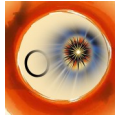


Series: From Ego to...?



Episode: 7

Stillness Returns to Gratefulness

Tony Macelli

[1. Reconnecting After the Depths](#)

If you have travelled with me through this series so far, you will know that the road has wound through some deep terrain. We began with the ego's cramped little room, then followed the long movement towards healing, the inner turning, the quiet consent of centring prayer, and finally the strange territory of the two "nothings". If you managed to stay with that last one, then you deserve a cup of tea and a biscuit.

There is something rather human about needing a breather after such intensity. Even the early monks knew this. Evagrius once warned that too much apophysis without a little warmth can leave the soul "like a deserted house, swept but empty". And, if you look closely, the pattern appears everywhere: silence leads us back to speech; emptiness leads back to noticing; the fasting leads, sooner or later, to a meal.

Gratitude is one of the gentlest ways back.

It is the movement of someone who has been stripped of the need to clutch at life and

IN THIS SERIES...

Episodes 1–3 traced the ego's story and its early unravelling: we began by seeing how the false self forms as a survival structure, narrowing our vision of God and ourselves. We followed how transformation begins when the ego loosens its grip and daily rhythms of silence, surrender, and honesty create space for healing and a more spacious identity to emerge.

Episode 4 – The Inner Turning

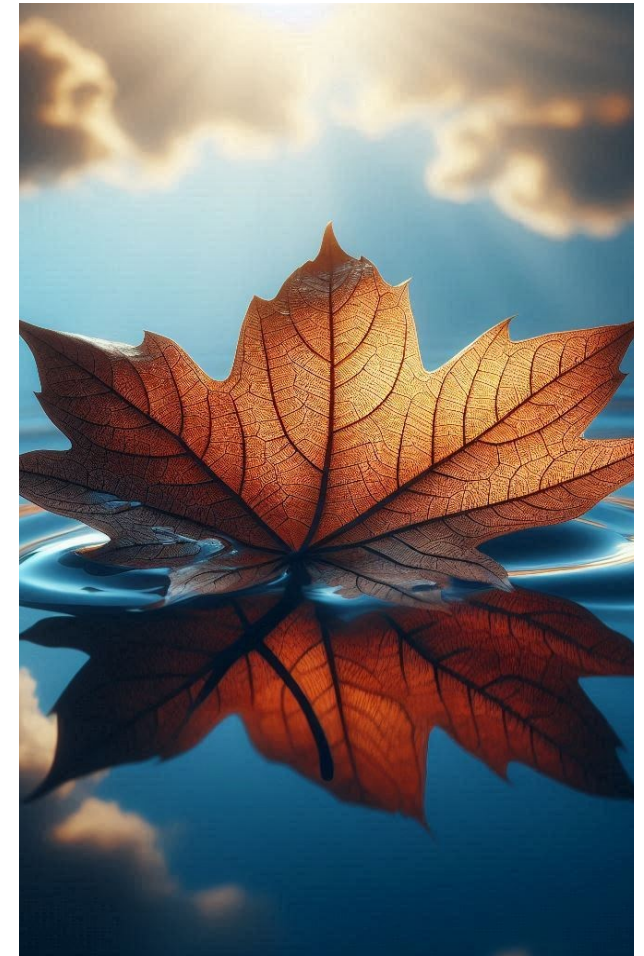
Here the focus shifted from "doing" to noticing grace already moving beneath the surface. Through seven "living orientations," we explored subtle inner movements – from silence and letting-go to trust and heart-centred presence – that help us cooperate with what God is beginning within us. This was the episode that taught us to listen before choosing and to let grace "find the path for us".

Episode 5 – Objectless Awareness

In this episode we went further into the apophatic stream, discovering that the deepest prayer may have no object at all. Drawing on Keating, Bourgeault, the *Cloud*, and others, we entered the consenting simplicity of Centring Prayer, where thoughts are gently released and we rest in the silence that God fills. Here we learned how "the prayer that no longer seeks becomes the ear of God".

Episode 6 – Two Nothings and a Bridge

Told as a short 3-Act play, this episode showed two kinds of emptiness. The first arises when life collapses – a silence of absence (Act I, with the Homeless Woman). The second is the bright stillness that comes when grace takes over – "the Silence of Light" in Sr Theodora's terrace above Metora. Between them lies a threshold: a bridge where striving gives way to surrender and "the reins slip to an unseen rider." The play offered a dramatic picture of letting the self fall quiet so grace can remember what self forgot.



can finally look up again. After the stillness of objectless awareness and the unsettling honesty of the "two nothings", gratitude arrives almost like a friend who knocks softly at the door and says, "Shall we step outside for a moment? The light is rather lovely just now."

