

# 'TIS THE SEASON OF EXHAUSTION... AND HOPE

by Glenn Williams



## Gratitude, grace, and letting go

Can you believe we're nearly done with 2024? If you're anything like me, there have been some fantastic highs accompanied by unexpected and unwanted lows.

While carrying out a postmortem on the year may be natural, I encourage you to look back at 2024 through a more reflective lens. What do I mean? Be kind to yourself. Be kind to others. It's been said that grace is the ability to accept and forgive ourselves and others. I think our world needs a lot more of it, don't you think?

It can be challenging for those of us who are driven or task-oriented. Just this past week, I connected with nearly forty senior leaders, all deeply focused on achieving as much as possible. Many are relentlessly pushing themselves and their teams, often at the expense of their closest relationships.

We might consider our goals to be non-negotiable, but the real challenge lies in balancing these ambitions with enough grace—for ourselves and for those we lead. It's about finding the space to pursue excellence without sacrificing connection, well-being, or the trust of those around us.

## Gratitude transforms your mindset

"Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Gratitude evokes grace like the voice and echo. Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning."—Karl Barth

Or, as Arianna Huffington put it, "Living in a state of gratitude is the gateway to grace." Regardless of which one precedes, a healthy dose of gratitude is just what the doctor ordered. Communication pathologist, audiologist, and clinical and research neuroscientist Dr. Caroline Leaf is among many researchers who espouse the significant and lifelong benefits of cultivating a lifestyle of thankfulness.

"[Research](#) on the effects gratitude has on our biology shows how being thankful increases our longevity, our ability to use our imagination, and our ability to problem-solve. [Gratitude](#) makes us feel that life is worth living, which brings mental health benefits in a positive feedback loop that leads to more [resilience](#)—the ability to bounce back quicker during hard times."

We can literally create new neural gratitude pathways in our brains by practising the simple and profound art of thanksgiving.

A few years ago, I found myself in a dark place, and gratitude was the last thing on my mind. In an attempt to clear my head, I laced up my running shoes and set out on a 10km walk. Walking has always

been a time for me to reflect, think, and pray, but this time, I decided to focus on something different—gratitude.

I made it my goal to think of every little thing I could be thankful for, even the small things I usually overlooked. To my surprise, by the time I returned home, I hadn't run out of things to be grateful for. That simple exercise not only shifted my mindset but also reminded me of the abundance in my life, even during tough times.

Try it for yourself. Is your family healthy? Celebrate! Did you do your best? Be glad. Did you learn something from a recent failure or mistake? Great! The brilliant thing is that grace and gratitude don't demand perfection; they celebrate the beauty of the ordinary, the joy in sharing a meal with those we love, or the courage involved in showing up for people day after day. Now, as you pause to celebrate Christmas (even if it might be just a holiday break for you), use this time to look at your life, family, friendships, and business with compassion and a healthy dose of gratitude.



## Margin transforms more than your health

As a leader, how I live, how busy I am, and what I prioritize, makes a big difference to the lives of those I love. How you manage your time and your [leadership capacity](#) directly affects the health of your

organization and its people.

Rest shouldn't be the traditional collapse in exhaustion at the end of the year. The uncomfortable truth is that research shows that if the leader is fatigued, it's very likely that everyone else will be similarly drained! The rest I'm talking about is something we choose as part of our lifestyle, a vital component for creativity, productivity, and bringing our best selves to the table.

Give yourself permission to rest; the world will keep turning, and it might be one of the best things you can do for yourself, for those around you, and for the long-term success of your business.

## **Be present**

This brings us to one of the greatest gifts we can offer the people we love: being present. As leaders, we feel a constant pull to live for the future, to spend our time in perpetual anticipation of what's next—regardless of how things are going! If it's been a difficult year, we want to move on, and equally, when we've experienced a breakthrough or some incredible advances, we shift our focus to the next goal just as quickly. In the process, we've lost the art of truly being present in the moment. Even when we reach those long-awaited milestones, we're more likely to take photos rather than simply enjoy it as it unfolds.

