

Episode 028 Transcript

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Gratitude and Positivity

Meredith: Hey there and welcome to episode 028 of the Simply Great Relationships podcast. We're so glad you could join us today. I am Meredith Silversmith and this is Marina Voron. And today, we are talking about "Gratitude and Positivity" - two very important things.

Marina: Mhmm!

Meredith: We're gonna be covering "gratitude" - what is it exactly, how cultivating gratitude impacts us, what makes practicing gratitude hard sometimes, how gratitude and positivity are connected, and a concept called process-based gratitude, so how to build more gratitude and positivity into your relationship. I will say that I think this topic gets a lot of coverage but not always in ways that I connect with. So I feel like having done with my own research and reading on it, I've really come more in alignment with being very focused on gratitude. I don't know how you feel.

Marina: Yeah! I would definitely agree. I feel like gratitude is almost one of those "buzzwords", and I think sometimes how it's talked about, it's not very clear what it is. It's not very clear if you're practicing it right. It's kinda like I always think of gratitude as meditation. Everybody talks about it, very few people are very solid on what it means and how you actually do it to reap the benefits.

Meredith: Yeah. So we're gonna dispel any myths today and we're gonna give you all the information you need. So make sure you stay with us until the very end because we've got a great bonus for you and we're gonna tell you how to get it.

Marina: Yeah! I'm really excited about this one! So let's start with "gratitude" - what is it?

Meredith: What is the gratitude?



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Marina: For me, gratitude, and from all the research I've done, from all the learning I've done around gratitude - is a quality of being thankful. It's not saying "thank you", it's not being polite, it's a quality of being thankful and really connecting with that feeling of thankfulness of the things that are already happening and present in your life. It's taking the contingencies away. It's not saying "I'll feel thankful when my husband buys me this thing or when we do that." It's "Today, a stranger held the door for me and that made me feel very appreciative and thankful."

Meredith: Yeah!

Marina: It's about very, very small moments but being actively present in those moments and like a readiness to show that appreciation and return that kindness.

Meredith: Mhmm! Definitely! And I think it's an inward thing, not an outward thing in some ways. It's not really silver lining. I heard it talked about in some places that way but it's really about like "What can I focus on and consciously and intentionally cultivate a feeling of gratitude for?" So like you said, it's very active, it's a thought, feeling, mind, body kind of thing.

Marina: Yeah. And I also think it's like people... and I know I definitely have this and let me know if this is something you kind of experienced also, and I've heard this from my clients also because, you know, I really push the gratitude because I feel like it has such a positive impact but people look for really big stuff like "Well, I have nothing to be thankful for because nothing big happened to me that I should be thankful." And I always say gratitude is like specs of sands. The things that you should be aware of and sharing and expressing gratitude for as your internal narrative should be like little tiny grains of sand. They shouldn't be for the big stuff because when we wait for the big stuff, we're holding our breath which only cheating ourselves by, again, it's putting that contingency by saying like, "Only when this big thing happens will I feel gratitude."

Meredith: Mhmm. Yeah! Absolutely!

Marina: So in that way, it's an active process because you're always looking for those little bits of gratitude to be thankful for.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely! So how does cultivating more gratitude impact us because I think that's the motivation, right? So you can do it but there's a reason that we do it because it has a positive impact on us as individuals and on our relationships.

Marina: Yeah! Well, I think individually, it just makes you scan for the positive stuff. And stuff to be thankful for. And again, get too out of that mindset of "what I should be thankful for should be really big, should be one off as opposed to the everyday."

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: I think when you're able to say "No, I should be thankful for the everyday and maybe a little extra thankful for the one offs", you're just having a paradigm shift into a much more positive place.



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Meredith: Yeah! Absolutely! And it really helps you shift your focus and give the weight to the good stuff over the bad stuff. It's so easy for us to focus on what's going wrong. And by cultivating a practice of gratitude, it allows us to focus on what's going right. So in a relationship, it's easier to give and receive positive deposits in the emotional bank account. We probably talked about that in episode two on Rituals of Connection I'd imagine.

