

Can a gratitude journal make you more hopeful?

By [April Yamasaki](#)

August 17, 2015

When my first book proposal was turned down, I submitted it to another publisher, and another, and another, until eight publishers later, my manuscript finally found a home. That's when I decided to re-read my manuscript, and felt immediately dismayed.

You see, every time my proposal got returned, I simply wrote a new cover letter, put everything in a new envelope and mailed it off to the next publisher on my list. Then—well over a year later!—when a publisher finally said yes, I re-read my manuscript. That's when I realized how much I had changed, how much my writing had changed, and how much re-writing I still had to do!

Even after a piece is published, I sometimes wish I could re-write or add to it or deepen it in some way—sometimes because I've found a better way to say the same thing, and sometimes because my thinking and my life have moved on since then.

That's how I feel about my recent lectionary column for the *Christian Century*, published this month and dated [August 16, 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time](#), but written a few months ago. In it, I reflect on King Solomon's prayer for wisdom ([1 Kings 3](#)) and Arianna Huffington's book *Thrive*, which defines success in terms of well-being, wisdom, and wonder. In June, I wrote:

Perhaps the most important lesson I'm learning about wisdom, from both Solomon's story and Huffington's book, is the practice of gratitude. In our hurry-sick society, it's all too easy to rush through life without thinking or stopping to give thanks. Cultivating a spirit of thankfulness helps me slow down and be more mindful of my surroundings and of other people. It helps me to be more positive in the face of challenges and to ask myself, Where can I be thankful in this situation? What can I learn?

And so I've added a simple gratitude list to the end of my day: just five people, things, thoughts, or experiences that I can offer back to God with

thanks. Sometimes I write them in my journal. More often I just mentally list them and let them go. My gratitude list seems oh so ordinary, nothing on the order of a visit from the queen of Sheba. It's the wonder of sunshine in the morning after days of rain, an actual letter in the mail, a church potluck, reading a good book, hearing a song on the radio. Simple pleasures, really, since I'm no king or celebrity.

You can see the rest of my *Century* article as published [here](#).

What I'd like to add now is that since then, I've started writing my gratitude list in my journal every evening, and my husband has started a gratitude journal too, thanks to this quote that I discovered after I had submitted my article:

As the months pass and you fill your journal with blessings, an inner shift in your reality will occur. Soon you will be delighted to discover how content and hopeful you are feeling. — by [Sarah Ban Breathnach](#)

After a week of gratitude lists, I asked my husband, "Has your reality shifted yet?" I meant it as a teasing, inside joke between the two of us, because of the quote we read, which seemed to promise too much. To my surprise, he said, "Yes, I really think it's working."

Now, after almost a month of gratitude lists, we're still going strong. For me, it's definitely been a positive practice, a kind of [examen of consciousness](#) to express my thanks to God, and I like the way my lists serve as a diary of my days, too. So in these simple ways, maybe my reality really *is* shifting.

*Originally posted at [Yamasaki's blog](#)*