And this is not a detour from the contemplative path. It is the next step in it.

For once the ego's noise has quietened a



little, the world starts to look different. You find yourself noticing small gifts that were hidden before – a patch of good sunlight, a line from a psalm that suddenly feels alive, the familiar kindness of someone putting a mug down beside you. Meister Eckhart famously wrote, “If the only prayer you ever say is *thank you*, that will be enough.” It is one of those lines that seems too simple, until life becomes hard enough for it to be true.

And this is why gratitude makes sense here, at this point in the journey. It reconnects us to the world after a time of inner stripping. It gives the heart a way of returning to the ordinary without losing the depth it has found. It is a kind of soft landing after the heights and the silences.

Think of the whole series so far as a long exhalation – letting go of egoic effort, self-story, and the restlessness that narrows the soul. Gratitude is the first, small in-breath. It

does not undo the work of emptiness. It simply fills the silence with a very quiet yes.

In other words, it is time for things to become a little lighter. Gratitude offers exactly that.

[2. Gratitude as the Ego's Undoing](#)

If you think about it, the ego is something of a professional complainer. It always has a list: what's missing, what's risky, what isn't quite good enough yet. It doesn't matter how much life hands us; the ego has a way of narrowing the beam so that only the problems get illuminated. It is not malicious – just its job description, really. Episodes 1–3 showed how this habit is formed and how it drains the soul of oxygen even when nothing is objectively wrong.

This is why gratitude feels so mischievous, almost subversive. It does something the ego is not prepared for: it points to what is already good, already given, already quietly supporting us. The moment the heart says “thank you,” even in the smallest way, the ego's entire operating system flickers. It doesn't know how to process a reality that isn't centred on lack.

You may remember, in Episode 4, how we explored those “living orientations” – gentle inner turnings like stillness, letting-go, trust, or heart-attention. Although gratitude wasn't named among them, it weaves through all of them. In fact, gratitude often arises as a *fruit* of these orientations. A moment of stillness makes space for “thank you” to rise; letting-go clears room for appreciation; trust invites gratitude to surface without being forced. Gratitude is not a separate path – it is the quiet glow that begins to gather whenever any path is lived with sincerity.

A grateful glance is, in fact, a tiny echo of that inner turning. It is not a method we apply, but a spontaneous softening that arises when

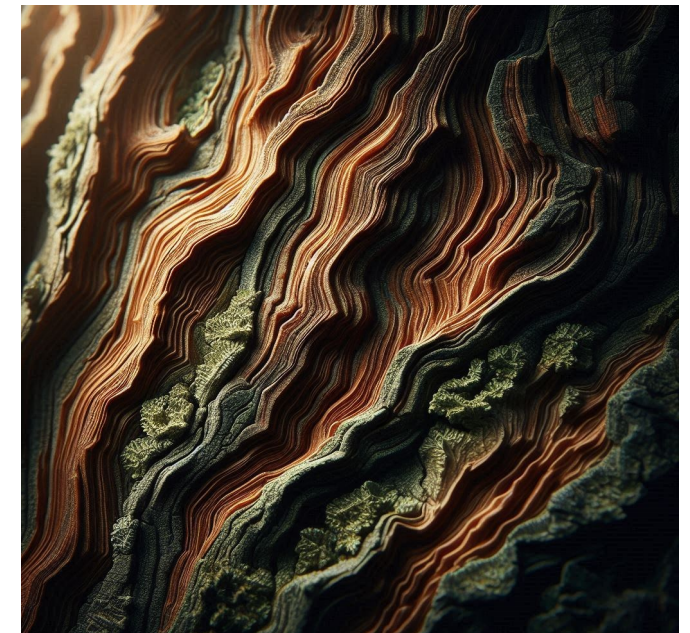
the ego stops narrating the moment. Even the briefest thanks – for sunlight across a wall, or the taste of morning tea – draws a thin line of light across the ego's darker narratives.

A small line, yes, but lines become paths.

And paths become ways of being.

There is an old insight tucked away in the Desert Fathers: “*A single thought of praise breaks open the closed room of the heart.*” The ego likes closed rooms. Gratitude opens windows. It lets air in. It loosens the stiffness of comparison, self-justification, self-protection – those familiar egoic reflexes that Episodes 2 and 3 unmasked.