Marina: Mhmm.

Meredith: It allows us to get into a space of positive sentiment override which is when our positive to negative interactions are in balance and things feel good, we give each other the benefit of the doubt or more loving or more easy going in our relationships. And it actually creates a cushion and a buffer against the not-so-good stuff. So the level 5 issues will actually feel like a 5 or like a 3 or like a 2 in contrast to all the good that you've seen and felt over the course of the week versus if you've had no positivity over the course of the week, that level 5 is gonna feel like a 10.

Marina: Mhmm! Exactly! It also just overall improves our mood. When our mood is better, I think we're better at being partners.

Meredith: Mhmm! Yeah, I would say.

Marina: Our outlook and our perspective is improved so it makes it easier to turn towards.

Meredith: Mhmm, absolutely. And our productivity! I mean, who doesn't, I don't know... You and I talk about this all the time but productivity is a challenge. When you're not feeling well, when you're not feeling motivated and you're not seeing the benefits of your hard work, it's hard to keep going but when you're focusing on everything that's going right, every small thing that's going right, it's a lot easier to keep chugging along and being productive and that sort of ties into self-esteem and self love like, "I am worthy of these good things. I expect for positive things to come my way."

Marina: Mhmm! And I think a big part of gratitude is that self love gratitude. Not only for the things that happen outside of you, but for the things that are happening within you. So many people are like, "Well, when I lose weight, I'll be happy. When I get this muscle tone, I'll be happy. When I feel this, I'll be happy." When really, practicing gratitude for the person you are right now and really being aware and being actively reminding yourself of all these positive qualities you already present in this moment is a huge, huge feeder of self-esteem.

Meredith: Mhmm. Yeah, that's a great point! I know we kind of laughed today when we were getting on the call to record this episode because our next topic is "What Makes Practicing Gratitude Hard Sometimes?" And I know we've had a long day and it's a long week in some ways and it's only Monday. But, what makes it hard? I mean, we can definitely relate to that.

Marina: Yeah! I think biologically and evolutionarily - is that a word? We're supposed to be self-protective and in that way. It's easier to focus on the negative stuff because the negative stuff's the dangerous stuff. It's the stuff we should be aware of and protect ourselves from and that's why we carry so much weight. But in this day and age, does it really serve us that function anymore?



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Meredith: Right! And that's something I always tell my clients because when I learned that, I found that so interesting. It sort of in some ways normalizes it but also let's you know that you don't need to pay as much attention to what feels super negative. So our brains, literally our brains, the way they scan the environment is to find danger. And back in the past, whatever timeframe you wanna consider, there was real danger, life or death danger. You're gonna get attacked by something, get eaten by something. Now, our danger is social danger, judgment, anxiety, whatever your negative sensitivity is and our brain will seek that out. And the more you seek it out, the deeper those neural connections get and your brain gets better and better at seeking it out. So it's sort of like the more you focus on the negative, the more you focus on the negative.

Marina: Yeah and it's really easy to get caught in that rumination, and again, that's when I think you're much more likely to say "I'm only grateful for the really big one off stuff."

Meredith: Mhmm.

Marina: And it's really hard to find those little pebbles of gratitude everyday all the time because the bad stuff feel so big, the good stuff that has to outweigh it has to be even bigger.

Meredith: Yeah. Definitely! And the Gottmans have researched this and you know we reference the Gottmans a lot but the negatives have more of an impact. So we've talked about this in the past. The ratio of positive to negative interactions for things to feel good in your relationship and to be in positive sentiment override is 20 positives to every 1 negative in times of peace and 5 to 1 in times of conflict. So the weight between the positive and negative is so imbalanced. It just shows you how much of an effect it has on our minds!

Marina: Mhmm! Yeah! Negative stuff is very, very heavy. That's why it's really easy during times of stress to put anything positive on the back burner and be like, "Oh, I'll come back to it when I'm not stressed anymore." but you know we've said this a couple of times - life's not gonna get less hectic.

Meredith: Yeah!

