


**Gratitude  
and  
Addiction Recovery**

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**Driven to Discover™**

School of Social Work  
*Leadership for a Just and Caring Society*


**Gratitude and Addiction Recovery**

- Part 1: Introduction to Gratitude
- Part 2: History of Gratitude
- Part 3: Research on Gratitude
  
- Gratitude Practices



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**First Gratitude Exercise:  
Three Good Things**



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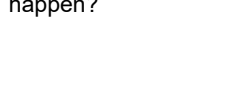
**Three Good Things Exercise**

Ideas

- Weather
- Nice exchange with another person
- Small accomplishment
- Anything that was fun
- Moment of kindness or encouragement
- Good idea you had
- Saw or heard something beautiful
- Something you enjoyed
- Feeling relief about something

Instructions


- Look back over the past 24 hours.
- Write down three good things that happened.
- What made them happen?



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**Gratitude and Addiction Recovery**


- **Part 1: Introduction to Gratitude**
- Part 2: History of Gratitude
- Part 3: Research on Gratitude



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**Part 1: Introduction to Gratitude**


- Definitions
- Forms
- Benefits
- Theories



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**Definitions of Gratitude**


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**What is Gratitude?**

“A pleasant state ... linked with positive emotions” (Emmons & Shelton, 2002)


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**What is Gratitude?**

Something that typically involves benefitting “from the costly, intentional, voluntary action of another person” (McCullough et al., 2008)


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**What is Gratitude?**

Gratitude is felt especially in response to a gift that cannot be repaid (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000) or a gift that is in some way unearned (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).


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**What is Gratitude?**

Gratitude motivates us to reciprocate (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000) either to the benefactor or to another person (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006).


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**What is Gratitude?**

An emotion that is essential to everyday relationships (Algoe, 2012; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006)


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## What is Gratitude?

Gratitude doesn't need a "benefactor" it can be for any positive aspect of life: being grateful for the warm sunshine, grateful to be here, grateful for another day of life.

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## What is Gratitude?

Gratitude suggests a comparison to an alternative, less valuable state (Emmons & Shelton, 2002; Rusk et al., 2016).


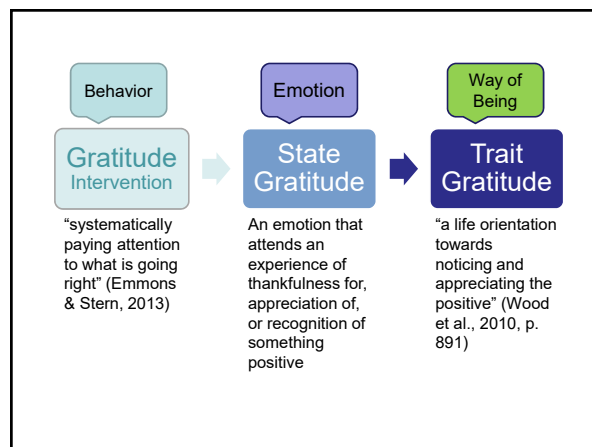
"I'm grateful for this hot meal"  
(This is better than a cold meal)  
(This is better than going hungry)

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## Forms of Gratitude

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## Benefits of Gratitude

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## Benefits of Gratitude

**Positively** associated with:

- Growing or benefiting from a negative event (Kashdan et al., 2006; Lies et al., 2009; LaBelle & Edelman, 2018)
- Positive mood and happiness (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)
- Coping with problems in helpful ways, including getting help from others; actively trying to solve the problem (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007)
- Among AA and NA members: length of recovery, support from sponsor and friends in recovery, step work, AA promises coming true (LaBelle & Edelman, 2018)

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## Benefits of Gratitude

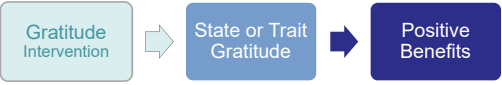
**Negatively** associated with:

- Psychopathology and substance abuse (Kendler et al., 2003)
- Coping with problems in ways that are less helpful, including denial, self-blame, withdrawing, and giving up (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007)
- Envy, materialism, worry, frustration, anxiety, fear (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)
- Burnout and other measures of employee well-being (Chan, 2011; Kaplan et al., 2014)
- Among AA and NA members: lower levels of stress and fewer physical symptoms (LaBelle and Edelstein, 2018).

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## You might conclude that increases in gratitude will lead to positive benefits



```


    graph LR
      A[Gratitude Intervention] --> B[State or Trait Gratitude]
      B --> C[Positive Benefits]
    
```

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## How Might Gratitude “Work” for Recovery?