If gratitude were only a warm feeling, the ego would tolerate it. But gratitude is far more dangerous than that. It exposes the ego's favourite illusion: that life depends on its vigilance. Gratitude says, gently but firmly, “You are not holding up the world. You are held.” That is why the ego tenses when you start giving thanks. It senses something slipping from its grasp.



And it is right.

Gratitude loosens its grip.

It does so quietly, almost imperceptibly, and usually through moments too small to impress anyone. But this is how transformation sneaks in. The ego, which relies on scarcity to stay relevant, cannot thrive in the presence of genuine appreciation. Every sincere “thank you” is like a small hole in the ego’s armour. Enough holes, and light begins to get through.

By the time you reach Episode 5’s kind of silence – the “objectless awareness” that asks for nothing and expects nothing – gratitude is no longer just a practice; it becomes a mode of relating to reality. And when you’ve crossed even part of the bridge described in Episode 6, you begin to realise that gratitude is not just a virtue; it is a sign that the ego’s



story is no longer the only story in the room.

“This too is given,” the heart says. And the ego falls quiet for a moment.

That moment is where grace starts its work.

[3. Gratitude as Spiritual Defiance](#)

It may sound odd to call gratitude a form of defiance, but stay with the idea for a moment. We often imagine gratitude as soft, harmless, a kind of spiritual politeness. Yet every serious spiritual tradition knows that gratitude, when it is honest, has a backbone.

The ego, you might remember, prefers to focus on what threatens or diminishes us. It scans for danger, lack, comparison, and slight. It is a master of spotting the crack in the windowpane and missing the whole view beyond it. That is why gratitude unsettles it. Gratitude flips the direction of attention. It notices what is given, not what is missing; what supports us, not what undermines us; what is still possible, not what has collapsed.

This simple reversal is quietly revolutionary.

When the ego tightens around fear, gratitude says, almost cheekily, “Yes, but look at this small good thing right here.” And that changes the atmosphere. Not because the danger disappears, but because fear no longer monopolises the inner conversation.

Think of the scenes in Episode 6. In Act I, the Homeless Woman by the barrel fire speaks in the language of loss, yet there is a strange brightness running through her words. They carry a kind of clarity, a spark of truth that is neither self-pitying nor bitter. That brightness is a cousin of gratitude. It is not cheerful, but it refuses despair’s finality. In Act II, Sister Theodora on the terrace at Meteora embodies another form of this defiance: the kind that meets emptiness not



with panic but with hospitality. “The void does not echo; it receives,” she says. That line alone could be a definition of gratitude: a receiving of reality without armouring the heart.

Gratitude does not deny sorrow; it simply refuses to let sorrow define the whole picture.

This is why Diana Butler Bass calls gratitude “radical” when things are really hard. It is an act of standing one’s ground. In a divided world, gratitude insists on the possibility of connection. In a culture thick with resentment, gratitude insists that kindness still matters. In times of fear, gratitude insists on hope. Not naïvely, not in a tone-deaf way, but in a way that says, “I will not be shaped entirely by what wounds me.”

There is strength in that kind of thanksgiving.

And notice: this strength does not come from pushing ourselves into a brighter mood. It comes from seeing truthfully. Gratitude clears the inner fog long enough for us to notice what is genuinely sustaining us. It is defiance not be-

cause it suppresses the dark, but because it insists on keeping the dark in proportion.

One line from the early Christian monks captures it well: *"Give thanks when you can, and when you cannot, give thanks for the desire to give thanks."* Hidden in that advice is a fierce, almost stubborn hope. It says, in effect, that gratitude is a stance we return to, even when circumstances are not cooperating.

When the ego is convinced that everything is falling apart, gratitude whispers, "Even so, the story is not finished." When the ego braces against pain, gratitude replies, "You are still held." When the ego prepares for battle, gratitude suggests, "Perhaps gentleness will do."

This is not passivity. It is courage of a very quiet kind. A courage that refuses to surrender the field of the heart to bitterness or fear. A courage that recognizes the truth of suffering but refuses to crown it king.

Gratitude is defiance, not because it denies darkness, but because it keeps the light in view.

[4. Encountering Suffering Truthfully](#)

If gratitude has a kind of quiet courage, then its most courageous moment is when it stands in the presence of suffering. Not to explain it, not to decorate it, certainly not to deny it, but simply to remain present. In a sense, gratitude's first mature act is honesty.

We touched on this back in Episode 3, where the early work of healing required us to stop pretending that pain, confusion, or fear were signs of failure. They are signs of being human. The spiritual tradition has always insisted on this point: suffering is real, and no amount of pious language can soften its edges. As the Homeless Woman in Episode 6 demonstrated — speaking by the barrel fire as her life thinned into cold air



— suffering can strip a person bare. And yet there was a curious dignity in her words, a lack of flinching. She did not hide from the shadows. She named them.

