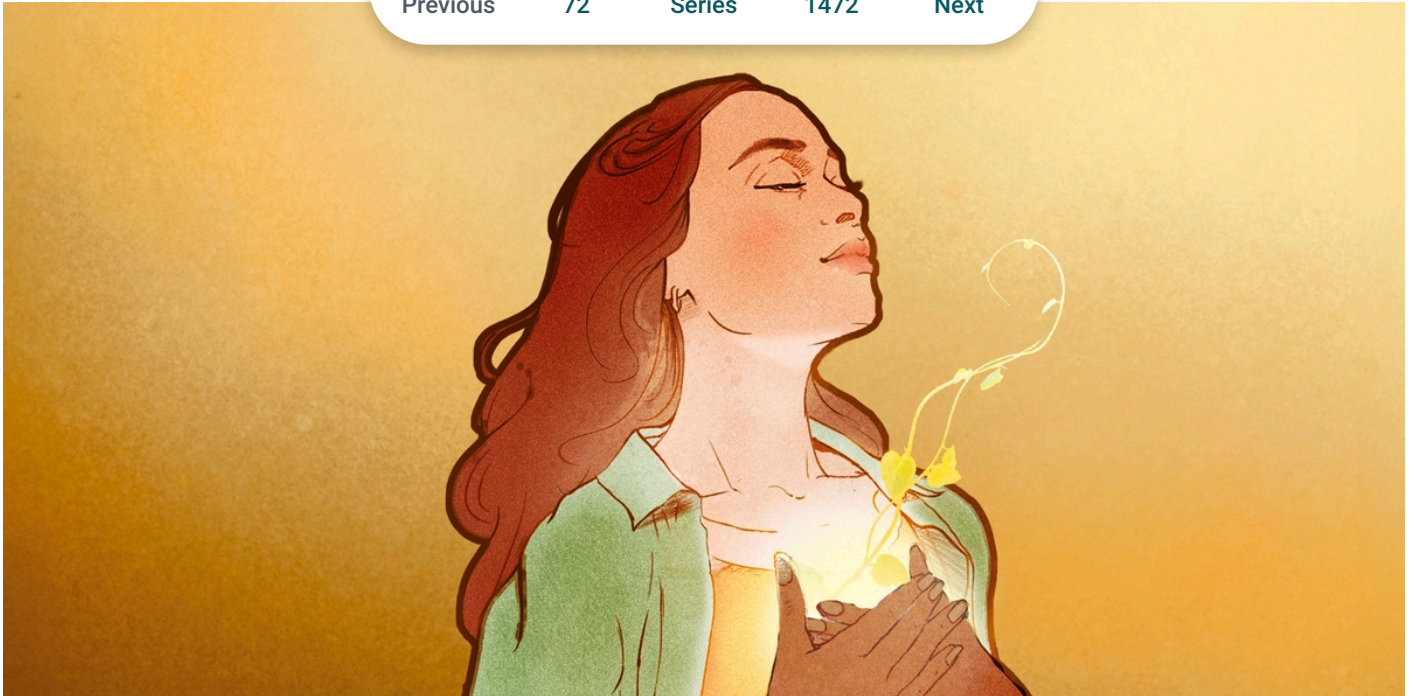


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HEALTH VIEWPOINTS

Gratitude: An Alternative Medicine for Anger and Depression

Research shows that a daily gratitude practice can positively affect emotional health and interpersonal relationships.

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This is part 1 in “[Virtue Medicine](#)”

What medicine is safe, effective, free, and requires only a subtle shift in perspective? We welcome you to explore the neglected link between virtue and health—‘Virtue Medicine.’

In the sterile calm of the doctor’s office, Serena sat restlessly, her mind replaying the scene that had led her there. Earlier that day, during an important project meeting, the new intern, Sarah, had timidly offered a suggestion. To everyone’s surprise, the manager had liked this new idea, and said it would be implemented in the next project—at the cost of Serena’s original proposal.

