



Thank You.

How to Change the World



I'm Sorry.

with 3 Sacred Sayings



Tell Me More.

"Don't let what seems like simplicity fool you: This is a book that wants to change the world."

JAMES K. A. SMITH, author of *You Are What You Love*

Rod Wilson

The essence of wisdom is taking what is complicated and not making it simple, but offering a clarity that cuts to the chase of a matter. Rod Wilson is a wise, compelling, and true-to-the-heart human whose gift of clarity is scintillating and life-changing. To take three common but often misused phrases and offer a robust picture of what they can bring to life is brilliant, but far more, it is a reminder of how our words reflect the genius of our Creator. This book will bring a new savor to the sweetness and saltiness of your words.

DAN B. ALLENDER, PHD, professor of counseling psychology and founding president, The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology

Are we happy about the way we respond to and interact with the people in our lives? If we know we are falling short, failing to treat with respect and understanding the precious people whose lives are linked with ours, three phrases excavated and explicated by Rod Wilson may go a long way to enhance mutual harmony and trust. I know these are principles I need to learn and practice!

LUCI SHAW, author of *Angels Everywhere* and *The Thumbprint in the Clay*, writer in residence at Regent College

Sometimes we have to talk ourselves into becoming different people. We believe what we repeat. We live into what we rehearse. In this wise and inviting book, Rod Wilson offers us three simple but potent litanies that could talk us into becoming a society that is attentive,

caring, vulnerable, and grateful. Don't let what seems like simplicity fool you: This is a book that wants to change the world. It starts with me. And you.

JAMES K. A. SMITH, professor of philosophy at Calvin University, author of *You Are What You Love*

Rod is like a good spiritual-retreat master, only more humorous. After reading Rod Wilson, I'll never again trivialize the importance of saying "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "Tell me more." These expressions pack a wallop and, when understood, found a needed culture based on gratitude, remorse, and caring.

J. MICHAEL MILLER, CSB, archbishop of Vancouver

It is amazing that so much is packed into three magical phrases totaling seven words! I am awed by Rod's ability to unpack them with the aid of engaging, first-person stories. The nuances revealed are rich in spiritual and psychological implications. They are so profoundly applicable in changing my own mindset that I could not read through it without constantly stopping to apply the principles to my own life.

WILLIAM WAN, JP, PHD, general secretary, Singapore Kindness Movement

With his poignant, insightful, and often witty slices of real-life wisdom, Dr. Wilson shines a light on ways we might embrace the much-needed practices of gratitude, remorse,

and care to bring connection and gracious humility to an increasingly fractured and self-centered world. If we allow this thoughtful book to challenge us to use the three key phrases of “Thank you, “I’m sorry,” and “Tell me more” meaningfully in everyday life, we might slow down enough to relate to one another in healing and affirming ways.

KEREN DIBBENS-WYATT, Christian contemplative, author of *Recital of Love*

As a Black gay man committed to the work of antiracism and the elimination of homophobia, even as I seek to listen and learn and work for justice with indigenous neighbors, I wondered if *Thank You. I’m Sorry. Tell Me More.* had anything to offer. I was pleasantly surprised. I found the third phrase, “Tell me more,” especially helpful. It echoed and reinforced my own understanding of the importance of building relationship through the door of stories to create space for mutuality and transformation. The stories and, in particular, the reflection questions continue to resonate. I am grateful for the gift of this book.

REV. MICHAEL BLAIR, general secretary, general council, United Church of Canada

This is the best time in human history to be alive. And yet so many of us are unthankful. Rod Wilson’s stories of gratitude, remorse, and caring open us up to seeing how we’ve been captivated by entitlement, victimization, and

individualism. Those stories can also help us laugh at ourselves and enjoy the journey to our better selves.

BOB INGLIS, US representative (R-SC4) 1993–1999, 2005–2011; executive director of republicEn, South Carolina

Timely in an age of division and polarization. Laced with tender stories from his own life. Rod applies three familiar yet revolutionary simple statements that can transform relationships, organizations, cities, and our world. Honest, heart-warming, vulnerable, and at times raw, Rod lives what he writes.

REV. DR. MICHELE A. BLAND, senior pastor and psychologist, Hong Kong

This book came into my life at the exact right time. As I have faced being a CEO, wife, and mother of six in a world that seems to be filled with increasing discontent, discord, and disconnection, Dr. Wilson so clearly articulates how three simple phrases can help me bring more love, hope, and connection into my personal and professional lives. Dr. Wilson's expert storytelling reveals how gratitude, remorse, and caring enough to listen to others' stories can transform the world. This is THE must-read book for anyone who is leading through challenge and uncertainty.

