

one thousand gifts

readers' guide

CHAPTER 1: An Emptier, Fuller Life

1. *Ann* means “full of grace”; *Aimee* means “loved one.”
Do you know the meaning of your name? If so, what significance does it have for you? If you don’t know your name’s meaning, what do you know about why your name was chosen for you?
2. “If I’m ruthlessly honest, I may have said yes to God, yes to Christianity, but really, I have lived the no” (p. 16).
What do you think Ann means by this? Has this ever been true for you? If you feel comfortable doing so, describe the experience.
3. During their forty years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites survived on a daily diet of manna (Exodus 16). It is a baffling substance whose name literally means, “What is it?”—but they eat it, are nourished by it, and even seem to like the taste (p. 22). The author makes a connection between manna and the troubling mysteries of our own

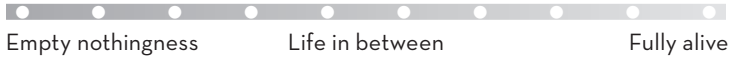
lives. How do you respond to the idea that our questions and the things we don't yet understand may actually be sources of spiritual nourishment? What do you think it might mean, in practical terms, to "eat the mystery"?

4. Ann describes how the death of her sister "tears a hole in the canvas of the world" (p. 16) and later writes, "I wonder . . . if the rent in the canvas of our life backdrop . . . might actually become places to see. To see through to God" (p. 22). Is this a metaphor you find intriguing, comforting, or disturbing? How do you understand it in light of your own experiences of loss?
5. The author's narrative is rich with vivid phrasing and evocative imagery. What lines or descriptions stand out for you? Why do you find them to be powerful?

CHAPTER 2: **A Word to Live . . . and Die By**

1. A terrifying nightmare in which Ann dreams she is dying of cancer becomes a catalyst that helps her realize how much she really wants to live. How do you generally respond to your dreams? Do you write them down and ponder them, or do you not pay much attention to them? If you have ever had a dream or a nightmare you felt was especially significant, describe the dream and the impact it had on you.
2. Ann describes three ways we can experience life: as empty nothingness, as fully alive, and as the life in between (p. 27). As you reflect back over the years, briefly describe a time you experienced life in each of these three ways.

Place an X on the continuum below to indicate how you experience your life right now. If you feel comfortable, share this with the group and describe the reasons for your response.



3. Studying the word *eucharisteo* (pronounced you-kar-i-**stay**-oh) helped Ann to identify “holy joy” as the “more” she had been seeking (p. 32). What do think might be the key to unlocking your desire for a fuller life right where you are and in the midst of your ordinary days?
4. The author recalls stories from Jesus’ life that illustrate the power of *eucharisteo*, of thanksgiving: the Last Supper, the raising of Lazarus, the condemnation of Korazin and Bethsaida (pp. 34–37). When considering the context of these stories, we discover that Jesus is within hours of his own death, is grieved by the death of a dear friend, and is rejected by entire towns that experienced his miracles.
 - Why do you think Jesus chooses to offer thanks at such times?
 - How does Jesus’ use of gratitude in difficult circumstances inform or challenge your view of what it means to give thanks to God?
5. Together, allow a moment of silence to identify a few of the difficulties you face right now. When everyone is ready, discuss these questions:
 - What thoughts or emotions come to mind when you think about expressing thanks in the context of your difficulties?

- “He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23). What would it mean for you to make a sacrificial thank offering in the midst of your current challenges? How do you imagine God could use your sacrifice of gratitude to deliver you, to help you enter into a full life?

CHAPTER 3: **First Flight**

1. Ann accepts a dare from a friend to begin a gift list, not of gifts she wants, but of gifts she already has. A gratitude list.
 - Have you ever made a gratitude list? If so, what prompted you to do so? How did the experience impact your relationship with God?
 - Assess your daily practice of gratitude on a scale from one to ten (one low, ten high). How would you rate yourself?
2. Among the first gifts on Ann’s list are these:
 - Morning shadows across the old floors
 - Jam piled high on the toast
 - Cry of blue jay from high in the spruce
 - Leafy life scent of the florist shop
 - Wind flying cold wild in hair

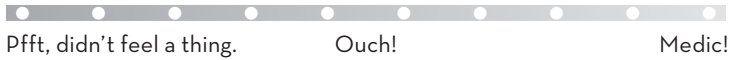
Each gift appeals to one of the five senses—something Ann can see, taste, hear, smell, or feel. Thinking back on the last twenty-four hours, use your senses to name five things for which you are grateful—your own mini gratitude list.