Marina: It's almost like time's when it is the most stressful and the most hectic when it's really important to bring the gratitude to the forefront but it's also counter-intuitive because our brain really wants to go down that rumination of all the bad stuff pile. So this is where you really have to channel that inner strength and that inner intention. I'll scratch the word strength because I don't think it's strength. I think it's that inner intention of what you give your focus to.

Meredith: Mhmm. Yeah!

Marina: And that's what makes it hard. It's like it's really easy and that's what my brain wants to do is to give focus to the negative but knowing that this is what my brain needs to do, I need to make sure that I'm giving attention to the positive.



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Meredith: Yeah! Definitely! That's a really good way to put it. And there's a choice! Ultimately it's a choice. It may not be easy choice but that's why we're talking about it today because we want you to have the tools and the strategies for being able to implement this in small ways. It's not a ton of time. We'll talk about that a little later but if you let it go and you just kind of ride the wave, you can fall into a really negative spiral or it just feels like, you know, I always hear it from my clients or even from friends - "Nothing, nothing, nothing. There's nothing to be grateful for. Nothing's going right." It's that all or nothing thinking that we know is not so great or so realistic but we can fall into that place because that's how it feels.

Marina: Mhmm. And not to say that that feeling isn't real in that moment, but again, you shouldn't be scared to question that feeling.

Meredith: Mhmm!

Marina: You shouldn't be scared to challenge that feeling because very few things in life actually live in the black and white. Very few things are all the time, always or never nothing.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: And that's why, again, it's the intention. It's when it feels like nothing's going right, nothing is going well. Well, let me challenge that for myself. "Is that true? Well, I had a nice interaction getting my morning coffee today and for a moment, I felt a little bit better. So I'm grateful for that one small moment where I felt better."

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: And just even giving that moment the gratitude and appreciation it deserves already gets you a little bit away from that.

Meredith: Yeah. And I know we talk about the mindfulness apps we use and the one I use, there's a really nice gratitude meditation and something that they say and it always sticks with me is just having the mind with which you can consider being grateful, like just being able to think about gratitude, that in it of itself you should be grateful for. Just having the awareness to be able to do that is a big deal.

Marina: Yeah! So how are gratitude and positivity connected? We talked about the negative stuff. Let's talk about the positive stuff.

Meredith: Yeah! Because I think they're related but they're not the same thing, right?!

Marina: Mhmm!



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Meredith: So having a practice of gratitude cultivates a feeling of positivity, right? Feeling genuinely more positive in your life and in your day and in your relationship which then makes it easier to have that sense of gratitude. So it's sort of this self-reinforcing cycle - the more gratitude you practice, the more positive you feel, the easier it is to practice gratitude, the more positive you feel and it just kinds of goes and goes in that positive cycle.

Marina: Mhmm! And I think that very much so translates into relationships, right? The more positive your relationship feels, the more you're likely to do really positive stuff and stuff that you're thankful for in it. It's easier to see your partner in a positive light, it's easier to give benefit of the doubt, it's easier to keep level 5 issue at level 5 or minimize it as opposed to maximize it. And it's easier to create more of those positive moments and invest the energy in those behaviors that make you feel that sense of gratitude and positivity as a couple.

Meredith: Mhmm!

Marina: So in that way, I think it's really very reinforcing. Meredith: Yeah! And you want your relationship to feel that way, right? We don't go into a relationship to just have these intense, heavy processed, emotion-oriented conversations all the time. You go into a relationship because you want it to be fun and enjoyable and happy. So creating this atmosphere as a couple really gives you the relationship that you want.

Marina: Yeah! I think there's so much lightness. We talk a lot about problem-solving and communication and all that stuff and I think people tend to see that as heaviness but I think lightness has such a positive, beautiful functions in a relationship and I think it's very much so tied to gratitude. If you flood your brain with all the light, nice, little moments that are going right and express gratitude for them internally and externally, so to yourself and to your partner, you're going to feel more positive.

Meredith: Mhmm.

Marina: Your relationship's going to feel more positive. There's a lot of attunement and connection that is built by doing those little things that make you feel that way.

