

“The Power of Thank You”
By Rev. Kim D. Wilson
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Poconos
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Every once in a while, Life calls us to “Wake Up.” We’re just going along, maybe things are basically fine, or maybe they’re not so fine. Then it happens. I want to share two stories with you this morning. The first one is told by a young man named Brian Doyle, who describes his own wake up call. And we’re going to listen to him tell us about his experience and how it affected him.

[play “365 Days of Thank You” *START AT 0:15]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNfAnkojhoE>

The second story is about a man named John Kralik. He began his career as a young, idealistic attorney. He was proud of the Statement of Ideals he had created and which he had posted on the wall of his law firm. It said, in part, “We will be true to our beliefs in right and wrong, both as lawyers and as human beings.” He also pledged to keep his fees low to make his services affordable. Regarding the fees, he later learned that, as he says, “such idealism had serious limitations as a business model.”

Seven years later, he wrote the following:

On December 22, 2007, I felt my life was at an irreversible personal nadir. My law firm was losing money and losing its lease. I was going through a difficult divorce, was completely out of funds, and was living in a small stuffy apartment where I often slept on the floor under an ancient air conditioner. My sons had grown distant from me. A horrible year was ending, with promises that things would soon be even worse.

An old friend of his from law school called. John says,

Bob asked how I was doing. This was a mistake. Poor Bob. “Not good” is what I said, and my tone was desperate and bitter. Bob asked if I wanted to go to breakfast. Another mistake. Later, he would tell me that he had never seen me this upset.

They met at a dingy coffee house near John's apartment in downtown Pasadena. The man Bob saw across the chipped Formica table was white, fifty-two years old, overweight, pasty, and tired, with a terrified sadness in his eyes. His usual stoicism had broken down. He told Bob his tale of woe, and added that on top of all that, he was being sued. Then Bob asked John about Grace, John's lady friend. Grace had just broken up with him the night before.

On New Year's Day, John took a walk on a network of paths in the San Gabriel mountains. He took a wrong turn off the trail and became completely lost. He kept thinking what a loser he was at what he was doing. He wanted to do something more meaningful with his life. He began to slip and stumble in the rough. He worried that he might fall into a ravine, and if that happened, how would he survive the night? John writes,

Then I heard a voice: "Until you learn to be grateful for the things you have," it said, "you will not receive the things you want."

He stopped and sat down. This message seemed important. He thought about his grandfather, and how he would give each of his grandchildren a silver dollar. He promised John and the others that if he received a thank you note, he would give them another one. John wrote a thank you note, and he received a second silver dollar. But he never sent a second thank you note and so he did not receive a third silver dollar.

John eventually found the path again, and as he walked, he came up with an idea. He would try to find one person to thank each day for 365 days. He had nothing to lose. He says,

My only problem: Did I have anything to be grateful for? The way my life was going, I hardly thought so.

He started by writing thank you notes for the Christmas gifts he had received, something he had never done before. He wrote one to Grace, which renewed their friendship. Then his younger son paid his dad back for a small loan. John wrote to him:

Dear Son,

Thank you for paying back the loan of \$120. By being true to your word you are building trust with others, and I am glad to see that. I am also thankful for the other positive changes in your life, your new job, the order you have brought to your apartment. It is very gratifying for us to see.
Love, Dad.

He wrote notes to family, his colleagues, his clients, his friends, his young daughter's teacher, and even to the guy at Starbucks who went out of his way to remember John's name. But it was a difficult project. As he looked back, he saw that the difficulty had been caused not by the state of his life but by, as he says, "my own ungrateful focus, my materialistic envy and resentment."

Eventually, John Kralik surpassed his original goal of 365 notes. He continues to write thank yous to this day. Throughout that first year, he underwent many changes and improvements. He wrote a book about how the project transformed his life and his priorities. Friends, family, colleagues and the other people in his midst are now at the top of the list. The most radical change of all, though, has been the opening of his heart.

Two stories. Two very different people. One clear truth: saying "thank you" can have a powerful effect on our own lives and on the lives of others.

I'd like for us to return to the question I asked during our Time for All Ages: To whom would you like to say thank you and why? Would anyone like to share?

[sharing]

Saying thank you to express our appreciation wakes us up and keeps us awake to the exquisite beauty of being alive. It is in the genuine turning to one another that we find the sacred; God, the Spirit of Love and Life. May what we have heard here this morning inspire us to say "thank you" more often. May our words inspire others. May the world one day hear a joyful chorus of gratitude.