3. In reading Philippians 4:11–12, Ann discovers “the secret to living joy in every situation, the full life of *eucharisteo*.” It is in the apostle Paul’s statement, “I have learned” (p. 47). Take a moment to think of a few things that have brought joy or a feeling of contentment to your life recently. Did you have to learn these things or work at them, or did they just happen, like happy coincidences? How do you understand the relationship between learning or practicing gratitude (by keeping something like a gratitude list) and experiencing joy?
4. “This dare to write down one thousand things I love . . . is a dare to name all the ways that *God* loves me” (p. 59). How does gratitude open the door to ever-increasing awareness of God’s love for you? How might you take up the dare to name the ways God loves you?

CHAPTER 4: **A Sanctuary of Time**

1. The narrative in this chapter is anchored in a series of ordinary moments—washing dishes, doing household chores, setting a table, comforting a child, eating a family meal. These are the kinds of things that can make “a life so full it can seem empty” (p. 63). As you imagine yourself in similar ordinary moments, what three words would you use to describe yourself?
2. “On every level of life, from housework to heights of prayer, in all judgment and efforts to get things done, hurry and impatience are sure marks of the amateur” (Evelyn

Underhill, p. 66). How do you respond to this statement? On the “pain scale” below, which statement best describes your response:



Take a deep breath. If you feel comfortable doing so, share the reason for your response.

3. Ann realizes she doesn't really want *more* time; she wants *enough* time: “*I just want time to do my one life well*” (p. 68). How would you explain the difference between having more time and enough time? Thinking back over the last few days or weeks, what experiences have you had that made you feel you were doing your one life well?
4. If giving thanks is “an invitation to slow time down with the weight of full attention,” would you say you have accepted the invitation, declined it, or are still thinking about it? In which situations or circumstances do you find it easiest to be fully present? In which do you find it most difficult?
5. “It takes a full twenty minutes after your stomach is full for your brain to register satiation. How long does it take your soul to realize that your life is full?” (p. 76). What is your response to the author's compelling analogy and to her question? How do you think you will know when your life is full?

CHAPTER 5: **What in the World, in All This World,
Is Grace?**

1. One sentence turns Ann's world upside down: "Levi's hand went through a fan at the barn!" (p. 80). Has your life, or the life of someone you know, ever been changed by one sentence? What happened?
2. The author wrestles with "the hard *eucharisteo*" (p. 80), that for which it is difficult, wrenching, to offer thanks—a maiming wound, the death of a child, a senseless act of violence. What thoughts or emotions come to mind when you think about offering thanks for the hard *eucharisteos*—past or present—in your life?
4. At age twelve, Ann discovers she needs glasses when she can't read a billboard in a neighbor's woods (p. 86). She uses the story to illuminate how God's Word is a lens that helps us see God's messages in the dark woods of our lives. How do the "lenses" listed below inform your understanding of God's role in your own hard *eucharisteos*? Which of these verses are most helpful or meaningful for you in your particular season of life?
 - "Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!" (Genesis 1:31).
 - "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20 NASB).
 - "For God does speak—now one way, now another" (Job 33:14 NIV).

- “God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else” (James 1:13).
 - “Does disaster come to a city unless the LORD has planned it?” (Amos 3:6).
 - “See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal” (Deuteronomy 32:39 NASB).
 - “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD (Job 1:21 NKJV).
 - “For [God] does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow” (Lamentations 3:33).
4. “Only the Word is the answer to rightly reading the world because The Word has nail-scarred hands that cup our face close, wipe away the tears running down, has eyes to look deep into our brimming ache, and whisper, ‘I know. I *know*’” (p. 87). When you are struggling, are you able to take comfort in knowing that Jesus understands what you are going through? If so, in what ways do you experience this comfort?
5. In God’s economy, everything belongs: “Darkness transfigures into life, bad transfigures into good, grief transfigures into grace, empty transfigures into full. God wastes nothing” (p. 97). Take a moment to identify a few things in your life that are life-giving, good, graced, full. When you trace back to the roots of these things, what do you find? Describe any that are rooted in something that was once a darkness in your life. How do you account for the genesis of the good things in your life?