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## How might gratitude work in recovery?

- Improve mood
- Interrupt a pattern of negative thinking
- Reinforce the idea that life in recovery is better than life in active addiction



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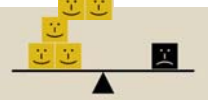
## Theories

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## Negativity Bias

- Negative thoughts/ emotions/ experiences have a greater impact than neutral or positive experiences
- Evolutionary purpose
- It takes 5 positive events to neutralize 1 negative event (Gottman, 2000)



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## Hedonic Treadmill

- Eventually return to stable level of happiness despite positive or negative events
- Improvements in life provide short-term happiness, then we become accustomed to them



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## Theory of the Maintenance of Behavior Change

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## Maintaining Behavior Change is Hard

- Individuals who are maintaining a behavior change regularly ask themselves

Is this worth it?

Is my life better now?

- The answer needs to be **Yes**

Rothman, 2000

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## Next Exercise: Gratitude List

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## Insight Timer



### Learn Meditation Today

Home to more than 4,000,000 meditators, Insight Timer is rated as the top free meditation app on the Android and iOS stores.



There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

-Albert Einstein

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### Jonathan Lehmann

- See everything today as a miracle
- The colors our eyes will see
- The sounds our ears will hear
- The tastes our palates will feel
- The new and old faces we will encounter

<https://insighttimer.com/jonathanlehmann>

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### What was Bill Wilson’s Gratitude Practice?

“One exercise that I practice is to try for a full inventory of my blessings and then for a right acceptance of the many gifts that are mine—both temporal and spiritual. Here I try to achieve a state of joyful gratitude”

*As Bill Sees It, p. 37*

### What was Bill Wilson’s Gratitude Practice?

1. Took a full inventory of all blessings, throughout all of life
2. Looked at the list and affirmed and accepted: These gifts really are mine!
3. Was present to the positive emotions that followed.

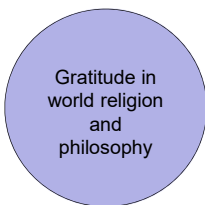
### Gratitude and Addiction Recovery

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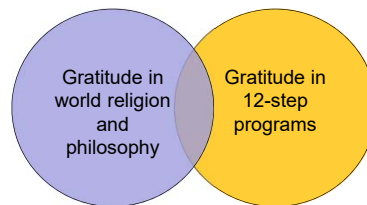


### History of Gratitude




- Gratitude permeates the texts, teachings, and prayers of world religions (Emmons and Crumpler, 2000)
- Aristotle (384-322 BCA) considered gratitude to be a virtue (Kristjánsson, 2013)

### History of Gratitude



- AA
- Big book
- Twelve & Twelve


Search for "Grat" (grateful, gratitude) and "Thank" (thank, thankful) www.aa.org




First 164 pages

- "We **thank** God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better" Into Action
- "His sanity returned and he **thanked** God" A Vision for You

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Search for "Grat" (grateful, gratitude) and "Thank" (thank, thankful) www.aa.org



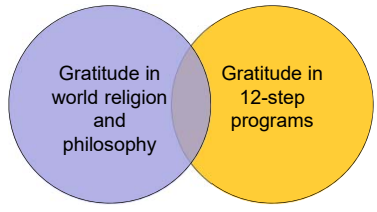
12 Steps

- "An honest regret for harms done, a genuine **gratitude** for blessings received" Step 10

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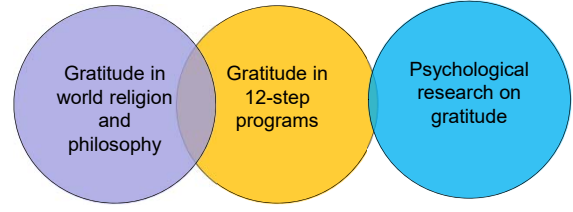
### History of Gratitude



- AA
- Big book
- Twelve & Twelve

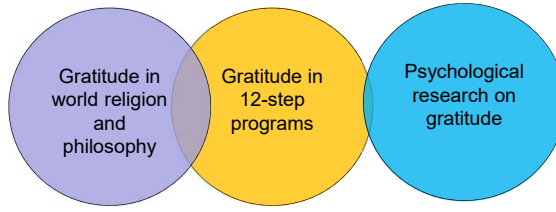
- Wilson's later writings featured gratitude
- *As Bill Sees It* (1967)
  - 17 pages indexed to gratitude