During that meeting, something in Serena snapped. She responded not with mere disagreement, but with an eruption of words and anger. Her tirade was merciless, leaving Sarah in tears and the room in silence.

Serena had struggled with anger in the past, but it had never shown itself as it did that day. As she sat in the doctor’s office, Serena felt guilt and frustration.

She was expecting, almost hoping, for a straightforward medical solution—a pill to suppress the anger, a quick fix to patch up a problem she felt powerless against. Instead, Dr. Corson handed her something far more unassuming, almost archaic in its simplicity: a small, blank journal.

“This isn’t what you were expecting,” the doctor acknowledged, sensing her skepticism. “But I want you to write down three things you’re grateful for every day. It’s a different kind of medicine.”

Serena looked down at the journal, its blank pages mocking her internal chaos. Journaling felt trivial in the face of her overwhelming emotions. Yet driven by a strong desire to change, she reluctantly agreed to give it a try.

An Antidote to Anger

As Serena began her gratitude practice, doubt lingered. Yet each evening, she dutifully wrote in her journal. Gradually, a shift occurred. Where once there was only frustration and anger, moments of appreciation began to surface.

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Previously, she was irritated by her colleagues and often complained about her commute to work. After a week of journaling, she felt a shift. She began to feel grateful for a colleague's help, a peaceful morning, and even the reliability of her old car.

Serena's experience, while deeply personal, is not unusual. Scientific research on gratitude supports her change in temperament.

A [study](#) published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* in 2012 found that individuals who practiced gratitude experienced lower levels of aggression, even after being insulted. In contrast, those in the control group—who did not practice gratitude—experienced increased aggression after being insulted.

Effects of Gratitude on Aggression

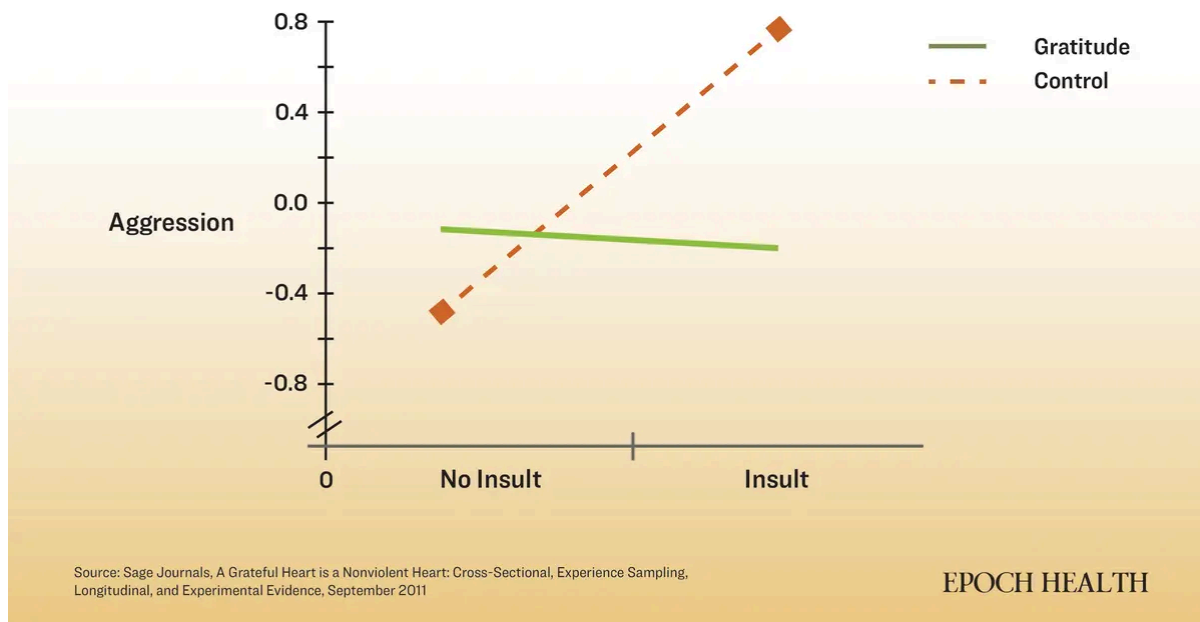


Illustration by The Epoch Times

Those practicing gratitude were significantly less likely to retaliate against others. The experience is akin to laughter interrupting physical exertion: Just as it is impossible to continue a strenuous workout while laughing, gratitude elicits a psychological state in which aggression and anger find little foothold.