ALIA EYRES, CEO of Mother's Choice, Hong Kong

In an age when there is an oversupply of self-proclaimed leaders and an undersupply of humility, Rod Wilson is a skillful leader with a humble and caring heart. In his latest book, he taps into the universal values of gratitude, contrition, and curiosity as key tools in a leader's toolbox. This is timeless wisdom, and I have had the pleasure of seeing Rod live these values in real life. He walks the walk.

PATRICIA TOWLER, president and CEO of CPA Nova Scotia,
Canada



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David Zimmerman, Acquisitions Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor; Olivia Eldredge, Operations Manager; Eva M. Winters, Designer

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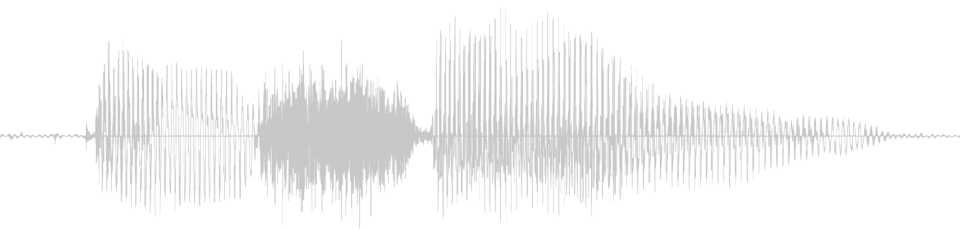
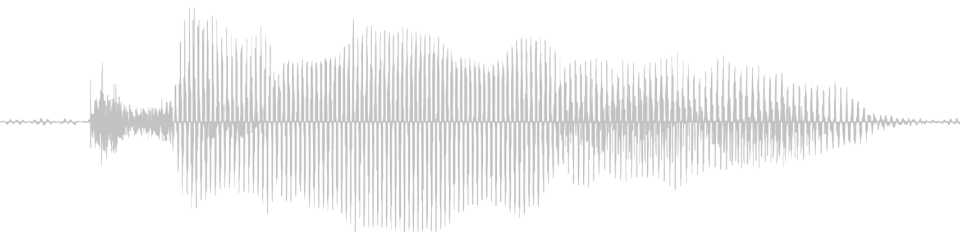
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Introduction

Change the World?

AMANDA, WIDE-EYED AND ECSTATIC, doesn't notice it's 5:47 a.m. but wakes Mom and Dad up. What would you expect from a six-year-old on Christmas morning? Then Grandpa and Grandma arise from sleep amid all the commotion, as does Amanda's brother, Jimmy, and everyone makes their way down to the Christmas tree and the massive number of presents.

With permission granted, Amanda decides to open the big box from her grandparents. Paper flies everywhere, ribbon is tossed aside, and she finally finds the toy she's been asking for since summer. With shouts of excitement, she proceeds to open the box and remove the various pieces.

"What do you say to Grandma and Grandpa?" says Mom. "Thank you," mumbles Amanda, not even turning her head to look at the givers of the gift.

A few hours later in the day, Amanda's emotions have turned from ecstasy to agony. She comes screaming into the kitchen, doubled over in apparent pain. "Jimmy punched me in the stomach," she blurts out between sobs. "Jimmy!"

yells mom. "Come to the kitchen." Jimmy, with an aura of eight-year-old assertiveness, starts speaking before he's even in sight. "But she pushed me first." As Jimmy enters the room, Dad makes him stand in front of Amanda. "What do you say to your sister?" In an almost inaudible voice, with no hint of contrition and an inner conviction that he will do it again given the first opportunity, the words come out: "I'm sorry."

That evening, fifteen-year-old Olivia returns from visiting her dad. It's the first Christmas Day she has spent away from her mom, stepdad, and stepsiblings. Everyone is excited to see her when she arrives, but she has interrupted their board game, so there's little conversation. Mom asks how her time went, and Olivia begins with the usual teenage brevity: "Fine." On his way into the kitchen to get coffee, Dad says, "Tell me more," but Olivia has already gone down the hallway toward her room, and he's in a hurry to get back to the game. Connection missed.

"Thank you."

"I'm sorry."

"Tell me more."

Most of us link these three phrases with good manners. We assume that's their sole purpose. Rearing children to be well-behaved, or at least to appear that way, will come about if they learn to repeat "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "Tell me more" with frequency.

