy Friday!”

Frank’s engaging banter changed the way we started work in the morning. Instead of simply flashing our passes anonymously and making a beeline for the elevator, we found ourselves seeking out Frank and making sure to say hello. He set a positive tone for the entire day.

But we never considered how Frank might be helping our business, other than preventing intruders from entering the premises.

That is, until the day Richard Davis, the president and COO of U.S. Bank, the sixth-largest bank in the United States, came to see us. For months, our entire team had been working to create a pitch that would wow Davis and win us the huge U.S. Bank account. At the time of Davis’ visit it was down to the wire. We were one of two agencies still in the running for the account. Davis and his team were flying in from their executive offices in Minneapolis to meet personally with us. We didn’t realize it at the time, but in fact, Davis and his team were a bit apprehensive about the treatment they’d get in New York City.

The furious pace and hard-bitten “out of my way” attitude of the Big Apple had become part of the mythology of the city. They were afraid we would be too cold, too aloof. But when Richard Davis and his team walked into our building, they received a warm, enthusiastic greeting from Frank. When Davis reached our offices a few minutes later, he was gushing about the friendly security guard. “This guy gave me a huge hello!” he said. “And all of a sudden, I thought how could I not want to work with a company that has someone like Frank? How can I feel anything but good about hiring an agency like that?”

We won the account. Of course, Davis wouldn’t have awarded us the job if he wasn’t impressed with our work. But we’ve got to give Frank credit. With a multimillion account in the balance, it was Frank’s warm hello that helped us clinch the deal. That is the power of nice!

Why not try the practicing the power of nice and see how it betters your life and others.

**Live with Joy**

**Quote of the day:**

“We cannot choose our fate but we can choose how we face our fate.” —Guo Youming

**Think about it:**

As I was skimming headlines on an online news website, I saw this headline: “He’s a Fighter: Guo Youming Won’t Succumb to Rare Disease.” Intrigued, I clicked on the article and started reading Guo Youming’s incredible story.

As a child, his mother noticed that he walked unsteadily and had frequent falls. His condition worsened until he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at age seven. The diagnosis was crushing for Youming’s parents, who struggled with guilt and grief as they learned that there was no cure. Youming said that he also wanted to despair, but he realized that he would only be making life harder for his parents. Instead, he refused to let his condition limit him and determined, he says, to “do my best and smile bravely.” At nine years old, he became unable to walk and was confined to a wheelchair. As his muscles atrophied, his limbs lost all function. Today, his indefatigable mother insists him with eating, using the bathroom, taking a shower, and other basic tasks.

Although Youming had to rely on his mother to wheel him into class, he insisted on never being absent. His positive and buoyant attitude made him a favorite among classmates and teachers, who admired his victorious outlook on life while living with a steadily worsening condition.

At age 26, Youming can only ingest liquids and relies on a respirator to make it through each day. His rapidly declining physical strength didn’t even last through his own graduation ceremony. Yet he passed his oral exam with outstanding marks and earned a master’s degree in Chinese literature. Literature is Youming’s passion, and his thesis is a collection of his poems and other works. It is 100,000 words long, a monumental achievement for Youming, who is only able to type ten words per minute for ten minutes each day, lying on his back and using a mouse to tap on a special keyboard. Youming hopes to pass the civil servant exam in the future.

“We cannot choose our fate,” says Youming, “but we can choose how we face our fate. If life seems meaningless, then we must give it meaning. Whether we pass a day in sorrow or in joy, we still have to live through the day. Why not live it with joy? As long as I don’t give up on myself, God and others won’t give up on me.” – By Elsa Sichrovsky

**1,000 Reasons for Gratitude**

**Quote of the day:**

“Gratitude is a decision of the will, and if a decision of the will, the choice resides squarely with us. Deciding to be thankful is no easy task. It takes work.”— Chuck Swindoll

**Think about it:**

In a video clip I watched on YouTube some time ago, one of the participants in a panel was talking about a trying time in her life that had led to serious depression. A friend advised her to put together a list of 1,000 reasons for gratitude, so she started keeping track of the good things that came across her path each day, and slowly the tide of negativity turned.

I often thought of this video clip but never ventured into the task of keeping such a complex gratitude list myself until recently, when a personal loss was followed by poor health and a big unwelcome change in my work environment.

These setbacks caught me by surprise, and as I stood in front of the proverbial overturned apple cart, watching my carefully collected apples roll all over the place, I couldn’t help but feel utterly dismayed. Like dark clouds forecasting an approaching storm, I soon felt the wind of depression blowing about me.