Gratitude begins precisely there – not after the shadows have passed, but inside them.

This is where many people misunderstand gratitude. They fear it might be too saccharine, too eager to "look on the bright side," too quick to bypass the broken pieces. But genuine gratitude does none of that. It does not ask us to pretend that the fracture in our lives is merely an interesting pattern. It simply refuses to reduce our entire life to the fracture.

Sister Theodora, up on her Meteora terrace, gave us a picture of this in Episode 6. She spoke of the void that "does not echo; it receives." That receiving is the beginning of truthfulness. When we stop resisting our pain long enough to feel it, something unexpected softens. Not a solution, but a kind of clarity. A sense that the pain belongs to the story but is not the whole story.

This is where gratitude quietly enters – not with fireworks, but with a pulse.

The pulse might be as small as noticing that we are breathing. Or that a friend has not given up on us. Or that a line from a psalm suddenly feels like a hand on the shoulder. The magnitude is irrelevant. Letting the heart acknowledge even a single life-giving thread when everything feels frayed is an act of truth-telling. Not hopeful optimism, but truthful perception.

And truthful perception, as we've been tracing across this series, is where grace finds room.

Consider the bridge in Episode 6. Suffering had left the characters in a place of disorientation: the widower who felt the air withdraw after his wife's death, or the scholar whose equations "gave him dust." Their pain was not erased on that misted bridge. What changed was the perspective from which they saw it. The bridge did not demand that they deny their grief; it carried them as they brought their grief along. Gratitude often begins with that same carrying – a willingness to





be moved even when we feel heavy.

To encounter suffering truthfully is to hold it in one hand and some small sign of goodness in the other, and to allow both to be real. The ego protests at this. It wants one single, dominant narrative: either everything is terrible or everything is fine. But the heart, cleansed by silence and made spacious through consent, can hold both together without collapsing.

This is why gratitude is not a psychological trick. It is a spiritual perception.

Gratitude does not “fix” suffering; it refuses to let suffering become the final verdict. It does not explain loss; it allows hope to share the same room with it. It does not justify injustice; it keeps love alive long enough to resist injustice without becoming deformed by it.

In the Christian tradition, this is the difference between that first “nothing” of collapse and the second “nothing” of grace. The first empties us by force; the second empties us by love. Gratitude is one of the ways we recognise the second emptiness when it arrives.

And perhaps this is the deepest truth: gratitude, when it meets suffering honestly, becomes a witness. It stands quietly beside the wound and says, “There is more to you than this pain.” That is not denial. It is prophecy.

[5. The Compounding Nature of Attention](#)

One of the quiet surprises of the spiritual life is how much depends on attention. Not willpower, not brilliance, not purity of motive – simply where the gaze of the heart chooses to rest. If you have ever watched how a small change in light can transform a whole room, you already know something about this. Attention works the

same way: it does not have to be dramatic to be transformative.

Gratitude makes use of this principle in the softest possible manner. A single moment of noticing – sunlight on the floor, the steadiness of breath, a kind word remembered – does very little on its own. But let that noticing repeat a few times a day, over a few weeks, and something begins to shift almost imperceptibly. You become aware of a kind of inner readjustment, as if the furniture in your interior house has been moved an inch or two. Nothing that would impress a visitor, but enough to change how you inhabit the room.

This is precisely what Diana Butler Bass meant when she said that gratitude “compounds.” It grows by accumulation, like interest. Not in the sense of earning anything, but in the sense that attention gathers itself. Each act of noticing trains the heart to look again. And each “looking again” increases the likelihood that you will see more than you saw the day before.

In Episode 4, we explored how the spiritual life often begins not with heroic acts but with tiny nudges in the direction of God – the small “living orientations” that grace initiates and we consent to. Attention behaves similarly. The heart settles where it repeatedly returns. If it returns often enough to gratitude, even briefly, its centre of gravity shifts.

You could say that gratitude alters the default setting of the inner life.

Episode 5 offered a glimpse of how attention behaves in silence. In Centreing Prayer, every time one notices a thought and lets it go, the heart practises a form of attentional release. This may feel like nothing, but over time it



builds a new habit: the habit of not being captured by every passing impulse. Gratitude builds a complementary habit: the habit of being captured by the good.

The two together slowly re-pattern the inner landscape.

