

Welcome, dear friends! Today, we conclude our journey through *Gratitude Across Spiritual Traditions* with a powerful and transformative topic: ***Finding Gratitude in Challenges***. This may not always be easy, but the journey toward finding gratitude in life's cracks can bring profound beauty and meaning. Together, we'll explore stories, practices, and affirmations to help us transform our struggles into golden opportunities for growth.

Gratitude is a cornerstone of spiritual traditions worldwide. Today, we weave this universal practice into the Christian perspective by reflecting on the teachings of Jesus, the story of Joseph in Genesis, and the metaphor of *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of golden repair.

Let's begin with *kintsugi*, a centuries-old Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by filling the cracks with gold. Kintsugi teaches that brokenness is not something to hide or discard but a part of the object's unique beauty and value. This mirrors our human journey. When we face challenges and embrace our imperfections, we fill our cracks with the gold of resilience and gratitude, becoming "imperfectly perfect."

Consider Joni Eareckson Tada, a remarkable woman whose life exemplifies *kintsugi*. At 17, Joni's life was changed forever by a diving accident that left her paralyzed from the shoulders down. Broken, like shattered pottery, Joni initially felt hopeless. Yet, through her journey, she embraced her challenges and filled her cracks with gold.

Joni found her purpose. She began painting breathtaking works of art using a brush held between her teeth. She became a renowned author and an enthusiastic advocate for people with disabilities. Like *kintsugi* pottery, Joni's cracks were not hidden but transformed into golden veins of strength and gratitude, creating a life of purpose and beauty.

The story of Joseph from the Bible also illustrates this principle. Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, Joseph faced unimaginable challenges—false accusations, imprisonment, and years of separation from his family. Despite his brokenness, Joseph found gratitude in his journey, trusting a greater plan.

In time, Joseph rose to power in Egypt and saved countless lives during a famine, including his family. His challenges became steppingstones for growth and transformation. Like Joni, Joseph's cracks were filled with gold, making his life's story even more profound and inspiring.

What can we learn from these stories of Joni and Joseph? By embracing our cracks and imperfections, we transform them into sources of beauty, gratitude, and strength.

What Can We Learn from Embracing Our Cracks?

1. Our Cracks Reveal Our Hidden Strengths

Joni discovered artistic talents and a purpose that inspired millions. Joseph's struggles prepared him to lead with wisdom and compassion.

2. Our Cracks Deepen Self-Awareness

Challenges push us to explore our untapped potential and discover what we're truly capable of.

Joni and Joseph developed a deeper connection to their inner strength and purpose.

3. When We Accept Our Imperfections, We Open Ourselves to Gratitude

Gratitude for our resilience, adaptability, and growth emerges when we accept our cracks instead of hiding them.

Like *kintsugi*, repairing our brokenness is a process that takes time and care. Let's explore three practices that help us fill our cracks with gold.

The First Practice – Acceptance

Acceptance is the first step in healing. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:28:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Acceptance is not passive; it's courageous. It allows us to see our imperfections as opportunities for transformation.

The Second Practice – Self-Reflection and Meditation

In Matthew 7:7, Jesus said:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."

Self-Reflection

Ask powerful questions during challenges:

How does this challenge serve me?

What opportunities for growth exist within this struggle?

What strengths am I uncovering?

These questions are like gold in kintsugi, reframing challenges into opportunities for growth.

Meditation

Combine prayer and meditation. After asking questions, meditate to listen for answers. Joni often speaks of the power of prayer, and Joseph's trust in divine purpose guided him.

The Third Practice – Affirmations

Affirmations help us reframe our narrative. They're the gold that fills the cracks, reminding us of the beauty in our struggles.

Examples of Affirmations:

I am grateful for the challenges that reveal my hidden strengths.

My imperfections are opportunities for transformation and growth.

I fill my gold cracks, finding beauty in every experience.

My struggles are a source of strength and resilience.

Each challenge I face brings me closer to my highest potential.

Butterflies in My Classroom

When I taught 1st grade, I had a butterfly demonstration display. One day, a child saw a butterfly struggling to emerge from its cocoon and decided to help by opening it. Sadly, the butterfly emerged too weak to fly and died. The child didn't realize that the struggle to break free is essential; it strengthens the butterfly's wings. This story reminds us that challenges are necessary for our growth. Like the butterfly, our struggles strengthen us, and gratitude allows us to see their purpose.

Conclusion – Embracing the Kintsugi of Our Lives

Reflect on the image of kintsugi pottery. The cracks are not flaws; they're places where gold can flow. Our challenges and imperfections are not failures; they're opportunities for transformation.

Joni and Joseph remind us that our cracks don't diminish our worth; they enhance it. They're proof that we are "imperfect yet perfect."

This week, take time to reflect on your challenges. Ask yourself: *What gold is waiting to emerge from my cracks?* See your struggles as opportunities for growth and transformation.

Let's fill our lives with gratitude for the cracks that make us whole.

Affirmation: *Each challenge I face brings me closer to my highest potential.*

Thank you for walking this journey with me. Let's go forth and embrace the kintsugi of our lives, transforming our cracks into golden masterpieces of gratitude and strength.