6. Ann comes to a realization that life is not a mix of grace moments and curse moments but that *all is grace*—an “ugly-beautiful” paradox in which God is always present and always at work, no matter how difficult the circumstance (pp. 99–100). How do you respond to this idea? How can you more fully embrace this perspective, or aspire to it more passionately? Name an ugly situation—in the world, your community, your life—and consider it in light of this question: What beautiful thing might God make out of this?

CHAPTER 6: **What Do You Want?**

1. The author has her unique way of noticing moments, being present to them, and capturing them with a camera or in her gratitude journal. As you have followed her journey through six chapters, how has her way of paying attention to her world impacted the way you pay attention to yours? How is your unique way of noticing and capturing moments similar to Ann's? How is it different?
2. Ann is literally two steps from beauty that will take her breath away but does not see it because she is lost in “time's strangling grip” (p. 102). She needs a loving presence to redirect her gaze, to help her see the extravagant gift she almost misses. Who helps you to notice graces and gifts you might otherwise miss? How specifically do they help you? How do you help others notice?

3. In an instant, Ann drops everything she is doing and goes out into the fields to embrace the gift of a harvest moon. Like a child, she runs, laughs, breathes, kneels, and lies down before the beauty she sees.
 - When was the last time you felt a childlike wonder about something? What was your response—one of surrender, as Ann did, or one of resistance bred by fear that you might look foolish? If you responded in surrender, what did you do to express this surrender?
 - The stunning beauty Ann experiences leads her to worship: “The weight of God’s glory, not illusory or ephemeral, but daily and everywhere, punctures earth’s lid and heaven falls through the holes. I kneel in wheat, moonstruck” (p. 107). What kinds of things typically lead you into an experience of worship?
 - How do you understand the relationship between wonder and worship?

4. “Isn’t my internal circuitry wired to seek out something worthy of worship? Every moment I live, I live bowed to something. And if I don’t see God, I’ll bow down before something else” (p. 110). Take a moment to reflect on the last twenty-four hours. Dividing the day into three parts—morning, afternoon, evening—what three things would you say you were bowed down to? To what degree were you able to “see God” in your day—just a little, a great deal, or somewhere between?

CHAPTER 7: Seeing through the Glass

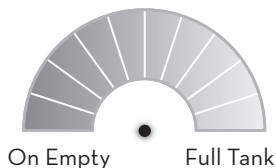
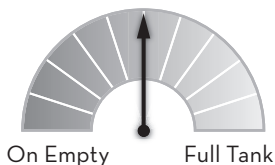
1. The author contrasts the outer beauty of sunflowers with the inner ugliness of the conflict between her sons. Noticing God's gifts and God's presence in the natural world is often easier than noticing these things in our relationships with other fallen human beings. In what ways do your relationships blind you to God's grace rather than reveal God's grace?
2. "I'm blind to joy's well every time I really don't want it. *The well is always there. And I choose not to see it*" (p. 130). Instead of choosing joy, Ann notes that she sometimes chooses lesser things—the empty dark, drama, power, control.
 - Complete this sentence: I choose _____ instead of joy because of _____.
 - Complete this sentence: I choose joy instead of _____ because of _____.
3. "The practice of giving thanks . . . is the way we practice the presence of God, stay present to His presence, and it is always a practice of the eyes. We don't have to change what we see. Only the *way we see*" (p. 135). How do you stay present to the presence of God during your day? How have you found that the practice of giving thanks invites you to practice the presence of God?
4. God breaks Jacob by touching his hip on the sinew of the thigh. In commenting on the significance, Ann quotes James H. McConkey: "The Lord has to break us down at the strongest part of our self-life before He can have His own way of blessing with us." (p. 138).

- What are your strongest parts—the places that keep you locked in a wrestling match with God? What would it mean for God to touch you there or to “break” you there?
- What blessing do you think might result if God could break you down at the strongest parts—for yourself and in your relationships?