The effect of gratitude in displacing hostile feelings highlights it as a personal virtue and tool in fostering empathetic social interactions.

Gratitude Expands Happiness

Back home, Serena sat at her desk, pen in hand, thinking about what she was grateful for that day. After some free journaling, she realized she was unwittingly writing about Sarah, the intern. Her heart ached with guilt, remembering the tears she'd caused her.

Serena knew she had to make things right. She wrote Sarah a letter expressing her remorse and gratitude for making her realize she had

to change her ways. The following day, she greeted Sarah in the office, apologized for her previous outburst, handed her the letter, and remarked on her valuable contributions at work. That night, Serena felt a lightness she hadn't experienced in weeks, even years.

This lightness came from genuine contentment. A [study](#) published in 2005 showed that writing thank-you letters increased participants' happiness by 10 percent and reduced their depressive symptoms by 35 percent. These feelings were sustained up to six months after writing the letter, highlighting the powerful effect of this gesture.

Effects of Gratitude on Happiness and Depression

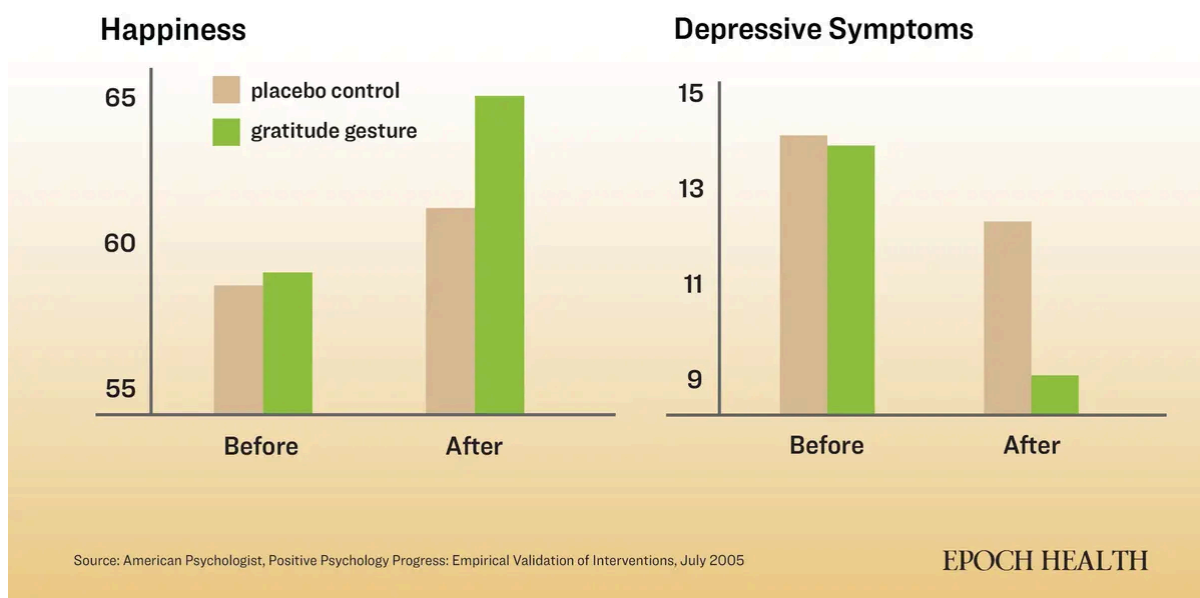


Illustration by The Epoch Times

This was evident in Serena's life—the bouts of anger that used to dominate her days were less frequent, almost non-existent. In their place, moments of genuine happiness began to emerge. She was surprised to find herself smiling more—not only at her achievements, but also at the small joys of everyday life.