Meredith: Absolutely! And I think keeping in mind that we have influence over this. This is not out of your control, you can influence how you feel, how you feel the world, how you look at your partner. It's a lot of that is within your control so taking these steps can really help that in a positive way.

Marina: Yeah! I think the big thing to remember here is that when you're feeling least connected is when you need to connect to that sense of gratitude the most.

Meredith: Mhmm! Yeah!



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Marina: Right? You have the power to do that. I have the power to do that and for me I can say it wasn't the easiest, most direct, like A to B, linear process and it's still a process but it is something that we have power over and just connecting with that sense of power is so impactful, it's so liberating to know. When things are really overwhelming and really hectic and very stressful, I can still have these moments of gratitude and I can come home and be really grateful that my partner is there. And I can come home and look at myself in the mirror and say, "I'm really grateful that I rode the dirty New York City subway but I'm healthy."

Meredith: Yeah!

Marina: Just these small things in times like that have such a powerful impact.

Meredith: Yeah! And same! It wasn't an easy process. I bet you experienced this as well, but I felt when the shift happened, like brain-wise, I clearly went from automatically thinking about the negative, automatically think about what went wrong and then putting into practice. Practice of gratitude everyday and I can't say how long it took, I don't know, probably a couple of months, a few months before it was really like a shift. And I remember it would be like maybe 50/50 in the middle. I would go to the positive or the negative automatically. And now, it takes me, if I start to go negative very quickly... my brain catches it and I just go like "Hoo!" And it feels so, it's so genuine, it feels very natural. It not something I'm constantly thinking about. I'm not obsessing over it, It just happens now because we've developed that thought process and now your brain takes over for you and makes it easier.

Marina: Yeah! And it's a process, right?

Meredith: Mhmm!

Marina: But definitely I know exactly that feeling of that shift you're talking about and I feel like for me the change I noticed in myself is it makes me a lot less reactive. Meredith: Mhmm! Yeah!

Marina: And I react in a much calmer, more benefit of the doubt, more empathic kind of way.

Meredith: Yeah! Absolutely! So, let's talk about how to's. Let's talk about process-based gratitude, how to build more gratitude into your relationship. But you know what, before we go into the relationship, we have to start with the individual, right?

Marina: Yeah!

Meredith: So how do we do this, Marina? This is what we do.

Marina: Five minute journal.

Meredith: Five minute journal. We're not sponsored by five minute journal but we love the five minute journal. So, we've been filling this out for quite awhile. And I would fully attribute my consistency to just having this book.



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Marina: Mhmm!

Meredith: You wake up in the morning, you fill it out, takes five minutes or less, get into bed at night, fill out the other half, five minutes or less. And it's just talking about what you're grateful for, what would make the day great, what wonderful things happened that day. It's wonderful. I'm obsessed with this.

Marina: I'm obsessed with it also. I have to say I'm a huge believer. The major shift I noticed when I started doing it, really consistently is I knew I would have to do it at night, I would intentionally almost scan, to bank the things I wanted to put in it. It really makes you scan for things that went great. It really makes you scan for things that you're grateful for. And I noticed that I used to think really big now. My whole mantra is think small and sometimes I am like putting in a 4, 5, 6 of things I wanna write down because they were things that I paid attention and really added value and made my day great.

Meredith: Yeah!

Marina: Even though they're small things.

Meredith: And there's a section in the evening on there where it says "What could I have done to make today better?" I'm sure you have like once in a blue moon. In this phase of gratitude practice, I have had a day where I've genuinely been able to say there's absolutely nothing I could have done to make today better. And by no means is that everyday but there are these one day, here and there where I truly, that's how I feel! Nothing!

Marina: Yeah! I can totally relate to that where I'm just like, I feel like I lived today in a very positive congruent way and things align with how I want it to feel and by no means was it a perfect day.

Meredith: No! Of course not!

Marina: But it was just a day where I was like "I was grateful for this day!"

Meredith: Mhmm!

Marina: So definitely. And I think having a day like that is just a powerful testament to the fact that it doesn't need to be this big production of a day, it's just about really internalizing what the day brings at you and how you're dealing with it.