### History of Gratitude



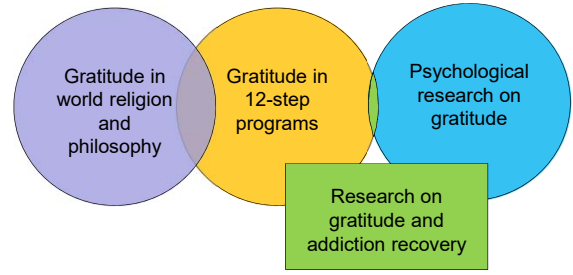
- 2001: "...social scientists...have tended to neglect gratitude as a topic..." (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 249)
- 2003: Psychological research on gratitude "...is still in a fledgling state" (Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

### History of Gratitude



- 2017: Meta-analysis of 38 studies (Dickens, 2017)
  - Results: gratitude group had significantly more wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction, positive mood, optimism, higher quality relationships and less depression than the neutral control group.

### History of Gratitude



- 2010: Small pilot test of an 8-week intervention among adolescents in SUD treatment.

## Gratitude and Addiction Recovery

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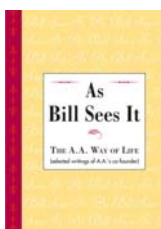
## About Research Presentations

- Question the research was designed to answer
- Data: information used to answer the research question
- Sample: who were the people?
- Design of the research study
- Results
- Implications

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## Gratitude in Alcoholics Anonymous

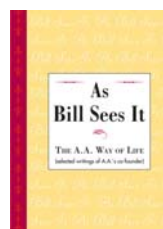


What were Bill Wilson's ideas about gratitude in Alcoholics Anonymous?

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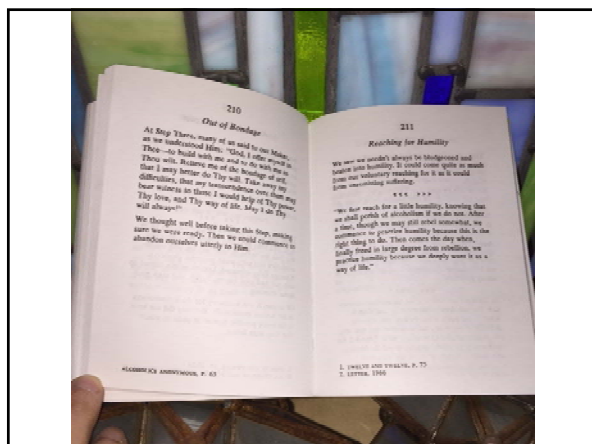


## Gratitude in *As Bill Sees It*

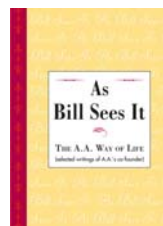


- Published 1967
- Quotations from Wilson's other writings and talks
- Index of topics

Archivist, General Service Organization Archivist, personal communication, 2018



## Gratitude in *As Bill Sees It*



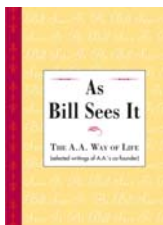
### How involved was Wilson in choosing and indexing the topics?

- Janet G. (AA member, consultant to trustees, copyeditor)
- Janet G. chose and edited Bill's writings "with Bill's word-by-word approval"
- Bill did some editing of his own

Pass it On (1984, p. 36)



### Gratitude in *As Bill Sees It*



- 17 pages are indexed to gratitude topic
- Pages contain 91-164 words
- Pages reference 25 original sources published 1939-1966
  - AA Comes of Age (3)
  - Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (2)
  - Alcoholics Anonymous (1)
  - AA Grapevine (7)
  - AA Today (1)
  - Letters (10)
  - Talks (1)

### Qualitative Research

- Involves deep study of things that are not numbers
- Identification of content that is interesting and related to the research question
- Things you notice that repeat are clustered into themes
- Interpretation is made about how the themes relate to one another
- A picture of these relationships is drawn

Braun & Clarke, 2006

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### Themes

- Credit for sobriety is not due to one's self but is due to external benefactors
  - God
  - Other people
- Gifts and blessings enjoyed
  - AA program
  - Recovery from alcoholism
- Paying back what we have been given

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### Recovery is Joyful

Wilson associates recovery with positive emotion

- “release and joy” (p. 163)
- “joy and satisfaction” (p. 249)

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### Recovery is Communal

- AAs are “fortunate that we can know, understand, and love each other so supremely well” (p. 231)

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### AAs are Successful

- AAs should expect to “begin to achieve some measure of importance and material success” and reclaim “the esteem of our friends and business associates” (p. 19).