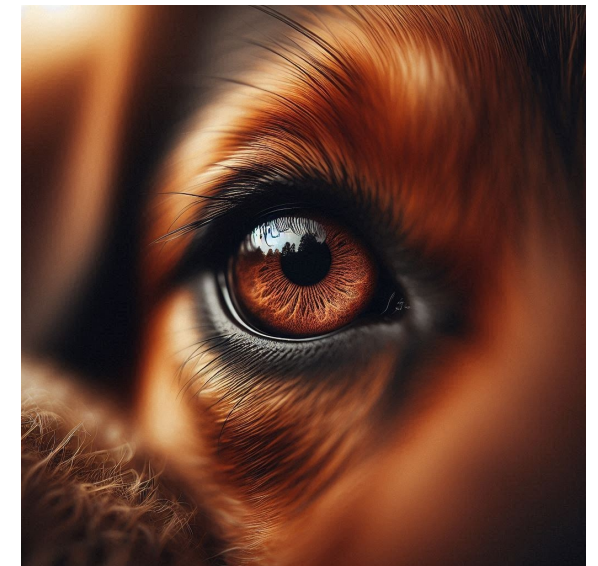
And this is where the compounding effect takes on depth. What we repeatedly attend to becomes easier to attend to, and what we neglect becomes harder to see. If the ego draws us constantly toward scarcity and grievance, we will become experts in scarcity and grievance. But if the heart learns to pause for a moment each day and notice a gift – any gift, however small – the field of vision widens. You begin to catch glimpses of what was always there but hidden behind habit.

There is an old monastic saying that “the eyes see what the heart loves.” This is another way of describing the compounding of attention. Gratitude strengthens the heart’s capacity to love what is given, rather than resent what is withheld. And

as that capacity grows, perception becomes less distorted. You begin to see not only what is broken but also what is being mended. Not only the wounds but also the hands that support you as you walk with them.

Over time, this becomes a kind of inner momentum. Gratitude no longer feels like something we must remember to do; it begins to carry us. It becomes a reflex – not a saccharine optimism, but a trained, truthful noticing of grace. We find ourselves thinking differently, responding differently, seeing differently.

The cumulative effect is gentle but real. Attention, like water, shapes stone – not by force, but by persistence. And gratitude is one of the most patient forms of water there is.



6. Gratitude and the Unknotted Heart

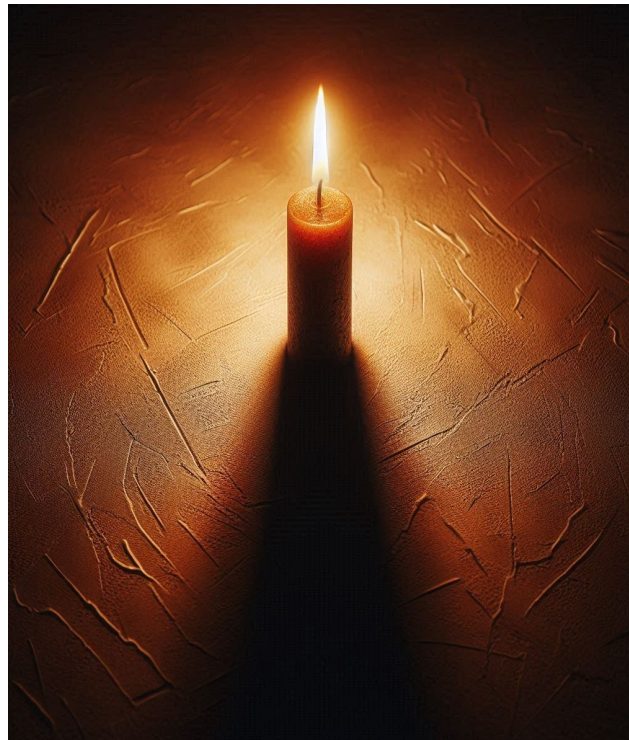
At some point in the spiritual journey, the focus shifts from managing the mind to softening the heart. Not softening in the sentimental sense, but in the deep, unclenching way that makes inner space where there was tension before. If you think back to Episode 3, you might recall how much of the ego's woundedness shows up as tightness – the tightening around our hurts, the tightening against vulnerability, the tightening that tries to hold everything together by sheer will. Those knots of the heart may be invisible to others, but we feel them. They sit there under the sternum, with their familiar ache.

Gratitude does not untie these knots by argument or technique. It simply warms them until they loosen.

