



WAKE UP GRATEFUL

Wake Up Grateful: The Transformative Practice of Taking Nothing for Granted **By Kristi Nelson, Executive Director, A Network for Grateful Living** **Discussion Guide**

“A mini-formula for grateful living runs through this whole book: Stop. Look. Go. Moment by moment, life is offering you gift after gift — exactly what you need to thrive. But unless you stop, you will rush right by that gift; unless you look, you will miss it; and only if you go and do something with it can you fully avail yourself of that gift. Kristi Nelson speaks with depth and weight when she is talking about grateful living. She knows the deep joy that springs from simply being alive and can show you ways toward finding joy in your own life.”

– Brother David Steindl-Rast

Description

What does it mean to truly live gratefully, every day? In *Wake Up Grateful*, Kristi Nelson, executive director of A Network for Grateful Living, unlocks the path to recognizing abundance in every moment, and gives readers the tools to bring this transformational shift in perspective into their daily lives. Nelson goes beyond the proverbial question of whether the glass is half full or half empty, and encourages readers to awaken to the gift of having a glass at all. With questions for reflection, daily exercises, and perspective prompts for appreciating the fullness of life as it is, right now, this book promises profound personal change through the practice of taking nothing for granted.

How to Use This Guide

Perhaps you are seeking deeper reflection on the core concepts of grateful living. Or maybe you are reading *Wake Up Grateful* in a book group, in the classroom, or alongside a small group of loved ones. You can use one or all of the following questions as journal prompts, personal meditations, or as discussion prompts. Whether you are seeking deeper contemplation, dialogue, or connection, may the book and this guide offer you the accompaniment you are seeking.

Author Bio

Kristi Nelson is the executive director of A Network for Grateful Living. She has a master’s degree in public administration from the Harvard Kennedy School and has spent more than 30 years in nonprofit leadership, development, and consulting. She has worked at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, and the Soul of Money Institute. Kristi is a Stage IV cancer survivor who cherishes living among friends and family in western Massachusetts.

From Gratitude to Grateful Living

1. What is your current relationship to grateful living? Have you ever experienced a moment of being in “super-soak mode”? What did it feel like? Have you been able to replicate that experience? Have you ever built up “gratitude tolerance”? How would you like to **practice grateful living**?
2. What is the difference between gratitude and grateful living? What is the difference between being grateful for everything that happens and having a **grateful orientation toward your life**? What is a challenge you are currently facing? How might a practice of grateful living help you move through this challenge? What are you grateful for in this very moment?
3. Think of **someone who embodies grateful living**. How does this person move through challenge and hardship? How do they celebrate and share their experience of joy? In what ways can you live a more grateful life inspired by this person’s example?
4. In what ways is perspective like a muscle? How do we care for and strengthen this muscle? How can we **shift our awareness** to see obligations as opportunities? Can you remember a past moment where you viewed a responsibility as a cumbersome obligation rather than an opportunity? Were you able to shift your perspective? How might you approach a similar experience today?
5. How do wake-up calls serve as reminders that life is precious and fleeting? How are these moments shared in popular narratives, in the media, and in your social circles? How can dramatic or alarming experiences both connect us to gratefulness and strain our nervous systems? Can you think of a **meaningful experience of waking up**—to a relationship, an injustice, a privilege, or a moment? How did that experience impact how you navigate your life today?
6. How can you tend to your **sense of curiosity** and your individual interests? What are some ways you can practice more gratefully caring for yourself? What beliefs, ideas, or circumstances seem to stand between you and full acceptance of all that you are?
7. What does it mean to you to **greet each moment gratefully**? What are some ways you could remind yourself that each present moment is a gift? How does it feel when you remember this truth?
8. Think of someone in your life who approaches life with **curiosity and wonder**. What have you learned from witnessing their perspective about life’s mysteries? How can you cultivate and share surprise and delight with others?
9. What are some of the extraordinary things that exist in your life? How can you practice not taking these **extraordinary elements of your life** for granted? What are you committed to savoring and celebrating more?
10. What are some things that make you feel appreciated by others? How can you **share more appreciation and attention** with your loved ones? How could you share more appreciation and attention during interactions with strangers?
11. What does it feel like to experience an overflowing heart? How can you **share your loving heart** with others? How can you share your loving heart with your community? How could you use your love to support the movements and organizations that you value?

12. What practices or rituals have you previously used that have helped you experience gratefulness? Are there any obstacles or difficulties that have prevented you from continuing these practices? What is your current intention for **cultivating a practice of grateful living**? How might you lean on others for support with your grateful practice?
13. In what directions is your attention currently being pulled? How can you **intentionally slow down** in order to become more present? How can slowing down be both a sacred and a radical act?
14. How can you use your memory or imagination to shift your perspective? How can you remind yourself to **seek perspective** when you feel challenged or stuck? Are there physical reminders you can establish that would support your ability to sustain a more grateful perspective?
15. How can you **cultivate a sense of greater possibility** in your daily life? How can you practice saying yes and engaging gratefully with possibilities? What does it feel like to focus your attention on a sense of possibility?
16. What does it feel like in your body to be awake, appreciative, and **alive to your experience**? What does it feel like in your heart?