Meredith: Yeah! Definitely! So we want you to start there. Start with the five minute journal. We'll put the link below. That's your individual gratitude practice. And then from there, we shift to the couple's piece of the work.

Marina: So couple's gratitude I think is really important to make it a ritual of connection.

Meredith: Mhmm.



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Marina: So episode 002, we talk all about rituals of connection and if you use the bonus from this week - The Couple's Gratitude Journal Page - it's very similar to the individual but making that a ritual of connection for the two of you as a couple and not just to focus on the individual things but the couple's things just fasters your connection, builds gratitude in the relationship. It's just a lovely thing to do to be able to share, and again, it primes your brain to look for that stuff.

Meredith: Mhmm!

Marina: It primes your brain to have a different focus.

Meredith: Yeah. And to throw something in there, you know, there's the individual piece and the couple's piece to share with your partner something you're grateful for related to the relationship and related to them as a person. That's really powerful to hear on a weekly basis or if you're really good at daily basis, but that's amazing! What doesn't give you the warm fuzzies more than that? Hearing that your partner's grateful for you and something you did for them and a way that you supported them that maybe you didn't even realize and now you know. I think that's huge.

Marina: Yeah! And a lot of times, the things I internalize gratitude for not necessarily the things like George is doing to make me feel grateful but like you said, to be able to share that and just give them that insight into your inner world of "This gave me the warm fuzzies because to me, it was a really meaningful moment" is a really valuable and beautiful insight in your relationship.

Meredith: Yup! That's a big one! So as always, we don't want you to just listen to us and not take action. We want you to integrate this into your relationship, so like we said, we've put together The Couple's Gratitude Journal Page. You can get it at www.simplygreatrelationship.com/028. Definitely grab it. Also grab the Five Minute Journal. We'll put the link below. Love it. It's awesome. We wanna hear about your experiences with that. Let's talk about takeaways!

Marina: Takeaways! So my big takeaway is I love that you brought up the point that there's really an emotional shift that happens like you do feel different when this becomes really integrated into your life as a practice.

Meredith: Yeah.

Marina: So that's my big takeaway. You feel overall better and it's such a small thing. It's just intention and saying it to yourself and saying it to your partner, it's very low stake and very high reward and that feeling that shift is so powerful. That's my big takeaway.

Meredith: My takeaway is really what you shared about, you know, stressing again - focusing on the small things which I always keep in mind but when you, you know, the analogy that they're great like look at them as grains of sands. So really, break it down, break it down, break it down, what is the smallest, simplest thing you can be grateful for and build from there - I think that's a really powerful way to look at it. I like that.



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Marina: Mhmm.

Meredith: I like this episode.

Marina: Yeah! Makes me feel really grateful that we have the opportunity to share this. All the people that are listening really makes me grateful that we've both been on this journey.

Meredith: Yeah. And that we can share that to try to invite other people to join us because I think that's how this started. Not to get into like a whole story but Marina and I have done a lot of work, a lot of personal development work individually, as couples with our husbands. It doesn't come easy and we've done it.

Marina: As a partnership!

Meredith: Yeah! As a partnership with each other. We really, really do a lot and we don't just talk about this stuff. We live it and I think we've... I don't wanna say like come out the other side but in some ways, we're on this journey and we've seen the progress and the positive change and we really wanna just share that and invite everyone else, anyone who's passionate about it and interested and motivated. We wanna invite you to feel what we feel and how we feel and how we can go through our day and live in our marriages very happily and it's not out of reach. So I'm grateful for that opportunity.

Marina: Yeah!

Meredith: So that's all for today. We hope you take these tips and start using them right away. We'd love for you to continue the conversation with us in our Facebook group where we're gonna hook you up with tips, tricks and live streams exclusively for our members. Maybe we'll even throw a challenge or two in there.

Marina: Mhmm!

Meredith: You can find our group at www.facebook.com/group/simplygraterelationships or you can click the link on our website www.simplygreatrelationships.com. So that's it for this week. Until next time!

Marina and Meredith: Bye!