But what if these three phrases could change the world? With all its challenges, problems, tensions, and difficulties?

Journeying with Others

As moms and dads, we believe that saying “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” and “Tell me more” will help our children become better people, friends, partners, employees, neighbors, and global citizens. Manners are a foundation for navigating our connection with others. But we need more than manners.

During elementary school recess, teachers are helping children learn to play with others. High school parents are vigilant in watching their sons’ and daughters’ relationships. High-quality romantic connections require the ability to interact well. Almost every workplace expects employees to connect well with coworkers, clients, and customers. Living next door to someone from another country, race, or faith is an invitation to be hospitable and engage. Being a congresswoman, senator, president, prime minister, member of parliament, or community advocate offers you the privilege and responsibility to interact helpfully with multiple people.

Can you imagine a world where we didn’t need to journey with others?

Some of us do have those fantasies. Feeling the burden of “the other” can be exhausting. A life-withering partner. An energy-consuming child. An exasperating family member. An irritating coworker. A frustrating neighbor. An annoying politician. We would love a world where it was just us. In communion with ourselves and no one else, we wouldn’t have to deal with “the other.”

The reality, in the nonfantasy world, is different. Every

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day people impact us, whether in the home, on the road, at work, or simply watching the news. And we impact others. By what we do and say, as well as by what we *don't* do or say. And we impact each other. The more we pretend we don't have influence on one another, the more deeply entrenched cultural norms keep us from truly seeing one another.

Although manners may be a starting point on the journey of how to relate, the three phrases take on new meaning when you begin to reflect on our daily journey with “the other.”

- If we say “Thank you,” we’re acknowledging the way others impact us.
- If we say “I’m sorry,” we’re acknowledging the way we impact others.
- If we say “Tell me more,” we’re acknowledging the way we impact each other.

Think of these three statements as one way to assess the relational quality of journeying with others. How frequently do my wife, daughter, coworkers, and close friends hear me say “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” or “Tell me more”? The world is a better place when political, religious, and public-square leaders—and the rest of us—have a way of being that acknowledges others’ mutual impact.

Something Is Wrong

At first glance, these three statements are compelling. A world where people frequently said “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” and “Tell me more” would be idyllic. Imagine marriages where each partner consistently acknowledged how their mate impacted them, how they impacted their mate, and how they impacted each other. Imagine a political or religious world where all those in power were known for their frequent use of these three phrases. Picture neighborhoods where this was the paradigm that characterized all the relationships down the block and around the corner. International relations would shift markedly if governments and countries had this level of discourse.

Just as manners run the risk of being overly simplistic, so does this basic outline of three phrases. Life doesn’t work that way. Some people never say “Thank you” in a way that values the other. And there are those who are known for never saying “Sorry.” Many of us have been in relationships where we’re always on the receiving end of a self-centered “*I’ll tell you more.*” In the face of these realities, learning to speak these words will hardly change the world. Why?

Entitlement, Victimization, Individualism

Much of Western culture is in the grips of entitlement, victimization, and individualism, with the consequence that it’s

challenging and countercultural to say “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” or “Tell me more.”

Entitlement. Newborns are captivating. Cute and adorable, they’re the center of attention at Christmas, political rallies, and local malls. Their daily lives are interesting. Food, the sole responsibility of the parents, comes in one end regularly, often on demand. (To translate, “on demand” means screaming, yelling, crying, or some combination of the three.) After due process, the waste comes out the other end, and it’s the parents’ responsibility to deal with the consequences of that action, one that employs almost all five senses. That process is sometimes on demand as well. A dirty diaper, after all, isn’t pleasant for the tiny infant, so he may well scream, yell, or cry. Apart from the odd smile, a lot of sleeping, and a few other “look at what he did” gestures, this is early life for the new baby. He makes demands for special treatment, and his parents oblige.

You can imagine the shock if the two-month-old sat up in his crib and exclaimed, “Thanks so much, Mom. That was an outstanding change. I feel much better now. Feel my gratitude.” For developmental reasons, both physical and verbal, we know that wouldn’t happen, but we also know it wouldn’t occur because infants deserve special treatment. They have a right to be treated that way. Special privileges are appropriate when you are two months old. We don’t expect them to say “Thank you,” although many parents would value just a little bit of appreciation in those early years.

One of the major problems with many post-infant

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people? Life doesn't change all that much. While I may not cry and yell with infant-like expressions, I do the same in more sophisticated and subtle "adult" ways. Sadly, this tendency is frequently reinforced by parents who, having lived the infant years responding on demand to "feed me" or "change me," have continued to cater to the demands and expectations of their older children in such a way that entitlement runs deep.