Grace and gratitude help us slow down enough to be present. They allow us to be in a single, simple and intentional moment and focus on the good, the lovely, the pure and the noble that surrounds us.

The payoff is that the more we appreciate the small moments, the more capacity we build for unexpected challenges and opportunities in life and business.



## **The gift of forgiveness**

Forgiveness has been one of the most challenging yet transformative aspects of my leadership journey. I've had to wrestle with it—not just forgiving others but also forgiving myself. As leaders, we often hold ourselves to impossible standards, and when we fall short, the weight of failure can feel overwhelming. For me, learning to forgive has been a pathway to freedom, clarity, and growth.

### **Forgiving others**

Forgiveness is fuelled by grace and is a gateway to gratitude. Our choice to forgive isn't dependent on others' repentance. We can forgive people who choose not to apologise; when we do, we are free. We

acknowledge our shared humanity when we extend grace to those who've wronged us. No one is perfect; I know I'm not. I've wronged people in the past, just as I've been wronged by others.

What we often miss is that unforgiveness keeps us tied to the past. As Nelson Mandela said on his release from prison after 27 years, "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

## Forgiving yourself

Mistakes happen, and [failure is inevitable](#) if you're alive! But as Henry Ford said, "The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing."

Forgiving others is one thing. Having compassion and grace for ourselves is often a lot more difficult. But we can only give what we've received. Forgiving others will be a lot harder if we can't forgive our mistakes. If we expect perfection from ourselves, we'll expect it from others.

If you're in a place of wrestling with forgiveness, whether for someone else or yourself, I invite you to pause. Reflect on what's holding you back. Then, make the decision to let it go—not because it's easy, but because you deserve the freedom and renewal it brings. Forgiveness isn't a sign of weakness; it's an act of courage. And as leaders, courage is what moves us forward.

## The reset

This Christmas, give yourself the gift of gratitude and grace. Be kind to yourself and take time to appreciate the small moments with family, friends, and colleagues. Take a deep breath and release yourself from the pressure of having to live up to any unrealistic expectations you've set.

If leaders can talk about the [reality of leadership](#) and share their experiences of success, failure, highs, and lows without shame or blame, it's a good start.

'Tis the season for extending grace – to ourselves, our families and friends, to our teams, to clients, to our customers – to those we meet every day. How can we extend grace in our everyday dealings? A call to slow down in the crazy season. Cutting ourselves some slack.



## A season of hope

As 2024 draws to a close, let's embrace this season as an opportunity to reset, refocus, and recharge. It's been a year of highs and lows, wins and losses, joy and challenge—but through it all, there's room for growth, gratitude, and grace.

The end of the year invites us to reflect—not with judgment, but with kindness. Look back not just at what went wrong but at what went right. Celebrate the ordinary moments, the lessons learned, and the courage it took to keep showing up. Grace reminds us that we don't have to be perfect; we just have to keep moving forward.

Gratitude transforms how we see the world. It reminds us to cherish the small joys—the shared laughter with loved ones, the quiet moments of rest, and the breakthroughs that come after setbacks. Gratitude isn't just about looking back; it prepares us for what's ahead.

As we enter the new year, let's choose forgiveness for others and ourselves, so we can be free of resentment and hurts that hold us back, and so we can have clarity and courage to move forward with hope.

And finally, let's make space for rest. True rest isn't collapsing from exhaustion—it's intentionally creating



room to breathe, reflect, and recharge. When we lead from a place of rest, we bring our best selves to our families, our teams, and our work.

This Christmas, may we see the transforming power of grace and gratitude as we extend them to everyone we encounter—including ourselves. Let's pause to appreciate the beauty of the present moment and commit to stepping into the new year with renewed purpose and hope.

What will you take with you into 2025? And what will you leave behind?