

Chapter 1: No Grapes Here

There are no grapes in grateful.

You might think that's just wordplay. But I mean it literally—and spiritually.

We all carry this invisible scoreboard, don't we? Somewhere deep inside, we start measuring what we're owed. What we expected. What we should have by now. It's easy to think that when you've done the work, stayed the course, said your prayers, or helped others... life should return the favor. A better job. A longer marriage. A clean bill of health. A call from a child who used to say, "I'll always love you, Dad."

And when it doesn't come?

That's when the grapes start to grow. Sour ones.

You don't notice it at first. Maybe you just start pulling away a little. Stop celebrating other people's wins. Start looking sideways at someone else's blessings. You scroll a little longer than

usual, feeling that subtle sting of comparison, muttering silently, *"That should've been me."*

You stop praying the same way—because why ask if you're just going to be ignored?

You start bargaining. Then resenting. Then assuming the worst.

And all the while, you're still saying things like "I'm just waiting on God's timing" or "I'm staying positive," but inside, the roots of bitterness have already cracked the soil.

Here's the hard truth I learned, the one that no one wants to put on a coffee mug or hang on the wall:

Gratitude begins the moment entitlement ends.

That sentence hit me like a freight train the first time it surfaced in my spirit. I was sitting in a parking lot. No music. No distractions. Just silence and the weight of a life that didn't look the way I wanted. A few things had broken open in the

months before—relationships, expectations, my own self-image. And I was angry. Not in the red-hot screaming way. Angry in the quiet, cold, disappointed way.

The kind of angry that wears a smile at dinner but flinches at the sound of joy in someone else's voice.

And that's when it came to me: *You don't get to be grateful and bitter at the same time. You can't say thank you with one hand and keep score with the other.*

This chapter isn't about blaming you for wanting good things. **Wanting isn't the problem.** Desire is holy. Hope is human. It's the part of you that still believes in joy.

But there's a line—barely visible—where desire crosses over into demand. Where longing becomes loathing. And when the “I hope it happens” turns into “I deserved better,” that's where the grapes start to spoil.

It's the part of you that folds your arms when the good doesn't come. That raises your eyebrows when someone else gets picked. That stares at the sky and thinks, "*Seriously?*" That turns bitter when life gives you storms instead of shade.

That part of you—the one collecting sour grapes—has no place in the grateful heart.

Because grateful doesn't mean you got everything you wanted.

It means you noticed everything you didn't deserve—and chose to say thank you anyway.

Let that settle.

Thank you... anyway.

Thank you... even though I'm hurting.

Thank you... even though I don't understand.

Thank you... even though it didn't work out.

Thank you... because somehow, even in this... I'm still breathing. I'm still here.

Gratitude isn't for the full basket. It's for the empty hands that still rise. For the morning that comes even after a night of weeping. For the one friend who stayed when the others walked away. For the moments that weren't promised but arrived anyway—unannounced and shining.

And here's the deeper revelation: When you let go of what you think you're owed, you make room for what you never imagined could be given.

Because entitlement is loud. It takes up space. It crowds your heart and makes you blind to quiet gifts.

A neighbor who checks in on you.

The stranger who lets you merge in traffic when they didn't have to.

The nurse who talks to your mother like she's her own.

The last good photo you took of someone
you love before the goodbye.

Small things. Unpaid for. Undeserved.
Beautiful.

When your hands are full of “I should have,”
you miss what’s still being offered.

We’ve all been there. I still go there more
than I’d like to admit.

Sometimes it’s the voice that whispers, “*You
gave them your best years, and this is what you
get?*”

Other times it’s the echo in your head that says,
“*No one sees how hard you’ve fought.*”

And maybe those thoughts aren’t completely
wrong.

But they don’t grow anything good. They
just keep you locked in a loop of rehearsed
injustice.

And gratitude is the only thing strong
enough to break the cycle.

It's not a trick. It's not spiritual bypassing. It's not pretending things are okay when they're not.

It's choosing to *look wider*.