Four weeks later, when Serena stepped back into Corson's office, the atmosphere felt different, almost unfamiliar. She was not the same

person who had hesitantly accepted a journal instead of a conventional prescription. The change within her was palpable, radiating from a place of newfound peace, positive thinking, and understanding.

Extensive Benefits

Noticing the transformation, Corson greeted Serena with a warm, understanding smile.

“It’s good to see you,” he said. “Did the unconventional prescription help?”

Serena paused. She felt a mix of humility and surprise at her transformation.

“Honestly, doctor, I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t experienced it myself,” she said. “But why? I mean, scientifically, how could such a simple practice have such a profound impact?”

Corson didn’t miss a beat. Pulling up a chair to sit closer, he said: “Gratitude isn’t just a habit—it’s about changing our mindset. In cultivating virtues, such as gratitude, our minds become healthy, and the body follows.”

“But since you asked specifically, take a look at this,” Corson said, handing Serena a poster describing the benefits of gratitude.

The Benefits of Gratitude



Illustration by The Epoch Times

“Remember, these findings are just the tip of the iceberg,” he said. “Science is still discovering the scope of gratitude’s impact.”

Many symptoms, diseases, and disorders plague our modern society. At the forefront is a lack of sleep quantity and quality. Gratitude can alleviate these side effects by [improving sleep](#). [Research has found](#) that participants—even those with sleeping disorders—who reflected on what they were thankful for before bed experienced significantly better sleep quality and duration.

Additionally, research found that those who practice gratitude journaling experienced a nearly [8 percent decrease](#) in pain, and are more inclined to exercise.

[Gratitude](#) can [significantly lower stress levels](#). This, in turn, benefits mental and physical health, and strengthens the immune system. By encouraging behaviors that [support immune function](#), gratitude lowers [levels of interleukin-6](#), a leading culprit in chronic inflammation.

The Comparison Trap

“Gratitude transforms how we interact with the world,” Corson said. “It shifts our focus from what we lack to what we have. Let me illustrate this with a parable:

“A man rode his old bicycle through the city, feeling dissatisfied. He noticed a shiny new car driving past and thought, ‘If only I had a car like that instead of this bicycle.’

“Inside the car, the driver was stressed about loan payments. Seeing the cyclist, he thought, ‘I wish I could be carefree like that cyclist, without these financial burdens.’

“At a nearby bus stop, a person waited. Watching the car and bicycle pass by, he thought, ‘I wish I had a bicycle or a car. It would be much more convenient than waiting for this bus.’

“Down the road, a person in a wheelchair observed the cyclist, the car, and the bus stop commuter. She thought, ‘How I wish I could stand and walk, even just to wait at a bus stop, ride a bicycle, or drive a car.’

“Finally, in a hospital room overlooking the street, a terminally ill patient lay in bed, gazing out the window. He thought, ‘I’d give anything to be out there, even in a wheelchair, just to feel the sun and breathe fresh air again.’

“Each person longed for what another had, forming a chain where the simplest blessings of one were the deepest wishes of another. Thus, we should avoid looking at what we lack and focus on and appreciate what we already have,” Corson said.

“This change in mindset also significantly improves social connections,” he said. “It makes us into people others want to be around, enriching our relationships and fostering a sense of belonging and interpersonal satisfaction.”

Serena experienced this firsthand—she knew what Corson meant. After apologizing and delivering the thank-you letter to Sarah, the two women had realized they had much in common, and their interactions became amicable.

“As a doctor, I ‘prescribe’ gratitude practice as it’s completely free and can affect all aspects of your life, not just physical health,” Corson said. “You see, in our modern medical practice, there’s a single focus on targeting symptoms, often with medication. It’s not wrong, but it’s not the whole picture either. Many tend to overlook the powerful influence of the mind on the body.”

