

Becoming a Grateful Spouse

The Way of Gratitude

Expressing gratitude is a fundamental aspect of Christian life. The phrase “give thanks” appears 56 times in the Bible and the word for thanksgiving— eucharist— is used as the name of the Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, the Holy Eucharist. Belief in God, specifically in Jesus Christ should increase our gratitude. His death on the Cross and Resurrection are the greatest gift we have been given and leads us directly to gratitude.

In marriage, gratitude is an essential virtue in the central dynamic of married love; the gift of self in which each spouse gives their life as a gift to the other and receives that gift in return. Without gratefulness the gift cannot be received properly. Ungratefulness can breed resentment and bitterness.

There is more to gratitude than simply saying thank you.

A higher expression of gratitude involves a sense of wonder and awe at the nature of existence, the goodness of God, the beauty of his creation; and responding to this in the way we live. This sense of wonder in the ordinary was well expressed by the 20th century Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton in a letter he wrote to his fiancée, Frances. After apologizing for an ink stain on the page he quipped, “I like the Cyclostyle ink, it is so inky. I do not think there is anyone who takes quite such fierce pleasure in things being themselves as I do” (Character Strengths and Virtues, page 553).



1 Chronicles 16:34

**Give thanks to the LORD, for
he is good; for his steadfast
love endures forever!**

The Gratitude Questionnaire

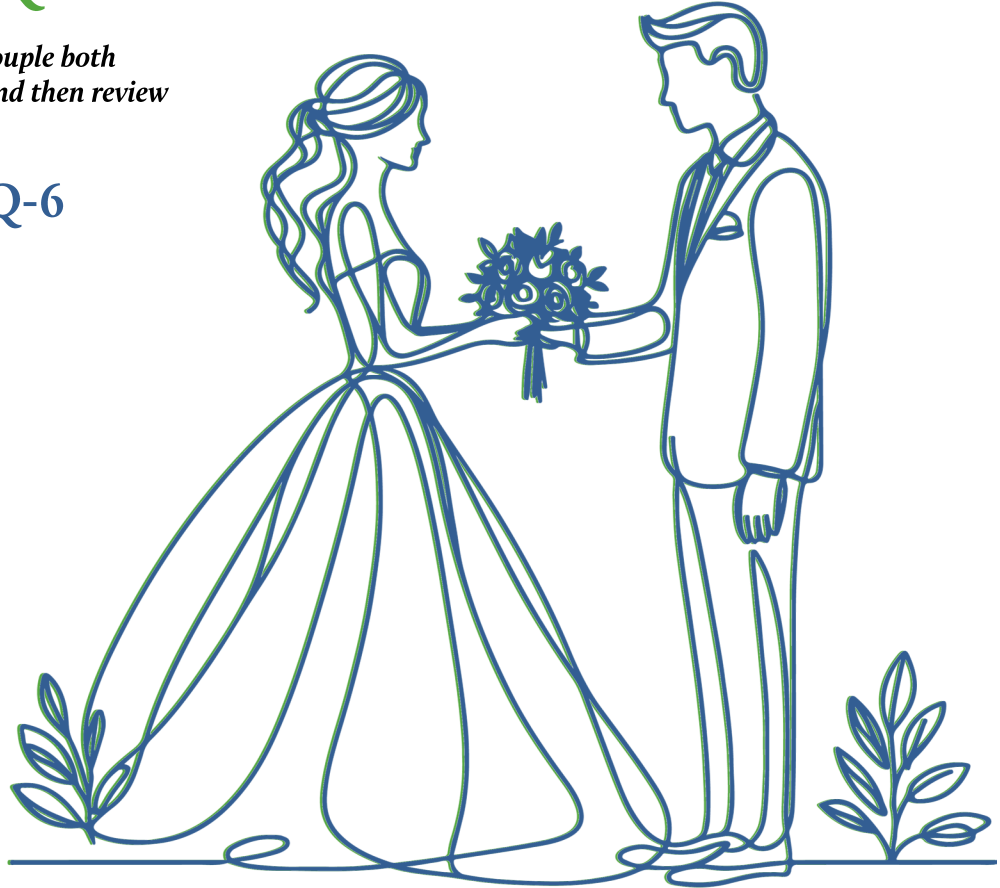
The learning couple and mentor couple both complete the brief questionnaire and then review the score together.

Link to one-page GQ-6

(<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/gratitudequestionnaire6.pdf>)



Instructions for scoring and interpreting the GQ-6



Instructions for Scoring

Add up your scores for all 6 items. Items 3 and 6 are to be reverse-scored. For example, if you scored a '7', give yourself a '1'. If you scored a '6', give yourself a '2'. Use this total to see where you land on the scale below.

Interpretation of Score

Here are some benchmarks for making sense of your score:


- ◆ 41 out of 42 on the GQ-6 scored higher than 75% of the people who took the survey. If you scored a 42 or higher, then you scored among the top 13% of people who took the survey.
- ◆ 38 out of 42 on the GQ-6 scored higher than 50% of the people who took it.
- ◆ 35 out of 42 on the GQ-6 scored higher than 25% of the people who took it.
- ◆ If you scored below a 35, then you are in the bottom 25% of the sample of people who took the survey in terms of gratitude.

