God, Gratitude, and Giving

God, Gratitude, and Giving

Three Simple Daily Practices to Quiet the Noise, Trust the Journey, and Live with Peace

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FREE SAMPLE

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Scripture passages are quoted or paraphrased from traditional English translations.

The examples in this book that are not the author's own experience are illustrative composites. Names and situations in them are imagined for teaching purposes.

This book offers spiritual and personal encouragement. It is not a substitute for medical, psychological, financial, or legal advice.

First edition

For everyone carrying more
than they were ever meant to hold.

Introduction: The Weight You Were Never Meant to Carry

Have you ever stood in your driveway with your arms full of grocery bags, refusing to make a second trip? You've got four bags hanging from one hand, a gallon of milk pinching the fingers of the other, your keys clamped between your teeth, and a case of water balanced against your hip. Your arms are burning. The plastic handles are cutting off the circulation in your fingers. And somewhere in your mind there's a stubborn little voice saying that if you can just get it all through the front door in one trip, you'll have won something. I smile when I think about that, because almost all of us have done it. But I also think it's one of the most honest pictures I know of the way a lot of us are living. We're trying to carry everything at once. The work and the worry. The people we love and the choices they make. The mistakes from last year and the fears about next year. The bills, the deadlines, the diagnosis we're waiting on, the conversation we've been dreading. And we keep telling ourselves that if we can just hold it all together a little longer, we'll finally be able to set it down and rest.

Maybe that's where you are as you open this book. Maybe your mind has been racing lately. Maybe you lie down at night and the thoughts start right up, going over what happened today, what might happen tomorrow, what you should have said, and what you'll do if things don't work out. Maybe you're doing everything you know how to do and it still feels like it isn't enough. If that's you, I want you to know something right at the beginning. There's nothing wrong with you. You're not weak, and you're

not failing. You're a human being who cares deeply about your life and the people in it, and you've been carrying more than any one person was ever meant to hold. I wrote this book for you. Not for some perfect version of you who has everything figured out, but for the real you, sitting wherever you're sitting right now, holding whatever you happen to be holding today.

My name is Michael Fox. I've worked in financial services since 1996, and for many years now I've also worked as a mindset and executive coach, mostly with financial advisors, insurance regional vice presidents, wholesalers, and other professionals who want to grow in confidence, in performance, and in the way they live their lives. I host a show called *The Growth Mindset Book Podcast*, and I wrote a book called *You Are the Magic Genie*. I tell you that not to impress you, but so you'll understand where I'm coming from. I spend a great deal of my time with people who are capable, hardworking, and successful by almost any outside measure, and who are also, very often, quietly exhausted. They're carrying the weight of their numbers, their clients, their teams, and their families, and they're carrying a lot of it alone. And over the years, I've come to believe that the thing most of us need isn't another strategy or another productivity system. It's a different way of holding our lives.

That different way is what I call the Three G's: God, Gratitude, and Giving. I know those sound like three very simple words, and in a way they are. You don't need to buy anything to practice them. You don't need to learn a complicated system, and you don't need to wait until your circumstances change. But the more I've lived with these three words, the more I've come to believe that when you really understand them, and especially when you understand how they work together, they can change the way you experience almost everything. Not because they make every problem disappear. I don't believe life works that way, and I'd never want to promise you something like that. But because they change the person who's facing the problems. They change what you're carrying, what you're noticing, and what you're offering to the people around you.

Let me tell you briefly what I mean by each one, and then we'll spend the rest of this book walking through them together, slowly and practically, the way you'd talk something over with a friend. The first G is God. For

me, this means learning to tell the difference between what's mine to do and what isn't, doing my part fully and faithfully, and then giving the rest over to God. It means being still long enough to listen. The second G is Gratitude. This means turning my attention toward what's already good in my life and allowing myself to actually feel it, not just list it, even on the days when life is hard. And the third G is Giving. This means offering to other people the very things I wish I had more of, whether that's encouragement, kindness, patience, appreciation, or love, and discovering that I already have far more to give than I realized.

Now, I want to say something about the word God, because I know it means different things to different people. I use that word because it's the word that's true for me. I believe God is love, and I believe that love is with every one of us, whether we feel it or not. But if you come from a different background, or you use different words, or you're honestly not sure what you believe, I want you to know you're welcome at this table. Maybe you think of a higher power, or the source of all life, or a deeper love you've never quite had a name for. You don't have to agree with every word I use to find something here that helps you. I'm not writing to tell you what to believe. I'm writing to share what has brought me peace, and to offer it to you in case it might bring you some peace too. Take what's useful, and leave the rest with my blessing.