I knew that I had to do something about this negative force that was entering my life. That’s when I remembered the 1,000 reasons for gratitude and how rediscovering the power of positivity had pulled this person out of depression. I figured it was worth the effort to see if I could get the same benefits for myself.

The next day, with pen in hand, I sat in front of an empty page of my brand-new journal. Soon, a number of simple reasons for gratitude popped into my mind:

1. Sunshine when the weather forecast promised rain

2. A night of undisturbed sleep

3. Half an hour of early-morning prayer time

4. An email with good news from a friend…

As I continued writing, I realized that there was a lot of gratitude to be found in the little things that could easily be taken for granted or go unnoticed. Like diamonds in the rough, they had to be dug out of the mud of my negative mindset.

I did manage to keep up my list, and now, 1,000 reasons for gratitude later, I can truly say that this short daily exercise helped me to look up when feeling down and focus more on what does work out instead of quickly putting a negative spin on any situation.

As I look back over the pages of my journal, I see it as a treasure chest full of God’s gifts, answers to prayers, and proofs of His love and care for me. Even better, I’m sure there will continue to be many reasons for future journals to be filled. -- By Iris Richard

**Game of Hearts**

**Quote of the day:**

“I found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay… small acts of kindness and love.” —J.R.R. Tolkien

**Think about it:**

Who doesn’t enjoy playing or watching a good game!? People all over the world love it! It must be something embedded in our DNA, as children start very early to discover the fun and excitement of playing games together. One common element of playing games is usually the spirit of competition, which, if handled properly, can serve an educational purpose. (At the same time, however, being overly competitive can lead to violence and, if taken to the extreme, even to war.)

So, how about playing a game where you compete only with yourself and do some good in the process? How about playing *The Game of Hearts*? How fun would that be? And what is *The Game of Hearts*all about?

Before going any further, I’ll give you a bit of background. Some of it is painful history. Last year, my daughter Jennie, who at the time was still living with me and helping with my NGO, entered into stage-four breast cancer with painful metastasis of the bones. It was a long, cold winter. We were snowed in a few times with white snow, which I usually adore, but this time it was different. A new pain was gripping the air, with its tentacles spreading. I knew cancer had come back and had violently started taking my daughter’s life. It was threatening to also take mine, by inflicting depressed and hopeless thoughts on me, night after night. It was a battle royal! I started hating that white snow, that black-and-white view, the freezing air, and was yearning for some warm rays of sunshine to break through that gloom.

And some sunshine came, in an unexpected way. During this time, I was corresponding with Alex, a friend I met during the Civil March for Aleppo. I casually mentioned that while on a train I was going to talk to somebody, “be*cause it feels good to show some love to a perfect stranger.”*

*“Is that the love game? Whoever spreads more love wins? Let’s play it!”*Alex replied.

And so we did. And we began writing to each other to share stories of random people we had met and somehow connected with, simply smiled at, or helped. In spite of the fact that people could say that my life is already full of giving, this was something different. It was an out-of-the-box giving. And besides doing some good for others, it helped me keep my sanity during a very difficult time in my life, as it forced me to look for opportunities and exciting new stories that I could share with Alex.

Then one day we talked about how it would be great to get more people to play this game, and since our winter camp was approaching, we thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to try it out with a bigger team.

Alex, with Sydney’s help, a longtime friend who was visiting from the States, came up with an actual Bingo-like board that would present the basis of *The Game of Hearts*, as we had started calling it by then. We met on January 2 in the morning to describe the game to all the curious attendants, especially the philosophy behind what we coined SALs, or “Small Acts of Love.” We then divided into two groups: those who spoke English and those who spoke Italian.

Each group discussed:

* What SALs am I already doing?
* Ideas for more SALs

Both groups came up with wonderful ideas, artistically written on cardboard sheets, which we hung up in the living room. After a quick lunch, we headed off to town, where we divided into three teams that, from 2:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon, were to try out this new game on the downtown population of Rijeka.

We tried to make three balanced teams and have Filip spend time videoing each one of them. We all had our personal gameboards, and the idea was to score five points. Needless to say, everyone had a great time and was very creative in their individual and collective giving. Time just flew, and when we met that evening to share how it went, people had plenty of stories to tell! Smiles, hugs, flowers given, garbage picked up, and songs sung. It was an afternoon dedicated to experimenting with the best game ever. That afternoon, downtown Rijeka surely experienced a powerful flood of love! -- By Anna, Croatia

**There are Two Ways to Live**

**Quote of the day:**

“There are two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle and the other is as though everything is a miracle.” —Albert Einstein

**Think about it:**

You don’t need to look far to find negativity these days. Scroll the headlines or turn on your TV and you could quickly come to the conclusion that we live in a dark and angry place. But you can change that—both your belief about the world, and the world itself.