You may have noticed this in your own life: when gratitude comes unforced – perhaps after a long walk, or a surprising kindness, or a line of prayer that meets you at just the right moment – something in the chest softens. You breathe more easily for a few seconds. The inner ground becomes less brittle. Nothing dramatic has happened, yet the heart feels just a little more supple, a little less armoured.

This is not accidental. Gratitude circulates the opposite energy to the ego. Where the ego contracts, gratitude expands. Where the ego judges, gratitude receives. Where the ego defends, gratitude opens a small window. Over time, these small openings matter. They become the places where grace can enter.

Episode 5 taught us how the practice of consent in silence subtly reconfigures the interior life. Each act of letting go, each moment of releasing a thought, weakens the grip of the ego's habitual tension. Gratitude performs a similar work, but in a different medium. Instead



of letting go of thought, it receives the good. Instead of releasing content, it recognises gift. Instead of consenting to silence, it consents to abundance.

Both movements – letting go and receiving – soften the heart in complementary ways.

Episode 6 offered two powerful images of what happens when these softenings mature. In the First Nothing, the Homeless Woman's speech hints at a life stripped of all pretending. There, even her suffering had a strange clarity, as if the knots were no longer hiding behind pretence. In the Second Nothing, Sister Theodora embodies the spaciousness that emerges when the heart has stopped clenching around the need for certainty. "What the soul calls nothing, the Beloved calls room," she said, and the line lingers because it

names the moment the heart becomes wide enough to hold sorrow without losing its centre.

Gratitude helps create that room.

This is why many writers in the contemplative tradition insist that gratitude is not an emotion but a condition of the heart. When the heart is knotted, gratitude feels impossible. When the heart begins to unknot itself – often through silence, consent, or sheer exhaustion – gratitude can slip in through the smallest crack. And once it slips in, it quietly widens the opening.

There is a gentle alchemy here. A grateful heart can still ache, still grieve, still fear. But the ache is not congested; the grief is not choking; the fear is not the whole story. Gratitude changes the *texture* of experience, not by removing difficulty but by unhooking the ego's reactivity. A knotted heart reacts; an unknotted heart responds.

Sometimes people ask, "But what if I don't feel grateful?" The truth is you don't need to. Gratitude is not primarily a feeling; it is a posture. It begins by acknowledging the smallest flicker of goodness without demanding that it cancel out the pain. A heart begins to unknot the moment it allows the good and the hard to coexist without forcing them into one story.

And here is the quiet grace: once the heart loosens even a little, gratitude recognises the shift and grows. The heart relaxes, and gratitude flows in; gratitude flows in, and the heart relaxes further. It becomes a reciprocal movement – the beginnings of inner freedom.

In the end, gratitude does not erase



the knots; it invites them to loosen. It turns the heart toward a gentler landscape, where it can breathe, expand, and finally rest. And in that resting, grace has room to work in ways the ego could never manage.

[7. Grateful Presence as Communal Vision](#)

Up to this point, we have spoken mostly about gratitude as an interior movement – something that shifts the heart, softens the knots, and changes the way we inhabit our own experience. But gratitude has a social life as well. It does not stay inside. Once it gathers some momentum, it wants to reach out. It wants to widen the circle.

Gratitude, almost without trying, becomes communal.

If the ego's instinct is isolation – tightening around its own concerns, defending its boundaries, narrating its private grievances – then gratitude quietly does the opposite. It loosens those boundaries. It makes the self more porous. When you feel even a flicker of real gratitude, notice how it tilts you outward. You find yourself recognizing the good in others, not just in your own circumstances. You feel a little less alone because the very act of being grateful reminds you that life is not accomplished solo.

Episode 6 gave us vivid scenes of this outward movement. On the Prague bridge at dawn, the Widower, the Professor, and Marie found themselves walking in a way none of them could have managed alone. The bridge “carried” them, yes, but they also carried one another. Their willingness to share their stories, their losses, their perplexities – all of it had a texture of gratitude, even when the word was never spoken. Gratitude often hides inside humility, or shared wonder, or



simple human warmth. It shows itself in the way we listen.

And on that Vienna street by the barrel fire, something similar happened. The Homeless Woman, the Student, the Nurse, the Street Cleaner – each arrived in their own vulnerability. Yet somehow their presence with one another softened the night. Nothing was solved; no one became a hero. But a small community formed around warmth, tea, honesty, and the faint dignity of mutual recognition. Gratitude often begins exactly like that: not in dramatic gestures, but in the willingness to see one another without defensiveness.

It is hard to exaggerate how transformative this can be. The ego tends to make life a solo performance. Gratitude makes it a shared table.