To widen your lens beyond the thing you lost. The thing you were denied. The person who didn't stay. And to notice the sunrise you didn't plan. The breath you just took. The laughter that still sneaks up on you sometimes, even when you swore you'd forgotten how.

It's remembering that every second you get to choose how you respond is a gift. Not a guarantee.

And that's why there are no grapes in grateful.

Because gratitude is not a harvest you control. It's not something you grow on demand. You can't plant a seed and force the outcome. You can't say, "Okay, I've been thankful for three days, where's my reward?"

Gratitude is the reward.

It's what frees you from waiting on life to be fair.

It's what breaks the illusion that control is the path to peace.

It's what keeps you tender when the world tells you to harden.

It's not flashy. It won't always trend.

But it will hold you together when your plan falls apart.

So let me say it again:

There are no grapes in grateful.

No scoreboard. No deals. No perfect endings.

Just the quiet, defiant, powerful choice to say:

“I see what I've been given. And that is enough for today.”

The Moment It Hit Me

The first time I truly felt it—the clean, sharp cut between bitterness and gratitude—was after my mother passed.

I'd said all the things you're supposed to say. "She's in a better place." "At least she's not in pain anymore." "She knew I loved her." And all of that was true.

But there was also the part of me that was angry. At life. At timing. At myself.

We used to talk every day. I still find myself reaching for the phone when something good happens. Or when I'm hurting. Her voice is still the one in my head when I'm wondering what to do.

She didn't get to see the way my life turned. The good parts I wish she could have clapped for. The harder parts I wish I could have asked her how to get through.

But here's what I did have: a woman who loved me fully. Who forgave me when I didn't deserve it. Who answered every call. Who prayed for me even when I hadn't prayed for myself in years. And I remembered—after the anger, after the silence, after the “why now?”—that I had so much more than most people ever do.

That was the moment.

I could keep harvesting sour grapes, or I could sit still and let the grateful grow again.

Stop Waiting for Sweet

So many people are stuck in the bitterness. They tell themselves, “I'll be thankful *when*.” When the money comes in. When the diagnosis is reversed. When the relationship heals. When they apologize. When it finally gets easier.

But gratitude doesn't wait for the sweet.

It takes root in the hard dirt. In the ugly fields. In the places where nothing is blooming, and you plant something anyway.

That's where this book begins. Not with the pretty pictures or the polished answers, but with the truth:

There are no grapes in grateful. Just choices.

You can pick bitterness or blessing.

Excuses or endurance.

Resentment or resilience.

One makes noise. The other makes roots.

Gratitude, real gratitude, begins when there's nothing shiny to show. When the account is overdrawn. When the pain still pulses. When the ending wasn't what you prayed for. Gratitude doesn't need circumstances to change before it shows up. In fact, the most enduring form of gratitude is forged exactly when circumstances don't.

I've heard people say, "If I could just get through this, I'd finally be okay." But what if you could be okay *in it*? What if the win isn't getting out of the storm—but remaining peaceful inside it? What if strength looks less like escape, and more like staying grounded while everything shakes?

We are trained, almost conditioned, to associate gratitude with outcomes. The job offer. The promotion. The remission. The return. The success story. But that version of gratitude is fragile—it only lasts as long as the blessing does. When things fall apart, that kind of gratitude disappears with them.

But the kind of gratitude this book is about—the kind that keeps you rooted even in grief, even in loss, even in betrayal—that kind changes everything.

It doesn't mean you pretend everything is okay. It means you keep your heart open while it's breaking. It means you believe something good is still possible, even while everything looks like a

mess. It's saying, "I don't like this... but I won't let it turn me hard."

I remember meeting a man years ago at a hospital waiting room. He was in his seventies, wearing an old hat from a war I hadn't even studied properly in school. We started talking—small stuff at first. Weather. Coffee. Then it got deeper. He was there because his wife of 48 years was in her final hours.

He wasn't sobbing. He wasn't angry. He just sat there with a quiet grace I couldn't name. I finally said, "You seem... peaceful."