Part of my purpose, I believe, involves contributing positively to the world. I want to be remembered for making a positive difference, therefore I strive to live that legacy now, every day, with every interaction. Do I always succeed? Probably not. But I hold this aim high and give it my best.

If you could use a boost of positivity in your work and life, consider one of these ideas:

* Surround yourself with positive people.Who in your life seems to glow with positivity? Who inspires, uplifts, and challenges you to up your game? Consciously build a network of people who motivate you to be your best, then spend ample time with them. Be that source of light for others, too.
* Watch your vocabulary.I once heard that Mother Teresa declined participation in an anti-war rally. When asked why, she replied that she did not want to give any attention to war, but she’d gladly participate in a pro-peace rally. Pay attention to your words. They can help you heal relationships, mend broken hearts, reach astounding goals, and craft a beautiful vision for your work and life.
* Infuse yourself with positivity.Putting poor quality gas in your car will not help it run at peak performance. Similarly, how you fuel yourself will determine your experience as well. Read inspiring books, download helpful podcasts, watch encouraging movies, and follow positive people on social media. Create a physical environment of positivity, too: post fun quotes on your bathroom mirror, or put a light-hearted comic on your office door, for example.
* Focus on what you can control.So much is out of our hands, isn’t it? Focusing on that, however, can leave you feeling depleted and helpless. Determine what you *can* control, and put your energy there. For example, you can control your responses, actions, words, and thoughts; you can be the change you wish to see in the world. You have more power than you realize, and when you keep your focus there, that power expands.
* Look for the good.Have you ever decided to purchase a certain kind of car, then suddenly you see that car everywhere? We tend to find what we focus on: If you believe things are awful, you’ll find evidence to support that belief; if you believe life is a gift, you’ll find evidence to support that. Look for positivity.
* Examine your daily routine.How do you start your mornings? How do you close out each day? How might you bring positivity into the activities you do regularly? One of my friends uses her commute to send silent blessings to other drivers; another reflects on gratitude every evening as she brushes her teeth. Shine positivity into your already-established routines.
* Choose to be positive.Like most things in life, positivity is a decision we can make in every moment. Set affirming boundaries in your work and life. Take action to support growth and joy. Begin the habit of pausing and thoughtfully choosing your response to situations rather than mindlessly reacting.
* Think positively about the world. Perhaps most importantly, think positively about the world. Yes, negative events occur; people inflict harm, make poor choices, and cause pain. But this is also a beautiful world filled with promise, opportunity, kindness, generosity, and love. Take note of the random acts of kindness and how often they go viral. Pay attention to the small groups of people making significant positive change in their communities. Look for examples of helpfulness and contribution throughout the course of your days. Continue to feed that positive world—like Einstein said, living as though everything is a miracle—and watch life transform accordingly.

**The Umbrella**

**Quote of the day:**

“Remember there’s no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.” *—*Scott Adams

**Think about it:**

The air was heavy with impending rain as I made my way on foot through Chiba, Japan. As I glanced at the low gray clouds, I chided myself for not bringing an umbrella. It seemed that in a minute or two the heavens would burst open, but two minutes came and went.

I was waiting at a railroad crossing when my luck ran out. Suddenly, huge drops cascaded from the sky, and I heard the sound of umbrellas clicking open all around me. The electronic display announced that the barrier would remain down to allow three trains to cross. I would be standing in the rain for at least five minutes.

I decided I wouldn’t let it faze me. After all, this wasn’t the first time that I found myself caught in the rain unprepared. Then a woman walked up and stood next to me. There was nothing striking about her, and I wouldn’t have paid much attention to her if it hadn’t been for what happened next. As she stood alongside me, she quietly held her umbrella over both of us, shielding me from the rain.

I was startled out of my pretended indifference and thanked her. She smiled but didn’t say

a word. I wondered what else to say. But as we stood there waiting for the trains to pass, I realized I didn’t have to say anything. She was one of those people who don’t give a second thought to the acts of kindness they perform.

We crossed the tracks together, then went our separate ways. Like everyone else’s, my life is

filled with little opportunities to do something to help others and show them a touch of God’s love, as that woman did for me that day.