Outside the home, entitled adults then get exposed to the marketing of a consumerist culture. We learn that we deserve easy credit, loans, homes, holidays, and credit cards. We experience deep disappointment when our perception of what we deserve in our workplace and marriage, what we expect from our mosque, church, or synagogue, and what we want from our politicians don't come to fruition.

At the core of entitlement is a problem with saying "Thank you" because of a high commitment to thinking *I deserve it*. If something is deserved, why would you say "Thank you"?

Victimization. A pivotal moment in debates around the social, legal, moral, and psychological issues related to being sorry and victimization occurred in a 1992 legal case. Stella Liebeck ordered a coffee from a drive-through window at her local McDonald's in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As she pulled the lid off to add cream and sugar, the whole cup of coffee spilled on her lap, burning her to such a degree that she required skin grafting and lengthy rehabilitation. Lawyers took the case on, suing McDonald's for negligence

because the coffee was dangerously hot—and at a much higher temperature than how other establishments served coffee. Jury deliberations led to McDonald's being held 80 percent responsible for the burns and Liebeck being held 20 percent responsible.

Some accused Liebeck's lawyers of initiating a frivolous suit, but we can now look back with the perspective of thirty years and realize that this case predicted much of contemporary culture. Even though Stella spilled her coffee because she put it between her knees and took off the lid, a lawsuit with a minute analysis of the temperature of the coffee was appropriate. She wasn't entirely to blame for what happened but was a victim of a fast-food chain. The lawsuit made a poignant point about the allocation of wrong.

Remember Jimmy's response when confronted about the punch to his sister's midsection? "She pushed me first." He's only been on the planet for eight years, but already he's learned to confuse reasons and excuses. Technically he may be right. Amanda did push him, which has given him an apparent reason to respond in kind, although one might wonder whether a punch from an eight-year-old is of the exact nature and quality as a push from his six-year-old sister. But now, he's taken the reason and converted it into an excuse: "Why would you punish me, Dad, when I was a victim of the push?"

It's straightforward to move into the space of the victim. The social sciences have helped us frame the present in light of the past, and we're in a cultural moment where what's

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“wrong” is up for discussion. *I’m not responsible because of this or that*, this line of thinking goes, *so why would I say “I’m sorry”?*

“I know you struggle to deal with my anger,” says the father to his daughter, “but you need to understand that it comes up because of my historical sense of being marginalized.” “I know I hurt you by having multiple affairs,” says the husband to his wife, “but I made a mistake, and a lot of it is due to my underlying need for affection.” The mathematical equation is explicit—

marginalization = anger + abuse of others.

Or

need for affection = multiple affairs + hurting spouse.

If that’s where the angry father and the unfaithful spouse stay, they’ll display classic victimization. They bear little responsibility for their influence on others and have no sense they need to say “I’m sorry.” Someone, or something, else is to blame.

While “Thank you” acknowledges others have impacted us, “I’m sorry” reflects an awareness that we have impacted others. It’s the opposite of “It’s not my fault.” Blame shifting and converting reasons into excuses gets us off the hook. We can spill our coffee, hit our sibling, be angry with our children, cheat on our spouse, and justify and legitimize what we

did by holding people or circumstances responsible. In the process, we fail to acknowledge the experience of the other, and they never hear “I’m sorry.”

Individualism. I once taught an introductory counseling course in Africa. One day a student asked, “So you are telling us that in North America, when people have a problem, they meet an individual stranger, who may be younger than them, in an office and pay them money for advice?” If you’ve had much cross-cultural experience, you’ll understand the predicament. Part of you wants to say, “Yes, what’s the problem with that?” but then you dread that your Western bias isn’t shared everywhere, and you know that the teacher is about to become a student.

“What do you do here if you have a problem?” I asked.

She responded, “We go to the town center and meet with a group of elders in a circle. The youngest one speaks first and the oldest one speaks last as we go around the circle sharing opinions. We believe that community is key in our healing.”

That interaction and many others since have made me acutely aware of the difference between seeing people as part of a community versus seeing them as individuals. In the West, being true to ourselves has become a virtue, and we prize privacy, self-direction, and independence. And now we have an entire industry helping us do self-care, as the individualism project has left us with wounds and warts.

The title of Sherry Turkle’s book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*,

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captures our current predicament all too well. We have unprecedented access to information. Connecting with people instantly in any part of the world is straightforward. So-called friends are accessible to us through multiple technological devices. But we are alone. Our sense of community seems to be decreasing as our experience of isolation and loneliness increases.