The scale is developed by Dr. Michael E. McCullough and Dr. Robert A. Emmons: McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002). The Grateful Disposition: A conceptual and Empirical Topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 112-127.

⇒ *Share & Discuss*

your results with your fiancé and your mentor couple.

Inventory to Self-Evaluate Level of Gratitude

 (<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/resources/questionnaires-researchers/gratitude-questionnaire#:~:text=The%20GQ%2D6%20is%20a,scored%20to%20inhibit%20response%20bias>)

Boosting Happiness Through Gratitude

Research gives us methods to boost happiness by developing the virtue of gratitude.

According to modern positive psychology research, gratitude leads to increased happiness and life satisfaction. It can be developed and strengthened through practice. Planning ways to develop the habit of gratitude can involve several research-based methods. In the past, research approached gratitude with a monolithic view that focused on measuring it simply in terms of intensity; people are more or less grateful, and that's it. In the past 25 years researchers have identified three additional facets of gratitude, all of which can be developed through intentional practice.

Colossians 3:15

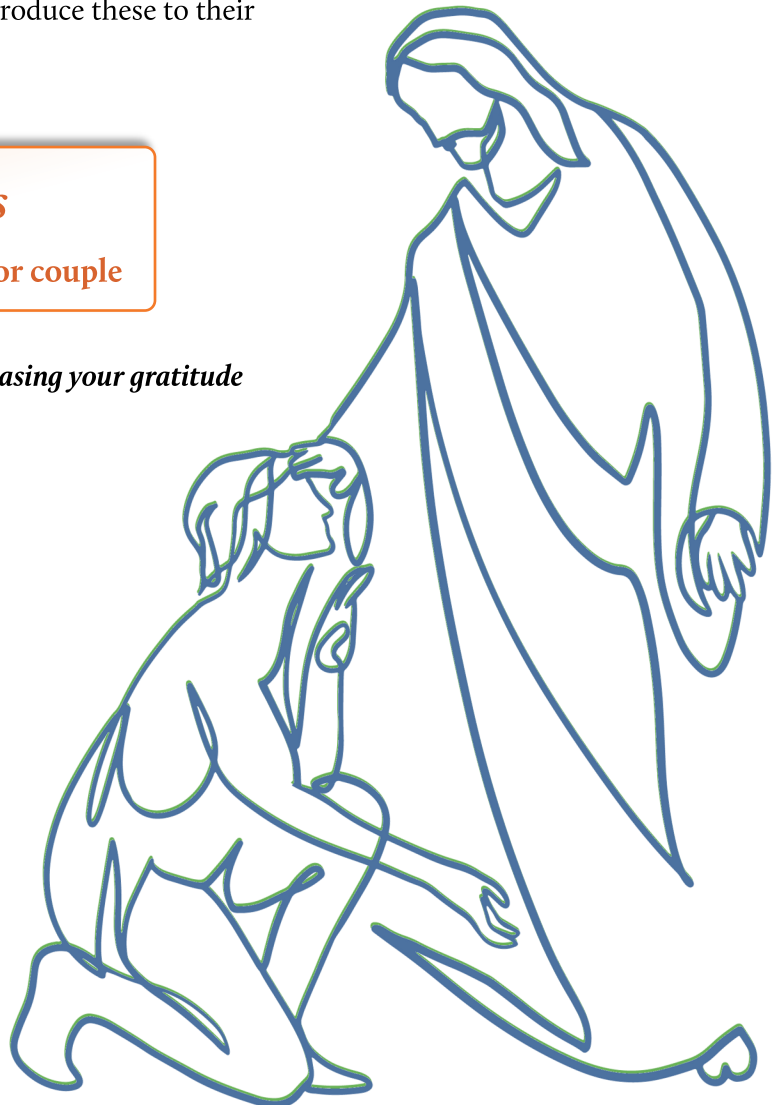
Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

In addition to intensity, the facets of gratitude are frequency, span, and density. Frequency is defined as feeling grateful several times a day. Span refers to the number of life circumstances that a person feels grateful for at a given time. Density is the number of people to whom one feels grateful for a single positive outcome or circumstance.

There are several research-backed practices that individuals and married people can use to increase all four facets of gratitude. Parents can also introduce these to their children.

⇒ *Share & Discuss*
with your fiancé and your mentor couple

What do you think about the possibility of increasing your gratitude through intentional practice?



⇒ *Share & Discuss*

with your fiancé and your mentor couple

The Three Good Things Exercise

Daily practice of the “three good things” exercise studied by Martin Seligman and others showed 94% relief from people described as “severely depressed” to “mildly to moderately depressed” within about 2 weeks of practicing this simple activity. To do this, one takes stock of their day and identifies three good things, describing why they were good gifts, and expressing gratitude. This can be included as part of the traditional Catholic practice of making an examination of conscience each evening by identifying sins and expressing contrition for them, and then identifying specific blessings received from God.