He nodded. "I've had almost fifty years with her. I could be bitter it's ending. But I'd rather be thankful it ever began."

I never forgot that line.

That's what it means to stop waiting for sweet.

Gratitude isn't just a response to what we receive. It's a stance we choose to hold, even when our hands are empty.

Bitterness says, "I deserved better."

Gratitude says, "I've been given more than I'll ever know."

Bitterness replays the hurt.

Gratitude reclaims the heart.

The two can't coexist.

You can try. We all do for a while. But eventually, one chokes the other out.

So many people are one apology, one raise, one reversal away from their joy.

But joy doesn't live on the other side of the apology. It lives on the other side of acceptance.

If you're still waiting for the perfect ending to feel grateful, you're delaying your own peace.

Start where you are. Thankfulness in this moment—not in the moment you wish you had—that’s where life really begins to change.

You don’t have to fake it. But you do have to face it.

Face the disappointment.

Face the unmet expectations.

Face the fear.

Then let the smallest seed of thankfulness push through the soil anyway.

The people who are truly grateful aren’t the ones who’ve had it easiest.

They’re the ones who’ve had to choose it again and again—in the darkness, in the drought, in the deafening silence.

That’s what this book is about.

It's not about pretending the hard parts didn't happen. It's about planting gratitude right in the middle of them.

So don't wait for sweet.

Start now.

Start here.

Start small.

But whatever you do—**start.**

Good. Now Grow.

You'll hear this phrase a lot in the pages ahead: *Good.*

Didn't get what you wanted? Good. Now grow.

Didn't feel seen or thanked? Good. Now deepen your why.

Didn't get closure, kindness, or credit?
Good. Now walk anyway.

Gratitude isn't something that finds you—
it's something you forge. Like steel in fire. Like a
voice after silence.

And here's the strangest part: once you stop
waiting for grapes, you'll find yourself grateful for
things you never thought you'd celebrate.

Pain will still knock. Life will still wound.
But bitterness won't get the last word.

Because when you choose to grow, even
when it hurts—*especially* when it hurts—you are
choosing life over numbness, hope over stagnation.

It's easy to say, "Good," when everything's
going your way. But when your prayers are met
with silence? When your efforts seem unnoticed?
That's when "Good" becomes a sacred kind of
defiance. A way of saying, "I'm still here. And I'm
not done."

Growth doesn't mean you love the hardship.
It means you won't waste it.

There's something radical about deciding to grow when everything around you says you shouldn't have to. When your friends tell you to let it go. When the world offers you shortcuts, blame, or bitterness—and you say, “No thanks. I'm going deeper.”

“Good. Now grow.”

It's a declaration that nothing will be wasted—not the hurt, not the delay, not the detour.

And growth rarely looks dramatic.

Sometimes it's going back to the gym even when the scale doesn't budge. Sometimes it's being kind when you don't feel like it. Sometimes it's reaching out to the person who wounded you—not to reconcile, but to release. Sometimes it's choosing stillness when anxiety says to spin.

Growth is quiet. Steady. Almost invisible at first.

But one day, you look back and realize—you are no longer who you were. And thank God for that.

I used to think growth meant always moving forward. Now I know better. Growth means returning—again and again—to the kind of person you truly want to be.

And gratitude is what fuels that return.

When you're grateful, you stop chasing applause and start chasing alignment. You stop asking, "Will they like me?" and start asking, "Am I proud of how I handled that?" You stop focusing on what didn't happen and start watering what's still possible.

That's why "Good" is never the end of the sentence. It's the beginning.

Good. Now breathe. Good. Now forgive. Good. Now listen. Good. Now learn. Good. Now grow.

This is your permission slip to begin again.

Not because you failed. But because you're becoming.

And becoming isn't a result. It's a rhythm.

So if you're in a moment that doesn't feel fair, doesn't feel kind, doesn't feel like it's ever going to break through...

Good.

Because it's in these exact moments that your roots are stretching the deepest.

No grapes in grateful. Just grit. Just grace. Just growth.

So dig in.

You're not buried.

You're planted.