Let's return to our opening story for an example of how being alone together can affect us. As Olivia participates in her blended family, she has her own internal experience. Her biological dad is off with someone else, she has a new stepdad and two new stepsiblings, and her mom is in a different marriage. Her first Christmas with her dad (and away from everyone else) was filled with various emotions. Some of them were positive, but there was sadness and not a little anger. When she says "Fine," in response to "How'd it go?" what she means is "I'm still processing it myself." When her stepdad says "Tell me more," that's the correct phrase but the wrong time because he was more interested in his drink and the board game.

But who's going to hear Olivia's story? Given all that she's going through, she needs human interaction, preferably face-to-face, where someone says, "I hear you spent your first Christmas with your dad since your parents split. Tell me more." Conversations of this nature—where stories are shared and experiences exchanged—seem less frequent these days. In the high pace of a culture that prizes individualism,

we can easily stay distant from one another and communicate that “my story matters most.”

Many of us are paying consultants, trainers, coaches, mentors, counselors, spiritual directors, and the like to help us improve, support us in accomplishing a goal, and provide input as we deal with challenges. I suspect an underlying dynamic driving these legitimate pursuits is *finding places where someone will listen to our stories*. Where someone will ask us to tell them more. Going to various counselors has been a positive experience for me, but there's no question that one of the most powerful aspects of these interactions was that someone wanted to hear my story. “Tell me more” was a welcome invitation.

While “Thank you” acknowledges others have impacted us, and “I'm sorry” reflects an awareness that we have impacted others, “Tell me more” is an affirmation that we impact each other. But we have to deal with the cultural hurdles of entitlement, victimization, and individualism in using these phrases.

Coping with Culture

There are three ways to cope with cultural trends: fight, succumb, or embody.

Fight. You know the fighters. Some are in your family. Your church. Your workplace. Always decrying the “way things are.” Everyone is entitled. Victimization is killing us. Do you remember the good old days when we had

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community and neighborhood, not all this individualistic navel-gazing?

The “fight them” approach demonizes others as wrong and ironically makes the observers seem arrogant, apparently untouched by the culture they’re criticizing. The style of their evaluative sermons, talks, books, and articles isn’t a compelling alternative. Their way of fighting the bad is as bad as the bad they are fighting.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche captures the potential danger in this approach:

He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.¹

Succumb. The succumbing crowd pays little attention to the way the culture influences them. They participate in entitlement, victimization, and individualism almost unknowingly. We often see this with those in positions of power. Disappointing to the rest of us, who expect more from our political, religious, and workplace leaders, those in charge seem like everyone else, participating in a way of being that doesn’t involve treating “the other” well.

This tendency may be most evident in the left–right political tensions. Ironically, both sides claim to be correct and see the other as a significant threat. There’s little interest in the common good or care for the other, no sense of gratitude for the opposition; there’s only a belief that the

other side victimizes my side. In many ways, both the right and the left have succumbed to a way of being that keeps the articulation of “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” and “Tell me more” to a minimum.

Embody. A third option, an alternative that doesn’t involve fighting or succumbing, is embodying a counter-cultural lifestyle, choosing to function differently than the majority around us. The ethos we bring to our way of being can offer a winsome and refreshing alternative to the aggressiveness of fighting or the passivity of succumbing.

In living a life where our attitude and words express . . .

- “Thank you,” we bring an attitude of gratitude in a culture of entitlement.
- “I’m sorry,” we bring an attitude of remorse in a culture of victimization.
- “Tell me more,” we bring an attitude of care in a culture of individualism.

If we walked with everyone, whomever they are, others would experience our gratitude, remorse, and care. Gratitude would move to the center, while entitlement moved to the edge. Maximizing remorse would minimize victimization. Care would become primary, while individualism would become secondary.

Elegance of Simplicity

Three short phrases. A total of eight words. Seem simplistic? How could their repetition change the world? Dangers present themselves when we rush to trite and clichéd phrases. Sometimes our leaders, both religious and political, resort to this overly basic approach. Everyone knows the world has way more complexity than a spiritual quote or a political byline.

My office window faces an inlet where international cargo ships arrive from various parts of the world and are unloaded in our local port. These massive vessels are close to 700 feet long and have a volume of space available for cargo, fuel, and crew of 22,790 tonnes (measured in Gross Registered Tonnage) and a fuel capacity of up to 800,000 gallons. While crossing the Pacific Ocean is facilitated by their impressive magnitude, the journey through the inlet and the eventual arrival at the dock is made possible by a much smaller boat. Tugboats, close to 90 feet long, with a GRT of 441 and a fuel capacity of 26,000 gallons, facilitate the journey's final leg.² The imposing and extraordinary are expertly and gently guided by the small and nimble.