This is why so many spiritual traditions speak of gratitude in connection with hospitality. Gratitude notices abundance – not abundance in the sense of wealth, but in the sense of “there is enough to share.”



Even when we have little, gratitude reveals the sufficiency of what is present. It invites others in. It expands the sense of “us”.

You may have experienced this yourself: when the heart is grateful, even in modest ways, you are more patient with others, more open to difference, more willing to forgive, more willing to be neighbourly. Gratitude dissolves the suspicion that everyone else is a competitor. It reminds us that life is not a contest but a gift.

The early Christian communities embodied this instinct. The breaking of bread was not merely a ritual; it was a school of perception. The meal taught people to see one another as bearers of grace. Gratitude for the bread became gratitude for the faces around the table. And gratitude for the faces became an awareness that the divine was present in the midst of them.

This is gratitude’s communal vision: a world

in which each person is perceived as gift.

And this is not idealistic. It is practical. Gratitude changes how we behave. It makes us gentler in queues, kinder in disagreements, more generous in small exchanges of daily life. It shifts the social temperature in a room. It can even shift a family. And when practised in a faith community, gratitude becomes the difference between a congregation that merely functions and one that nourishes.

In this sense, grateful presence is not just a personal virtue; it is a way of belonging.

It is how the heart, newly unknotted and more spacious, begins to curl outward, like a leaf unfurling after rain. It is how the solitary interior work of Episodes 4, 5, and 6 begins to bear visible fruit. Silence becomes welcome; consent becomes hospitality; emptiness becomes room for others.



Gratitude makes us communal again.

And perhaps this is the deepest wisdom here: a grateful heart does not simply receive the world differently – it enables the world to become different. Not by force, but by the gentle contagion of presence, generosity, and shared humanity. Gratitude is personal, yes. But it is never private.

[8. Living the Practice](#)

By now, gratitude may sound almost too spacious, too inward, too quietly luminous to be something one can actually *do*. And in truth, gratitude is less a “doing” and more a way of being present. Still, most of us need small, steady anchors to help us inhabit that presence in the middle of ordinary days. These are not techniques in the ego’s sense of “getting it right,” but small acts of orientation – like turning your face a little more toward the light.

Here are a few approaches that many people find helpful. You don’t need all of them. You don’t even need one of them every day. Think of these as gentle invitations rather than prescriptions.

A morning acknowledgement

Before the day gathers itself into lists and demands, pause for five seconds – truly, five – and greet the day with a simple inward “thank you.” Not because everything is easy, but because breath is happening, life is here, and grace has not withdrawn. This unobtrusive recognition quietly sets the tone your heart will return to.

Noticing one small thing

Episode 5 reminded us how powerful tiny gestures of attention can be. Choose one or-

dinary moment – the feel of warm water on your hands, the sound of a kettle, a sliver of sky between buildings – and allow yourself to recognise it as gift. This can take as little as a breath. Over time the heart begins to look for such moments spontaneously.

Evening recollection

At the end of the day, sit for a minute and notice one thing that sustained you. Not the best thing; just something true. A conversation, a quiet minute, something you learned, or even the fact you made it through a difficult hour. Let the acknowledgement stand without commentary. It is a way of allowing the day to return to God with its honest weight.

Gratitude in the body

Some people find it helpful to feel gratitude physically – a softening of the shoulders, a slowing of the breath, a loosening of the jaw. In



not pretending the difficulty is fine. It is recognising that, even there, not everything is lost.

Integrating into worship or shared life

In a community or parish setting, gratitude can be woven into the edges of shared practice: a moment of silence in which people notice something they are thankful for; a quiet acknowledgment of someone's unseen labour; a sentence of thanks before a meeting begins. These little gestures change the atmosphere. They train a group to see one another as gifts rather than obstacles.

Letting gratitude rest

Finally, do not try to be grateful all the time. The ego will seize that ambition and turn it into a moral performance. Let gratitude be intermittent, honest, small. Let it arise and pass. You are not building a skill; you are making room. Gratitude grows best when it is allowed to be simple and unforced.

In the end, living the practice is less about doing gratitude and more about recognising it when it appears. It will come, often through the side door, quietly. All the heart needs is a moment's pause to notice.

[9. Concluding Insight](#)

If we trace the arc of this episode – and indeed the arc of the whole series – a quiet pattern begins to show itself. Something softens, something widens, something becomes more spacious than it was before. The ego's habitual tightening, its scarcity, its insistence on being the main interpreter of reality, slowly loses its authority. What replaces it is not a strategy or an achievement, but a way of seeing.