And whenever I’m tempted with the thought that there’s really no point in showing kindness to strangers, I find good reason in the memory of the kind woman who shared her umbrella with me. More importantly, I realize that each extra step, kind deed, and loving word I say may seem small, but it can open a world of kindness for people who cross my path. You think not? Well, I’m sure that woman has long forgotten the kindness she showed a wet teenager years ago—but *I* haven’t. – By Roald Watterson

**World Kindness Day**

**Quote of the day:**

“If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” --Dalai Lama

**Think about it:**

The world can be a harsh place. That’s why even small acts of kindness matter. If you think small courtesies and helpful acts are just “a drop in the bucket,” think again! You can make someone’s day with a compassionate comment or a helpful act. And all those “drops in the bucket” could end up creating an ocean of kindness.

The story of “World Kindness Day” (Nov. 13) is inspiring in itself. According to this article in *The Washington Post*, the president of Tokyo University started the “Small Kindness Movement” in Japan in 1963 after no one came to his aid when he was mugged. The motto of this movement is: “Let us show whatever kindness we can, so that kindness will be the norm in society.” This wonderful slogan reminds us that not only might we make one person’s day better with gentle kindness, but also that we might create a culture of kindness, step-by-step.

Just so you know, ample research supports the idea that performing acts of kindness will make you happier, too. When college students were asked to perform five random acts each week for six weeks, they experienced a significant boost in happiness. Sometimes virtue truly is its own reward!

In honor of the founder of *World Kindness Day*, and because it’s the right thing to do, decide you will call 911, or the emergency number in your country, if someone needs emergency help.

Also you might decide to deliberately cultivate the habit of kindness as a personal goal. If so, you’ll soon become more alert to a broad variety of opportunities for compassion. And if anyone asks how they can repay you, just say what someone said recently to a friend of mine after paying for his groceries when he had forgotten his wallet: “Pass it on.”

The ways you can be kind to others are endless as you use your own creativity and thoughtfulness. Just be mindful of how you could be of service to someone. A few sensible guidelines: If someone doesn’t want help, back off. Be sensitive to other people’s needs for privacy and space. Show respect.

**The Quest**

**Quote of the day:**

“To everythingthere is a season, and a time to every purpose.” -- Proverb

**Think about it:**

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn to not judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall. When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe

what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted. The second son said, no, it was covered with green buds and full of promise. The third son disagreed, he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfillment. The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had

each seen but one season in the tree’s life. He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are—and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life—can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons have passed. If you give up when it’s winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, and the fulfillment of your fall.

Let’s judge life by looking at a mix of all the seasons. Let the joy and challenges of the seasons of life weave a beautiful tapestry.

**The Trouble Tree**

**Quote of the day:**

“Let us not bankrupt our today by paying interest on the regrets of yesterday and by borrowing in advance the troubles of tomorrow.” —Ralph W. Sockman

**Think about it:**

The carpenter I hired to help me restore an old farmhouse had just finished a rough first day on the job. A flat tire made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw quit, and now his ancient pickup truck refused to start. While I drove him home, he sat in stony silence.

On arriving, he invited me in to meet his family. As we walked toward the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands. When opening the door, he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face wreathed in smiles. He

hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss.

Afterward, he walked me to the car. We passed the tree and my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do earlier.

“Oh, that’s my trouble tree,” he replied. “I know I can’t help having troubles on the job, but one thing for sure, troubles don’t belong in the house with my wife and the children. So I just hang them on the tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning I pick them up again.”

“Funny thing is,” he smiled, “when I come out in the morning to pick ‘em up, there aren’t nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before.”

Why not take a tip from the carpenter and hang your troubles on your worry tree, or light post or whatever there is to hang them on outside the house and pick them up in the morning. You might just find, as the carpenter did, there aren’t as many as the night before.

**Giving Money**

**Quote of the day:**

“Give freely, joyously, lovingly, and with a sense of aban­donment, and as you do, fabulous wealth inevitably will be yours.” —Joseph Murphy

**Think About It:**

I was reading Shut up, Stop Whining and Get a Life by Larry Winget and he has a great section in his book about giving that I wanted to share with you.

Feed the children; feed the homeless; save the whales; save the rain forest. Mothers Against Drunk Driving; AIDS research; United Way; Jerry’s Kids—and on and on. Every one of these causes and all of the others in the world could be financed and most of the prob­lems solved if people would do some giving and stop talking about doing some giving.

You hear people say what a shame it is we have children who are starving right here in America. They are right, it is. It is a shame to have anyone starving anywhere. So how much have you given to bring an end to the problem? Really—how much? Give me a dollar amount. When did you give it? How long ago? When was the last time you actually sat down and put pen to check and gave a nice chunk of change to solve even one of the world’s problems? Most people talk about all the good that needs to be done, and so few do anything about it. It is just talk. Talk does not fix much.