Just as tugboats point larger vessels in a particular direction, these three phrases perform a similar function. Their usage embodies an alternative way of being to a culture moving in a different direction. More gratitude, remorse, and care will make for a better arrival at the dock.

THANK YOU. I'M SORRY. TELL ME MORE.

CULTURE SAYS	ATTITUDE	WE SAY	ATTITUDE
"I deserve it."	entitlement	"Thank you."	gratitude
"It's not my fault."	victimization	"I'm sorry."	remorse
"My story matters most."	individualism	"Tell me more."	care

Importance of Why

If we believe that gratitude, remorse, and care matter, we do so because these things agree with our underlying principles. There's a reason that these three phrases matter. There's always a *why* undergirding and inspiring "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "Tell me more."

Many people in contemporary culture have an ethic of treating people well. That's their big story. As they move in and out of their home, workplace, and relationships, they do their best to be responsive to others, and their goal in saying these three phrases is an underlying commitment to the fair treatment of people.

Others might have a big story rooted in secular humanism. People are seen as self-reliant and self-sufficient, able to determine their direction without reference to a deity or an otherworldly god. At times this is expressed as atheism (where there's a complete absence of belief in God) or agnosticism (where there's a belief that God isn't or can't be known). There's no question that 16 percent of the world's population who adhere to these philosophies could easily

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adopt and act on the three phrases in response to the *why* question because they take humanity seriously.

Eastern religions like Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, and Sikhism comprise about 24 percent of the world's population and generally differ from Western religions because followers worship multiple gods rather than one God. Adherents of these religions have a big story, a *why* behind the *what*. Worship of the gods also includes appropriate relationships with people.

The three main religions that trace their origins back to Abraham—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—comprise 54 percent of the world's population. Each has a big story embedded in a sacred text that outlines core beliefs and expected behaviors toward God and others.³

For Jews, the Tanakh (or Hebrew Scriptures) and the Talmud, a collection of writings from rabbis, emphasize that one's relationship with God and the other is crucial.

The Koran and commentary from Muhammad and his followers in the Hadith provide Muslims with instruction on their relationship with Allah and people.

Christians build their life on adherence to the Holy Bible, comprising Old and New Testaments, with its dual emphasis on relating to God and others.

As a Christian who finds his identity in God, I believe that my relationship with people flows directly from that connection. That doesn't mean I have to speak Bible, not English, to people. Nor does it mean that I have to push all my conversations with others toward religious or spiritual

matters. Instead, peoples' experience of me should be one of gratitude, remorse, and care.

When Jesus was asked how best to summarize all the commandments, his response was arresting: *Love God. Love others.* For followers of Jesus, these two commands are inseparable, and they pull the Christian faith together. How we relate to others flows from our relationship with God. Love is the action. People are the recipients. Expressing "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "Tell me more" to people is putting words to love: *I see you. I notice you. We impact each other.* For Jesus, loving God but not loving others is the ultimate contradiction.

People who know me should frequently hear me say "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "Tell me more." They should sense that I'm not a Christian who is continually fighting a culture of entitlement, victimization, and individualism, nor am I someone who has succumbed to the intoxicating nature of that culture. I seek to be a person who embodies an alternative story, and others should be beneficiaries of that choice.

At the end of the book, I'll provide more detailed personal reflections. For now, it's enough to state that I want gratitude, remorse, and care to characterize all people, especially those who identify as Christian. I fear that isn't the message we're offering at this moment in time. We have lost our gratefulness, see everyone else as wrong, and are more interested in having others listen to our stories than in listening to theirs. We've become known for our stand on socio-cultural issues, political affiliation, voting preferences, and

locating ourselves on the nebulous left–right continuum. And even as we hold to some of these commitments, we seem to be consistently marginalizing the other by our less-than-exemplary attitudes and actions, rather than welcoming what they offer.

Perspective

This book calls for increased gratitude, remorse, and care, but we need a proper perspective on *how* and *when*.

Gratitude is a mindset that should characterize our general way of being. Still, to suggest that every circumstance should be an occasion for saying “Thank you” is inhumane. It would be absurd, for example, to suggest that Amanda should thank Jimmy for punching her. It would be appropriate, however, for Amanda to live with an overall perspective of gratitude for her relationship with her brother. You can be thankful in a circumstance without being grateful for it.