CHAPTER 8: **How Will He Not Also?**

1. Financial concerns are a source of anxiety for Ann and something she finds difficult to entrust to God. In what ways do you think financial worries differ from other kinds of worries we might have? Do you find it more difficult to trust God with your financial security than other areas of your life? Why or why not?
2. Ann likens worry to a “babe a mother won’t forsake” (p. 143). Babies require constant attention and nurture; when uncared for or untended they fail to thrive.
 - What “babies” are you nurturing right now? In what ways do you indulge these worries, feeding them with fretful nourishment?
 - What fears arise when you think about entrusting your worry children to God?
3. The author describes a history of trauma and emotional pain that makes it difficult for her to trust God.
 - In what ways do significant events from your past continue to influence your relationship with God?

- In the diagram on the left below, the arrow indicates a level of half full. Using the diagram on the right, draw an arrow to indicate the level of trust you feel you have in God right now.



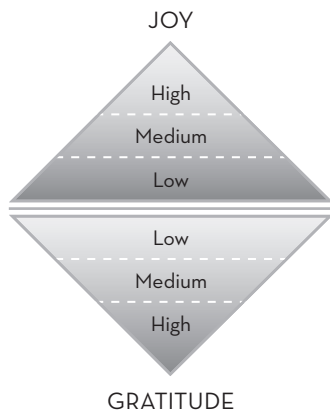
Describe the reasons for your response. What experiences have increased your trust level over the years? What experiences have diminished it?

4. “This is the trust I lack: to know that if disaster strikes, He carries me even there” (p. 148). When you think of the fears you find difficult to entrust to God, what is the disaster you fear most?
5. “Trust is the bridge from yesterday to tomorrow, built with planks of thanks. Remembering frames up gratitude. Gratitude lays out the planks of trust. I can walk the planks—from known to unknown—and know: He holds” (pp. 150–51).
 - What “frames up” your gratitude? In other words, how might you use what you know about God’s past faithfulness to build a faith structure that enables you to trust him for what you don’t know about the future?

- Drawing on your memories of God's faithfulness, identify some planks of trust—three to five things for which you are especially grateful. If it is difficult for you to come up with these planks of trust, and if you feel comfortable doing so, share the reasons.
6. “God reveals Himself in rearview mirrors. And I’ve an inkling that there are times when we need to drive a long, long distance before we can look back and see God’s back in the rearview mirror. Maybe sometimes about as far as heaven—that kind of distance” (p. 157). Has this been true for you—that with the distance of time, you recognize God’s activity in your life in ways you could not at the time? If so, describe your experience. If not, what are the aching questions with which you still struggle?

CHAPTER 9: **Go Lower**

1. What makes you laugh like a small child? For example, is it being with young children and experiencing life from their perspective? The playful antics of pets? Goofy friends or colleagues? What kinds of things routinely bring you joy?
2. If the heights of our joy are measured by the depths of our gratitude (p. 166), how would you gauge both in your life right now? Do you notice a difference between your levels of joy and gratitude, or do you see a reciprocal relationship between the two? Use the diagram below to describe your response.



3. “Expectations kill relationships—especially with God. And that’s what a child doesn’t have: this whole edifice of expectation” (p. 169). How likely do you think it is for you to live without expectations in your relationship with God? What might draw you away from expectation and toward “life as large surprise” (p. 169)?
4. Ann describes how the injury of her son completely changed her perspective—things she once took for granted suddenly made her giddy with gratitude. She asks, “Is it only when our lives are emptied that we’re surprised by how truly full our lives were?” (p. 170). Using as examples your own experiences of loss—or near loss—how would you respond to her question?
5. “*Lament* is a cry of belief in a good God. . . . *Complaint* is the bitter howl of unbelief in any benevolent God in this moment” (p. 175).
 - When you are struggling, are you more likely to lament or to complain?

- Identify a past or current difficulty in your life. If you were to complain to God about that issue, what would you say? If you were to lament instead, what would you say? How do you understand the difference between the two?
6. “My own wild desire to *protect* my joy at all costs is the exact force that *kills* my joy” (p. 178).
- On a scale of one to ten (one very little, ten a great deal), how would you describe the degree you fight to protect your joy?
 - Pause and reflect on one area in your life where you are currently fighting to protect your joy. What might it look like if you opened your hand in that area?