There's one more thing I want you to know before we begin, and it may be the most important idea in this whole book. So many of us are living as though peace, happiness, and generosity are rewards we'll get to enjoy later. Once things settle down, I'll finally relax. Once I hit my number, I'll feel grateful. Once I have a little extra, I'll start giving. But what if we've had that backward? What if the peace, the gratitude, and the love we keep postponing are available to us right now, in the middle of our unfinished, imperfect lives? I believe they are. And I want to say it as simply as I can, because I'd love for you to carry these three sentences with you long after you've closed this book. You don't have to control everything to have faith. You don't have to have everything to be grateful. And you don't have to be wealthy to give.

Think about that for a moment. You don't have to wait. You don't have to earn your way into a better inner life by fixing everything on the outside first. You can begin today, with whatever is happening, wherever you happen to be. You can do your part and give the rest over. You can notice one thing that's genuinely good and let yourself feel it. And you can make one person's day a little lighter. That's really all the Three G's ask of you. They're small enough to begin this morning and deep enough to grow with you for the rest of your life.

This book is organized in four parts. In the first part, we'll talk about God: why trying to control everything is so exhausting, how to practice what I call Open Hands, and how to quiet the noise long enough to hear the quiet knowing inside you. In the second part, we'll talk about Gratitude: why a checklist isn't enough, how to be thankful in the middle of real life, and how to truly see the people right in front of you. In the third part, we'll talk about Giving: how to give what you want more of, why the good you do travels farther than you'll ever know, and how giving quietly changes the giver. And in the fourth part, we'll put all three together and I'll walk you, day by day, through a simple morning practice you can begin tomorrow. At the end of each chapter, you'll find a short section called Pause and Practice. It's not homework. It's an invitation to take one small idea off the page and into your day.

I'd encourage you to read slowly. This isn't a book to race through so you can say you finished it. If a chapter touches something in you, stay with it for a day or two before you move on. Read it with a cup of coffee in the morning, or in a quiet corner before bed. Underline the parts that speak to you. And whatever you do, don't read it as one more list of things you're supposed to be doing better. I promise you, that's not what this is. Think of it more as a conversation between two people who care about each other, sitting across a kitchen table, talking honestly about the things that matter most.

So let's set those grocery bags down for a moment. You don't have to carry everything in one trip. You never did. And I have a feeling that by the time we reach the end of this book together, you'll find you were never as alone with all of it as you thought you were.

PART ONE

God

Do Your Part, Then Open Your Hands

CHAPTER ONE

The Exhaustion of Holding Everything Together

Have you ever noticed how quickly the battery on your phone drains when you've got a dozen apps running in the background? You're not even using most of them. You opened them hours ago, or yesterday, or last week, and never quite closed them. But they're still there, quietly refreshing, checking for updates, pulling power, and by the middle of the afternoon your phone is warm in your hand and down to nine percent, and you can't understand why. I think a lot of us are walking around exactly like that. We wake up tired, even after a full night's sleep. We feel drained by noon, even on a day that didn't ask very much of us. And we can't quite figure out why, because from the outside, nothing dramatic is happening. But on the inside, there are a dozen worries running in the background. The conversation from last Tuesday. The client who still hasn't called back. The test results. The teenager who's been unusually quiet. The retirement account. The thing somebody said at dinner that we keep turning over. None of those things are being solved. They're just running, all day long, pulling power.

I want to talk with you in this chapter about why we do that, and why it's so exhausting, because I believe that understanding it is the first step toward setting some of it down. And I want to begin with an idea that I think sits underneath most of our worry, even when we don't realize it's there. It's the idea that if we just hold on tightly enough, we can keep

things from going wrong. If I think about it enough, I'll be ready for whatever happens. If I keep a close enough eye on everything, nothing will catch me by surprise. If I worry hard enough about the people I love, somehow they'll be safer. It almost never gets put into words, but it's there, running in the background with all those other apps. And I call it the illusion of control, because it feels like control, and it looks like control, but it isn't.

Think about how much of life is simply outside our hands. We can't control what other people think, what they decide, or how they feel about us. We can't control the market, the economy, the weather, the timing of opportunities, or the way somebody's body responds to a treatment. We can't control the choices of a grown son or daughter, or whether a client chooses to stay, or whether the company we work for decides to reorganize next spring. We can influence some of those things, sometimes quite a bit. But control them? No. And yet, if you're anything like most of us, you spend an enormous amount of your energy trying to control exactly those things. Not with your actions, because there often isn't much action to take, but with your thoughts. You go over it and over it, as though enough thinking could finally put the outcome in your pocket.

The sample ends here. The rest of Chapter One and the full book are on Amazon.

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Find every format at michaelfoxcoach.com/books/god-gratitude-and-giving

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Fox has worked in financial services since 1996. He is a mindset and executive coach for financial advisors, insurance regional vice presidents, and wholesalers, helping capable professionals grow in confidence, performance, and the way they live their lives. He is the host of *The Growth Mindset Book Podcast* and the author of *You Are the Magic Genie*. You can find his work at michaelfoxcoach.com.