The Biological Blueprint of Gratitude

Serena wanted to understand how feelings of gratitude are stimulated in the body. Corson then explained:

“[Gratitude activates](#) regions of the brain associated with emotional regulation and pleasure, such as the caudate and frontal gyrus. When we practice gratitude, brain regions responsible for positive emotions are stimulated, while regions responsible for negative emotions are inhibited.

“This brain activity is quickly mediated by electrical signals, which you can think of as text messages—direct and specific. Gratitude also works through hormones, which are slower, like a mailed letter, but more robust.

“When we feel grateful, our brains release dopamine and serotonin—two neurotransmitter hormones responsible for how we feel. Dopamine gives us that ‘feel-good’ rush when we accomplish something, while serotonin boosts our mood over a more extended period, helping to stabilize it.

“Gratitude leads to a natural, self-sustaining loop of positive reinforcement. The more we practice gratitude, the better we feel— instantly and in the long term. Our brains begin to enjoy the release of feel-good hormones, encouraging us to continue feeling grateful. Over time, this practice can become part of our lives.”

As Serena left the office, she felt wiser and confident. She had transformed from a skeptic to a believer, a grump to an appreciative colleague. Armed with scientific insights and practical guidance, she was eager to continue her gratitude practice.

Virtue Medicine



[Part 1](#)

[Gratitude: An Alternative Medicine for Anger and Depression](#)



[Part 2](#)

[Your Brain Is Wired for Honesty—and Lying Taxes You](#)



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Author's Note:

The experiences in this article are composites of real stories, while Dr. Corson is fictional. The challenges, scientific insights, and benefits of gratitude practice described are based on contemporary research, offering both inspiration and practical guidance for readers.

Next: [Part 2: Your Brain Is Wired for Honesty—and Lying Taxes You](#)

A doctor's struggle with migraines led to a surprising remedy: confronting his everyday lies.

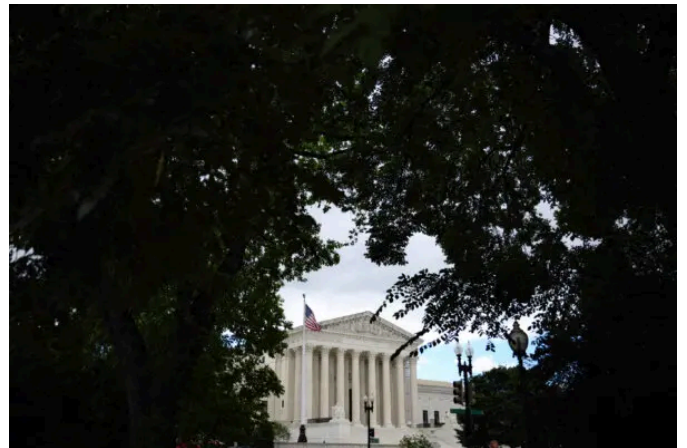
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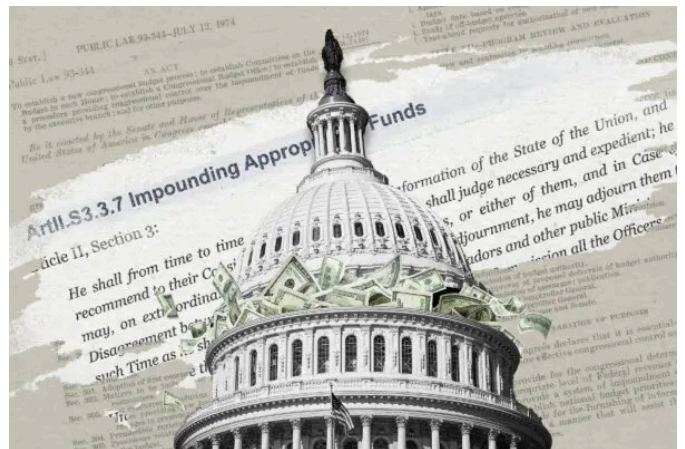
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