CHAPTER 10: **Empty to Fill**

1. Although the homeless man on Yonge Street behaves erratically, Ann sees something in him she recognizes—a shared humanity and a longing to be a blessing. At a soul level, what do you recognize in him? Wearing a mask to hide the real you? Needing a Savior to deliver you from bondage? Struggling with wounds that run deep and hurt badly? Longing to do something right? Wanting to be a blessing? What can you do to be a blessing to someone today?
2. “*Eucharisteo* means ‘to give thanks,’ and *give* is a verb. . . . God calls me *to do* thanks. *To give the thanks away*. That thanks-giving might literally become thanks-living. That our lives become the very blessings we have received” (p. 193).

- Can you recall a time in recent days or in the past in which you experienced what it means to give thanks away—to bless someone else? What happened?
 - If it's true that our lives can become the blessings we have received, what would you say your life is becoming?
3. “This life of washing dishes, of domestic routine, it can be something wholly different. . . . If done unto God, the mundane work can become the living liturgy of the Last Supper” (pp. 193–94).
- When you think of your domestic routine, your mundane work, what comes to mind?
 - What would have to change in you in order for you to really believe that you are doing these things unto God—for God on behalf of others?
4. “I can bless, pour out, be broken and given in our home and the larger world and never fear that there won't be enough to give. *Eucharisteo* has taught me to trust that there is always enough God. He has no end” (p. 197). Which one of the statements below best describes your response to this quote? Share the reasons for your choice.
- I feel I am a limited quantity. There is not enough of me for me, let alone for others. It's really hard sometimes to be generous in sharing my time, my resources, and myself with others. This makes it difficult to believe that God will provide for me.
 - I want to be more consistent in sharing myself, my time, and my resources—and I am making progress. Sometimes I take a risk, and God shows up in amazing ways; other

times I hold back. I believe in my head that God is enough and that he will take care of me, but I still struggle sometimes to act on that belief.

- I live to give! It is a great joy to always be looking for ways to spend myself on behalf of others and to share my time and my resources. I feel like I'm on an adventure with God. I know I can't out-give God, but I keep trying!
5. Ann makes a connection between her daily tasks and *eucharisteo*—and how gratitude becomes blessing when she serves others: “I can count each task a gift, pure *eucharisteo*. *Grace!* This work—the thousand endless jobs—they each give the opportunity for one to *become* the gift, a *thousand times over!*” (p. 200). What appeals to you about the idea that your daily tasks give you an opportunity to become God's gift? Which task or tasks can you see today as a gift, as “pure *eucharisteo*”?

CHAPTER 11: **The Joy of Intimacy**

1. “It is impossible to give thanks and simultaneously feel fear. This is the anti-anxiety medicine I try to lay in my wide-open palm every day” (p. 203). Do you find that the practice of gratitude helps calm your anxieties? If so, how?
2. The author notes how generations of believers pursued a three-step journey to God: purgation, illumination, union (p. 208). In this ancient path, Ann recognizes the course of her own *eucharisteo* journey. Using the list below as a prompt, reflect on your spiritual journey, recently and over time.

How does your path resemble or differ from this three-step journey?

- Purgation: purging the soul of self-will.
 - Illumination: a way of seeing that awakens one (and keeps one awake) to the presence of God.
 - Union: an ever-deepening sense of coming to know God more intimately and discovering our true self as one eternally and fully loved by God.
3. “God, He has blessed—caressed. *I could bless God*—caress with thanks. It’s our making love” (p. 216). How do you respond to this idea?
 4. “That’s [God’s] song! I rejoice in you. *Come rejoice in me. . . . Enjoy me!*” (p. 218). We know that faith requires many things of us—obedience, sacrifice, repentance, perseverance, to name a few. But what about enjoyment? Is *enjoyment* a word you would use to characterize your relationship with God? What is your emotional response to God’s invitation, “Enjoy me!”?

Afterword

1. In what ways has reading *One Thousand Gifts* and adopting the practice of gratitude changed the way you pay attention to your life? What kinds of things have you noticed? How have you experienced life differently?
2. What do you sense might be God’s invitation to you?