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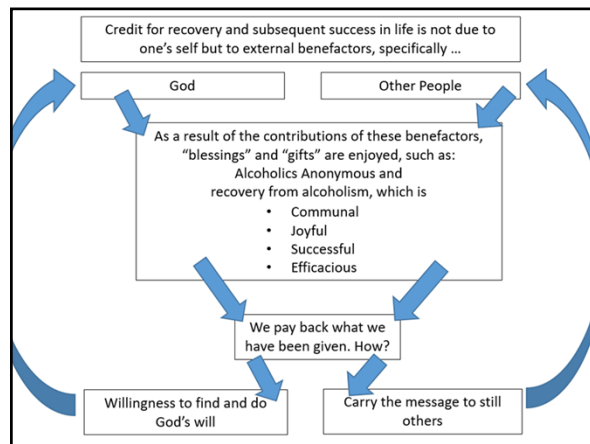


## AAs have Efficacy

Individuals in recovery are not passive recipients of the grace and good will of God and others, but are empowered in several ways.

1. AAs can bring about positive feelings by using gratitude
2. AAs can find value even in negative experiences
3. AAs can use gratitude to vanish feelings of self-importance and arrogance

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## Ideas from This Study for People in Recovery

- Gratitude improves mood
- Gratitude reduces self centeredness
- Gratitude can be employed on purpose for positive benefit
- Helping others might be connected to feeling grateful for recovery

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## Gratitude in Treatment for Alcohol Use Disorders

What would people in treatment think about doing a gratitude practice?

How would a gratitude intervention impact mood?

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## Participants

- 23 outpatients
- 46 years old (SD 10.9)
- 16 years of education (SD 3.0)
- 48% Female
- 82% European American
- 48% Married or co-habiting
- High levels of AA attendance
- Low levels of depression, anxiety, alcohol craving, drinking consequences
- Wide range of days since last drink

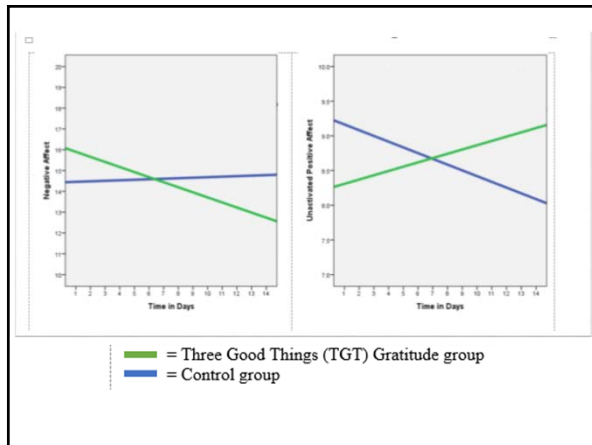
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Gratitude Group	Comparison Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of the first good thing than happened in the past 24 hours</li> <li>• What was its cause? (what made this happen?)</li> <li>• Description of the second good thing than happened in the past 24 hours</li> <li>• What was its cause? (what made this happen?)</li> <li>• Description of the third good thing than happened in the past 24 hours</li> <li>• What was its cause? (what made this happen?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When and where slept, dozed, napped</li> <li>• Exercise and when</li> <li>• Caffeinated products consumed</li> <li>• TV, computer, lights on while sleeping?</li> <li>• Hour before you last feel asleep.</li> <li>• Hour after your final awakening</li> </ul>

## Results




Activated Positive Affect	Unactivated Positive Affect	Negative Affect
Active Enthusiastic Determined Strong Inspired	Calm At ease Relaxed	Scared Afraid Upset Distressed Nervous
Increased?	Increased?	Increased?
Decreased?	Decreased?	Decreased?




### What made that good thing happen?

**“I always felt like I was falling back on, “Well, because I’m in recovery” ... that was pretty much the answer every time.”**




### Ideas from This Study for People in Recovery

- Small things count
- Thinking of three good things that happened each day might increase feelings of calm, ease, and peacefulness
- Connecting good things in life to recovery can reinforce recovery



### Overall Conclusion: The Role of Gratitude in Addiction Recovery



**Gratitude helps make life in recovery better and gratitude helps foster the idea that life in recovery is better.**

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**Thank You and Best Wishes!**  
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