Grateful Living in the Real World

Rethinking Uncertainty, Cultivating Trust, Tending the Body

17. How can uncertainty become a source of suffering? How did the author move through a period of intense uncertainty? How did she let go of her pursuit for a definitive answer about her cancer? Think of a time that you have **let go of a drive for certainty**. What did you learn?
18. How can you **cultivate courage to embrace life's mysteries**? What does it look like to let go of the idea that you can be in charge at all times? What feels hard? What feels liberating? How can grateful living help you embrace creative possibilities?
19. How was the author challenged by other peoples' assumptions about how she looked following her cancer treatment? How can you interrupt and **reshape your assumptions** about how other people look and feel? How can you shift your attention in order to connect with and listen to others more?
20. When do you **appreciate your body** most? When do you feel challenged by your body? How can you cultivate greater empathy, interest, and curiosity towards your body?
21. What does it look and feel like for you to **befriend your body**? How can you remind yourself to treat unpleasant perceptions and sensations with tenderness and care?

Appreciating Emotion, Opening to Vulnerability, Navigating Grief

22. What emotions feel difficult for you to appreciate? Does seeing emotions as “energy in motion” help you embrace and hold space for them? How can you **practice being present** when you feel emotionally overwhelmed or isolated?

23. Think of a time you expressed vulnerability with a loved one. What did that expression of vulnerability feel like? How can living gratefully lead to **more authentic connections** with yourself and with others?
24. What reminders have helped you remember that you are **worthy of kindness** and acceptance? How do you practice interrupting self-judgment? Are there people in your life who can support you being a good friend to yourself?
25. How did the author **establish positive boundaries** with others during and after her cancer treatment? How did those boundaries enable her to listen to herself more deeply? What external messages do you receive that may throw your intuition and wisdom into question? How can you counteract those messages?
26. What does it mean to soften to the invitation of grief? Have you experienced poignancy in the face of grief? If yes, what did it feel like? What are the **rituals, ceremonies, and truths** that have supported you through grief in the past? How might you share these practices with the community and world around you?

Turning to Nature, Recognizing Abundance, Creating a Legacy of Gratefulness

27. How do you currently practice being in **relationship with the natural world**? Does distancing yourself from technology help you to be more present with nature? How can we advocate for and support others being in deeper relationship with nature?
28. What does it look like to be a steward of the earth? How would you like to deepen your practice of **generosity and sustainability** towards the world around you? What stigmas exist around protecting or healing the earth? How can you counteract these messages in order to practice greater reverence and repair?
29. When have you experienced feelings of scarcity? What patterns or relationships perpetuate this feeling of not having or being enough? How can you be more **present to the fullness of the current moment**, and awaken to a greater sense of plenty?
30. When scarcity is leading a conversation, how can you interrupt? How are you able to change the thoughts and conversations you have about your life? What are some objects, experiences, or relationships whose **inherent abundance** you can appreciate more? How can you share these gifts with others?
31. How did the author channel her gratitude for surviving cancer towards a **life of service**? What values do you feel called to stand up for? What resources do you have that could be of use to your community, and to the larger world?
32. How can grateful living motivate you towards action in your community? How is the current moment calling you to act? How can committing to **greater presence and perspective** help you hold both suffering and possibility at the same time?
33. Whose legacies **inspire and uplift** you? How might you honor these legacies by inspiring and uplifting others? How can living a more grateful life impact how you are remembered by others?
34. Write yourself a guide to **living your grateful legacy**. What are the values that anchor and inspire you? What are the moments you've witnessed and choices you've made that you would like others to remember? What relationships contribute to your grateful legacy? How can this guide to your own legacy help you navigate a grateful future?

For Further Discussion and Reflection

- Read author Kristi Nelson’s article, *Waking Up to What Is: Grateful in the Face of It All*.
- Explore grateful living offerings from A Network for Grateful Living at grateful.org. Consider joining a Gratefulness Gathering, explore the Practice Space, or take an eCourse.
- Sign up to receive A Network for Grateful Living’s Word for the Day, Newsletter + Grateful Offerings, or Poem a Month.
- Watch A Grateful Day with Brother David Steindl-Rast.
- Explore Brother David Steindl-Rast’s digital archives at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

About this Guide’s Writer

Rachael Zafer is a writer, facilitator, educator, and the author of discussion guides for many books, including *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, and *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Rachael provides creative and technical consulting to nonprofits and institutions across the country and has led hundreds of creative and mindful workshops in prisons and jails in Michigan, Illinois, New York, and Colorado. She was the founding director of the NYU Prison Education Program and co-founded the Prison Arts Initiative at the University of Denver. Rachael holds an Executive MPA from New York University and a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Michigan.