A person who is always apologizing for any and every action isn’t expressing genuine remorse but carries a perpetual weight of guilt that’s out of proportion to individual events. But someone who never takes responsibility for the negative influence of their behavior has also lost perspective. How and when to express “I’m sorry” isn’t always straightforward.

Gratitude and remorse are conditional, offered in a way that’s suitable to the circumstance. “Tell me more” requires a different perspective. Asking someone to tell us more is a conscious choice that’s always available to us. It rarely, if ever,

has any conditions. Offering someone “Tell me more” is a gift without qualification.

Invitation to Engage

Let me extend an invitation to you—an invitation to engage.

A massive amount of information, a considerable amount of conflict, and deep disappointment in leadership, politics, religious systems, organizational structures, economic equity, and environmental care characterizes this cultural moment. In response, techniques and strategies are proposed, individuals offer themselves as the solution, various concepts and ideas are discussed, and political affiliations are promoted. But when it is all said and done, we may need to get back to basics.

With the other as our primary focus, we need to *cultivate an attitude expressed in a life and lifestyle* that communicates gratitude, remorse, and care, as we pay careful attention to the *why* question, determining the big story underlying our little stories. I invite you to engage in the rest of the book with this in mind.

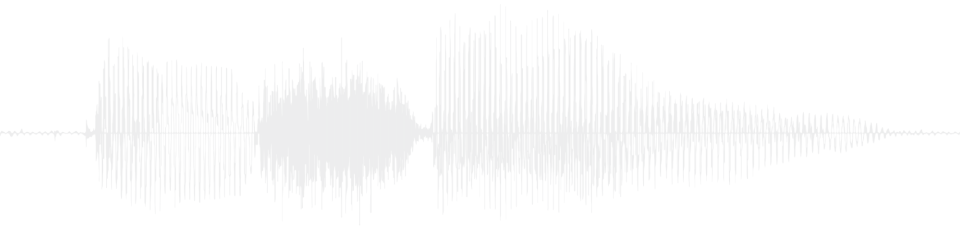
I don't want to minimize the importance of concepts, but the rest of the book is low on concepts and high on stories. We need more stories. Telling stories has the advantage that they almost always elicit other stories. So, as you read, don't just get caught up in these stories but think about your own story. Let my stories be a springboard to reflecting on your own experiences. What have you learned about gratitude,

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remorse, and care in your lifetime? How might you create new stories of this type in the future?

I also don't want to minimize the importance of information, but the rest of the book is low on information and high on wisdom. We need more wisdom. Wisdom puts the "if . . . then . . ." of life together. If we engage in a particular action, there will be a consequence. A different result will flow from another action. Every behavior has an outcome. As you read, reflect on the wisdom statement at the end of the section by looking backward and forward. Where have you learned this wisdom in the past, either through success or failure? How might you bring this wisdom to future circumstances?

I want to engage these three phrases more thoughtfully. I want to express them more frequently. I want a lifestyle that embodies them, and I desire the same experience for you. The world can change.



Part One

Thank You

WHEN CICERO, the philosopher-statesman from the century before Christ's birth, spoke these words in a speech, he provided an aspiration that needs to characterize all of us.

I wish to be adorned with every virtue, yet there is nothing which I can esteem more highly than being and appearing grateful. For this one virtue is not only the greatest, but is also the parent of all the other virtues.¹

Being and appearing grateful is the ultimate virtue, the parent that births all other admirable virtues.

Rooted in the Latin word *gratus*, which means pleasing or thankful, gratitude is an acknowledgment and appreciation experience. It's our way of saying, "You've done something, said something, or just been who you are, and I'm grateful. I want to acknowledge you and the impact you've had on me."

Psychologists argue that gratitude is both a state of mind and a personality trait. Traits are qualities that are embedded in who we are. Having a gratitude trait means that you're

attentive to situations where you've been the recipient of something deserving of appreciation and that you respond accordingly. It is who you are. Can you think of someone for whom gratitude comes easily? That person embodies gratitude as a quality, a trait. Can you think of acquaintances, work colleagues, and family members who never seem to "get it" when it comes to expressing gratefulness? That is a trait deficit.

The state of gratitude is the experience of thankfulness in the moment. When the clerk gives us a receipt in the grocery store and we say, "Thank you," that may not reveal a personality characteristic of gratitude; it may be simply a way to respond at the time. It is more something I do rather than who I am.