I grew up a foot-washing fundamentalist. One of the old gospel songs I heard growing up was, “You’re so heavenly-minded you’re no earthly good.” What a great thing for all of us to remember. Our thoughts are so lofty—so full of love—so full of willingness to do anything within our power to help. Anything but write a check.

Some people do give; I will grant you that. If you are one of the few who do, then I applaud you. But most do not give. How can they justify that? Is it because they do not have enough to give? Hardly. Everyone has enough to give something. It is not because they do not have it. It comes down to the fact they will not give it.

Why? Are they afraid they will diminish their supply by giving part of it away? Actually just the opposite is true. The more you give of what you have, the more you actually get. It is the coolest thing. I tried to figure that out for a long time until I discovered it was actually one of the Laws of Physics.

**Service**

**Quote of the day:**

“When you stop giving and offering something to the rest of the world, it's time to turn out the lights*.” —*George Burns

**Think about it:**

Viktor Frankl focused on the need for meaning and purpose in our lives, something that transcends our own lives and taps the best energies within us. The late Dr. Hans Selye, in his research on stress, basically says that a long, healthy, and happy life is the result of making contributions, of having meaningful projects that are personally exciting and contribute to and bless the lives of others. His ethic was "earn thy neighbor's love."

In the words of George Bernard Shaw: This is the true joy in life--that being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. That being a force of nature, instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It's a sort of splendid torch which I've got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

N. Eldon Tanner has said, "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." And there are so many ways to serve. Not a day goes by that we can't at least serve one other human being by making deposits of unconditional love. Are you serving others?

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**Quote of the day:**

“On the first of January let every man gird himself once more, with his face to the front, and take no interest in the things that were and are past.” —Henry Ward Beecher

**Think about it:**

New Year’s is one of the oldest holidays still celebrated, but the exact date and nature of the festivities has changed over time. It originated thousands of years ago in ancient Babylon, celebrated as an eleven day festival on the first day of spring. During this time, many cultures used the sun and moon cycle to decide the “first” day of the year. It wasn’t until Julius Caesar implemented the Julian calendar that January 1st became the common day for the celebration of the New Year.

The content of the festivities has varied as well. While early celebrations celebrated earth’s cycles, in the twentieth century, it has become a holiday mostly associated with traditions and resolutions.

While celebration varies all over the world, common traditions include: Making resolutions or goals to improve one’s life. Common resolutions concern diet, exercise, habits, and other issues concerning personal wellness. A common view is to use the first day of the year as a clean slate to improve one’s life.

Many nations and cultures within them have their own characteristic way of celebrating the New Year: **In Turkey,** New Year’s Eve is one of the most popular holidays. Turkish New Year’s Eve traditions include a family dinner, a national lottery drawing, and a countdown to midnight. Many people in Turkey start celebrating New Year’s Eve with a large family dinner. Variety shows on television begin in the late afternoon and continue until early morning of the next day. Many people play games while waiting for the clock to strike midnight. State TV channels announce the winning numbers of the New Year’s national lottery just before midnight.

**In Thailand,** Thais have been celebrating the 1st of January as the first day of the year for almost 70 years. The New Year is a long holiday in Thailand from the 31st of December to the 3rd of January. Many people take this opportunity to travel either domestic or abroad. For people who are away from their hometown, it is the time to go home to visit parents and family. A lot of Thais celebrate the New Year by attending countdown events around the country where there are concerts and magnificent fireworks. A number of Thais visit their local temple to make merit either on New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day. Some people also attend meditation retreats over the New Year.

**In the Philippines,** celebrations are very loud, believing that the noise will scare away evil beings. There is often a midnight feast featuring twelve different round fruits to symbolize good luck for the twelve months of the year. Other traditional foods include sticky rice and noodles, but not chicken or fish, because these animals are food foragers, which can be seen as bad luck for the next year’s food supply.

**In colder countries,** close to water, such as Canada, parts of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, it is customary to organize cold-water plunges. These plunges and races, sometimes called a Polar Bear Plunge, often raise money for charity, or awareness for a cause.

The old Scottish song, “Auld Lang Syne,” is sung at the stroke of midnight in almost every English-speaking country in the world to bring in the New Year. At least partially written by Robert Burns in the 1700s, it was first published in 1796 after Burns’ death. The words, “Auld

Lang Syne,” literally mean, “old long ago,” or simply, “the good old days.”