 Three Good Things	
1.	
2.	
3.	
<hr/>	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Fasting and Gratitude

In his book, *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Robert Emmon describes research showing “that people who have higher levels of gratitude are much more likely to fast regularly than those who score lower on a standard measurement of gratitude.” According to science, the discipline of fasting, when done with proper disposition, is not a rejection of happiness. Paradoxically, it actually leads to increased happiness.

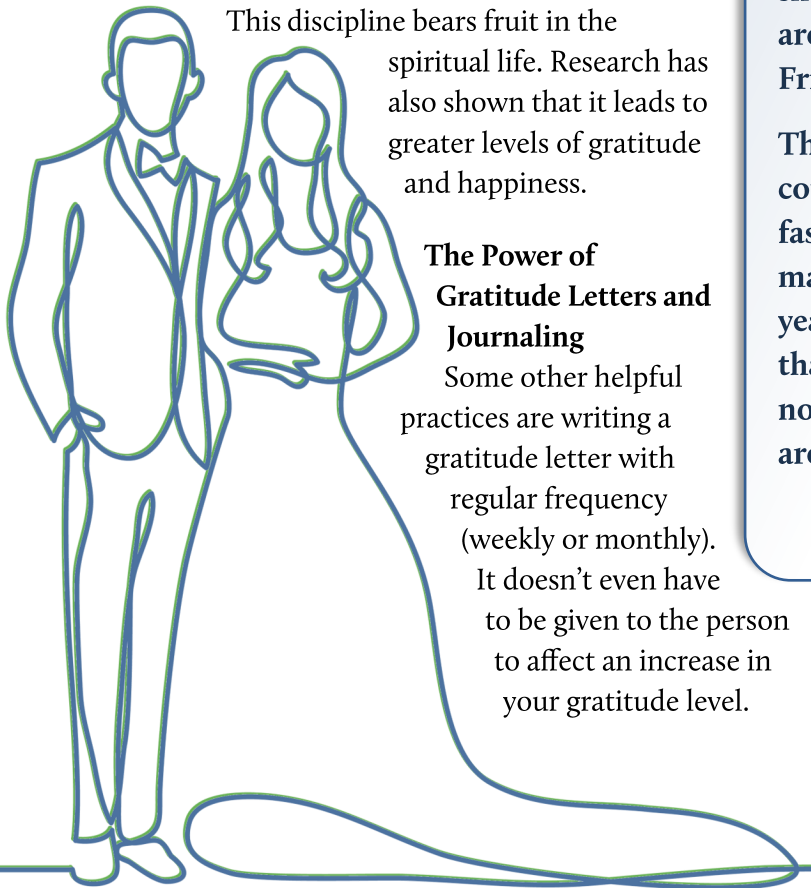
For Catholics, fasting is a spiritual discipline that is a regular part of the observance of the season of Lent. Catholics are obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. This also includes the practice of abstinence from meat on those days and all other Fridays in Lent. Fasting, or another form of sacrifice, is also observed on Fridays throughout the year to commemorate the Passion and Death of Jesus.

This discipline bears fruit in the spiritual life. Research has also shown that it leads to greater levels of gratitude and happiness.

The Power of Gratitude Letters and Journaling

Some other helpful practices are writing a gratitude letter with regular frequency (weekly or monthly).

It doesn't even have to be given to the person to affect an increase in your gratitude level.



Code of Canon Law

The divine law binds all the Christian faithful to do penance each in his or her own way. In order for all to be united among themselves by some common observance of penance, however, penitential days are prescribed on which the Christian faithful devote themselves in a special way to prayer, perform works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their own obligations more faithfully and especially by observing fast and abstinence, according to the norm of the following canons.

The penitential days and times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.

Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year. The law of fasting binds those who have attained their majority, until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance.

—Canon 1249-52

⇒ Share & Discuss

with your fiancé and your mentor couple, some ideas about how to live fasting and abstinence in your home.

Gratitude Statement

Exercise: Write a three-sentence gratitude statement, as an abbreviated letter, expressing gratitude to your fiancé for something they did during your engagement. If you have difficulty figuring out what to write you might try focusing on something specific to the wedding preparations. You do not need to share this with your mentor couple.

	 Gratitude Statements
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2.	
3.	
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1.	
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Gratitude Journal

Keeping a gratitude journal has a similar effect and when used daily can help one focus on specific aspects of life and facets of gratitude.

Emmon proposes assigning specific themes to each weekday:

- ◆ Monday- gifts we received from others and ways to respond to them
- ◆ Tuesday- recall a good that is going to end soon and acknowledge gratitude for it.
- ◆ Wednesday- the absence of a blessing or the ramifications if a blessing we have didn't happen
- ◆ Thursday- to whom we are grateful and for what
- ◆ Friday- write down times when something bad turned into something good.

We propose you add these for the weekend:

- ◆ Saturday- identify a blessing from the week that only God could have provided.
- ◆ Sunday- express your gratitude to God when you offer your own prayers during the Offertory part of the Mass.

Intentional gratitude leads to increased happiness and can deepen our relationship with God, our spouse, and in our family. Consider incorporating one or more of the practices introduced in this meeting into your life routine.