In the last twenty years, social-science literature has begun to link gratitude with a vast array of personal benefits. Those who express more gratitude tend to be more agreeable, open, optimistic, and happy, experience better sleep and mood, and have less inflammation, stress, depression, and anxiety. You could summarize this research by saying that thanking others is good for you!²

Cicero links gratitude with *virtue*—attributes that are good, right, true, and beautiful. This is distinct from personality, momentary states, or the personal benefits that accrue to us from thanking others. The practice of virtue is rooted in something much more profound than a personality style. If we say "Thank you" at the grocery store, we may or may not be exhibiting a virtue. But when the virtue of

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gratitude is deeply resident within us, grocery-store clerks will be included in our world of thank-yous.

Virtue isn't concerned with the outcome. I don't express gratitude because it will be good for me or bring me benefits. Virtues are themselves good. Appropriate. Moral. Ethical.

Gratitude is an acknowledgment of the other. They are in view. They are the focus. Genuine virtue is probably missing if a personal benefit is the focus of gratitude.

As a Christian, I want to embrace the virtue of gratitude. I don't want my thank-yous to be dependent on circumstances or only spoken when I'm in situations that seem to warrant this reaction. I don't want to be absorbed by the positive benefits that will come my way if I'm grateful.

Instead, I want to understand, cultivate, and practice the virtue of gratitude. Recognizing my life is a gift from God, I experience thankfulness, and so, in turn, I want to watch out for others who impact me positively and express my appreciation to them. My gratitude for God's gifts becomes the *why* behind my thank-you. And in case I get entangled with *I deserve it* entitlement, where I ignore gratitude for others, I keep reminding myself that the giving God is also a merciful God who regularly gives me what I don't deserve. I want to do the same for everyone else in my life.

It can be tempting to fight the entitlement culture or succumb to its influence. I want to embody an alternative story.

What follows are twenty stories on gratitude followed by a simple statement of wisdom. They capture scenarios where I learned the importance of saying "Thank you," sometimes

from what I or others did well and other times from my failures or others' shortcomings. Some of these stories describe experiences in the home, others relate to community engagement, and some originate in the workplace.

When we listen to other people's stories, we stimulate our imaginations and deepen our curiosity. As you read these stories, pause and ponder. Read through them slowly. Think of your own story and the degree to which it resonates with mine. Do you prefer a particular approach to gratitude from these stories? What does that look like for you? How might you pursue it?

Ponder the wisdom statements. Note the linkage of behavior and consequences, actions and outcome. How has this worked out in your life? Do you aspire to a different coupling of what you do and how things turn out? Spend time bathing in the wisdom, allowing it to wash over you and soak in.

As you read, imagine what the world would be like if we said "Thank you" to express gratitude in a culture that says "I deserve it" to express entitlement.

Whiny Space

COMPLAINING DOESN'T END IN INFANCY. If you don't believe me, go to a mall and listen carefully.

Infants are making odd, whistle-like sounds. Three-year-olds are being dragged, literally, out of a store with a loud and pathetic "But I *want* it." Teens sitting in the food court are griping about someone and what they have done. Couples, with hushed tones, are sniping at each other about how long they've been in the store. Older men drinking Italian coffee are waxing eloquent about increased income tax.

Complaining is an expression of legitimate dissatisfaction with the hope of resolution. Venting, in contrast, is a complaint without hope of resolution. The term *whining*, which started as a description of a hissing sound and could be used of both people and animals, became known as a feeble or immature way of complaining. The whiner is an excessive complainer.

Many families and workplaces have a sprinkling of whiners. Often their original complaint was legitimate and well-founded. They weren't treated well. Mistakes were made. But

whiners often can't move on. Whether their initial claim was addressed or not, whining is their way of being in the world.

Not only do venters and whiners create weariness for those around them but evidence suggests that these people's brains get rewired over time. Eventually, the whiner can look at any situation, positive or negative, and end up in a whiny space.¹

In the workplace, I've noticed that those who specialize in excessive complaining are usually the same people who are very low on verbalized gratitude. When they speak up in staff meetings, you know it'll be on the complaining-venting-whining scale, and it's a challenge to figure out which of the three is dominating. Rarely, if ever, do they express thanks to people, because in their world, people and communities always fall short.

I wonder what would happen if those who invariably live in this space were to see the other not as the cause of their problems or the dumping ground for their perpetual criticisms but as someone worthy of appreciation. Gratitude is an excellent ointment for the abrasion of excessive complaints.

Pause and Reflect

If we see others as worthy of appreciation, gratitude will increase as complaining lessens.