DIANA BUTLER BASS

Grateful

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GIVING THANKS
PART 1
ME: EMOTIONS—GIFTS AND THANKS

PROLOGUE: CONFESSION: NO THANKS

1. Diana Butler Bass is honest throughout the book about the ways that she has struggled with gratitude in her life. Before reading Grateful, how would you describe your relationship to gratitude? Did the title of this book draw you in?

2. Bass cites a Pew study that found that 78% of Americans responded that they felt “strongly thankful” in the previous week (p. xiv). Does this surprise you? Why or why not? Have you felt “strongly grateful” in the previous week? About what?

3. Discuss the gratitude structure Bass details on pp. xxv–xxix. Do you find yourself gravitating to one of the four segments more than another? Which do you think you might need the most help with?

CHAPTER 1: FEELING GRATEFUL

1. “The right place to begin understanding gratitude is as an emotion issuing from the heart, that pulsing, mysterious place at the center of our being” (p. 13). Is this the way you typically think of gratitude?
2. “If we change [the gratitude equation from] a closed system to an open one, banishing transaction and substituting grace, the picture of gratitude shifts” (p. 20). How does Bass suggest that gratitude shift happens? What have you learned about mutual reliance through your experiences?

CHAPTER 2: HEART MATTERS

1. Bass describes targeted and untargeted gifts on pp. 24–25 and opens up a faith discussion of how God provides for us. In your faith tradition, is there more of a focus on God’s targeted or untargeted gifts? What are the implications of this focus?

2. In this chapter, the author proclaims liberating news about gratitude. She points out that gratitude drives out fear (p. 28) and empowers the soul (p. 34). Ultimately, gratitude is the “deep ability to embrace the gift of who we are, that we are, that in the multibillion-year history of the universe each one of us has been born, can love, grows in awareness, and has a story. Life is the gift” (p. 43). Do you think that gratitude equals faith? Exercises faith? Whose particular marginalized voices have taught you about gratitude (p. 45)?

3. “Our emotional lives are like gardens” (p. 40). And like gardens, Bass points out, they need attentiveness, care, and tending. How are you tending your emotional life?
PART II
ME: ETHICS—AWARENESS AND PRACTICE

CHAPTER 3: HABITS OF GRATITUDE

1. Bass compares concepts of love and gratitude, noting that both words can be used as nouns (feelings) and verbs (actions) (p. 53). She goes on to speak of the choice to be both grateful and generous. Describe a situation in your life in which being grateful inspired you to be generous.

2. “If we practice gratefulness, it becomes a natural and normal way of engaging the world. With gratitude, our hearts open toward one another. It can make us different and helps us prosper” (p. 62). How do you specifically imagine gratitude helping your friends and community prosper?

3. Bass explores the gratitude we discover in hindsight and invites us to remember an event that was painful at the time, but that now makes us feel grateful (p. 65). What’s an example from your own life? Take time now to write or talk to a friend about a painful event from your past and how it looks now.

4. Bass gives readers a few different practical techniques they can use to become more grateful, such as cultivating awareness, journaling, telling people thank you, and
celebrating cultural gratitude, such as at Thanksgiving or religious festivals. What’s something you’ve put into practice that has helped you live more gratefully? Or if you struggle with this, choose one item from chapter 3 (or from the list on pp. 188–189) and start a new gratitude habit.

CHAPTER 4: INTENTIONAL PRACTICE

1. On pp. 82–83, Bass introduces the ideas of headwinds (difficulties) and tailwinds (advantages) as they relate to gratitude. She points out that we typically focus on headwinds, but tailwinds can be seen as blessings and called forth with thanks. “Blessings are not pious rewards for good behavior. Blessings are the ‘boost’ bestowed on us by systems, structures, families, and other benefactors who assist us on our way” (p. 84). What are your headwinds and tailwinds?

PART III
WE: EMOTION—JOY AND CELEBRATION

CHAPTER 5: GRATEFUL TOGETHER

1. Bass includes several stories in Grateful, which goes along with her statement that “Gratitude is not about repayment of debts. It is about relationships” (p. 98).
Which stories from this book do you remember most vividly? With whom do you share your stories of gratitude?

2. In describing the contagious social and communal nature of gratitude, Bass lifts up a Sanskrit word, *kama muta*, “moved by love” (p. 107). What are your hopes for the ways in which the communities around us would be moved by love? How can we use what we’re learning about gratitude to move love forward?

CHAPTER 6: THANKFUL AND FESTIVE

1. Bass shares her gratitude for festivals in this chapter, including religious, sports, and political festivals. Which of these experiences speaks to your life? Where do you find corporate jubilance—at Wrigley Field (pp. 113–119), at the communion table (pp. 119–124), or at the political convention (pp. 124–128)? How does she show us that each of these festival places can inform the other places?

2. “I want to reclaim Thanksgiving as our major festival of gratefulness” (p. 129). How does the fear of scarcity detour your life and the lives of those around you away from gratitude? How can we translate biblical messages about God’s abundance in a secular world?
CHAPTER 7: THE GRATEFUL SOCIETY

1. With the Women’s March as an example, Bass reminds us of gratitude’s partner—justice. “True gratitude, real gratefulness, the kind of transformative thanksgiving that makes all things new, cannot be quiet in the face of injustice. . . . We move from a personal ethic of gratefulness toward a public one” (p. 139). Name some people who have schooled our society on gratitude through their personal experiences of injustice and justice.

2. When you read that “Gratitude is resistance” (p. 140), what act of resistance can you imagine for yourself? Have you thought about gratitude operating in this way before reading this? What is surprising about it?

3. Communal structures of gratitude, such as reciprocity in Roman times (pp. 143–146) and obligation in Jane Austen’s time (pp. 146–148) put our societal ideas about gratitude in perspective. How does Bass use this grounding in historic systems to help reflect on our country’s current climate regarding gratitude?
CHAPTER 8: CIRCLES OF GRATITUDE

1. Bass unfolds the Bible story of Zacchaeus meeting Jesus to illustrate the differences between quid pro quo (this for that) and pro bono (for good) (pp. 161–169). Bass names this way as the way of salvation for our time as well, but bemoans the fact that “we just do not know how to come down from the tree” (p. 161). What would it look like to come down from the tree and choose Jesus’s radical path of gratitude? Talk with others about ways that your communities can work toward this.

2. Bass distinguishes between two models of human community—a circle and a pyramid (pp. 174–178). What do you think about this? How has this book empowered you to join the circle of those who want to make America “grateful again” (p. 152)?

EPILOGUE: A CALL TO THE GRATEFUL WAY

1. Grateful is timely in our current political environment (Trump’s presidency), but also timeless in the way it unpacks the topic of gratitude. What speaks to you as relevant about this book in whatever year you are reading it? What urgency does it provoke?

2. How have you noticed structures treating gratitude as “debt-and-duty” rather than “gift-and-response” since
reading this book? To whom will you recommend this book, and how will you live out its message?

3. In her epilogue, Diana Butler Bass says that gratitude doesn’t necessarily “fix” anything (p. 186). But gratefulness as an attitude helps us deal with what we can’t “fix.” How has a mindset of gratitude changed your ability to deal with your life’s circumstances?