Episode 6, Sister Theodora spoke of the heart becoming "a sky without horizon"; sometimes the body is the first place to sense that widening. A slight shift in posture can open surprising space.

Naming someone silently

When you feel able, bring one person to mind – not with elaborate prayers or expectations, but simply with an inward "thank you for this person." It may be someone who helped you, someone you love, or even someone with whom things are complicated. Gratitude does not need the relationship to be perfect; it only needs a single thread that you can hold without strain.

Letting gratitude accompany difficulty

If suffering is present – as it often is – gratitude need not wait outside the door. You might try acknowledging something small even in the midst of difficulty: a friend's message, a moment of clarity, the stability of the chair you're sitting in. This is



Gratitude is one of the clearest signs that this shift has begun.

Not gratitude as a mood, which comes and goes. Not gratitude as a virtue to be polished. But gratitude as a recognition: that life is given, that grace is already at work, that the heart does not need to operate as its own universe. Gratitude is the quiet realisation that, even in difficulty, we are not abandoned to ourselves.

Episodes 4 and 5 offered the inner mechanics of that realisation – the inner turning and the deepening consent that slowly unwrap the ego's tight grip on experience. Episode 6 showed it dramatically: the shock of the First Nothing, the luminous spaciousness of the Second Nothing, and the mysterious help that arrives on the bridge between them. Gratitude gathers all of that into a single lived posture. It is the heart's way of saying, without fuss, "I see

what is given, even here."

And "even here" is the whole point. Gratitude does not demand the right conditions. It is not dependent on clarity, comfort, or certainty. It is at home in the middle of unfinished stories. It can coexist with grief. It can move gently alongside confusion. It can share the room with anger without pretending the anger is inappropriate. Gratitude is not a way of escaping reality; it is a way of inhabiting it truthfully.

Perhaps that is why the Christian tradition is so stubborn about thanksgiving. It is woven into the liturgy, into the psalms, into the sacramental life. The Eucharist itself – the central act of Christian worship – simply means thanksgiving. To give thanks is not an add-on to spirituality; it is the heartbeat of it. It is the act that says, "This world, with all its brokenness, is still held in love."

And so are we.

If the early episodes of this series focused on



understanding the ego, loosening its strategies, and creating the inner conditions for healing, this episode marks the moment where all of that becomes recognisable in daily life. Gratitude is the lived sign of transformation. It is the shift from scarcity to presence, from defensiveness to receptivity, from isolation to communion.

It does not need to be dramatic. Often it is a matter of seconds – a small acknowledgement, a softened breath, a moment's unguarded yes. But those seconds add up. They compound, as we have seen. They shape the heart into a place where grace can work freely and where love can breathe again.

In the end, to move from ego to grateful presence is simply to live with the awareness that nothing is too small to be received as gift. The day itself becomes a teacher. The ordinary becomes sacramental. And the heart, slowly unknotted, begins to rest in the deeper truth: that life, even in its difficulties, is given.

And that the Giver has not gone anywhere.

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Endnotes and References

Endnotes

1. Diana Butler Bass (b. 1959) – American historian of religion and author of *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks* (HarperOne, 2018). Her reflections on gratitude “compounding” under difficulty inform several insights in this episode.

2. The Desert Fathers – Early Christian monastics from the 3rd–5th centuries, whose sayings (the *Apophthegmata Patrum*) often highlight the spiritual effects of interior attention, praise, and humility.

3. Thomas Keating (1923–2018) – Trappist monk and key teacher of Centering Prayer. His concept of “divine therapy” appears in Episode 5 and underlies some of the present episode’s reflections on inner healing.

4. “Sister Theodora” – A character in Episode 6, representing the wisdom of the Christian contemplative tradition. Her sayings (e.g., “The void does not echo; it receives”) illustrate the spaciousness that allows gratitude to mature. See Earlier in the present Series. Episode 6: Two Nothings.

5. The Homeless Woman (Episode 6) – A dramatic embodiment of the “First Nothing,” whose clarity amid collapse provides an example of honesty-in-suffering, a ground where genuine gratitude may later take root. See Earlier in the present Series. Episode 6: Two Nothings.

6. Marie and the Prague Bridge (Episode 6) – Figures illustrating the passage from effort

to surrender. Their shared experience hints at the communal dimension of gratitude and grace. See Earlier in the present Series. Episode 6: Two Nothings.

7. The Eucharistic Tradition – The Christian practice of thanksgiving at the heart of liturgy (eucharistia means “thanksgiving”), grounding this episode’s concluding reflections on gratitude as spiritual perception, not merely emotion.

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