

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for A.J. Jacobs | Thanks a Thousand: A Gratitude Journey (Episode 174)

A.J. Jacobs is a big weirdo, but that's really why I like him. He's spent a year living according to the Bible in the most literal way possible. He's endeavored to build the biggest family tree in history. He's read all 32 volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica to become the smartest person in the world. He's gone to great lengths running social experiments that make most of us cringe just thinking about them. He's got a knack for putting himself in situations where he's able to examine current rules and think in a totally different way -- and then break our default mode that we get from culture and social programming and replace it with something else entirely.

[In this episode](#), A.J. joins us to share the yields of the experiment that resulted in his latest book, [Thanks a Thousand: A Gratitude Journey](#). We'll find out what he discovered while thanking a thousand people along the supply chain responsible for his morning cup of coffee -- from the bean farmers in Colombia to the truckers who get the stuff to the States to the barista who hands him the cup.

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Sabbath Digital Sabbath

When he was in the process of writing [*The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*](#), A.J. found himself following some pretty obscure rules that may have once made sense in the distant past, but seem irrelevant to current-day sensibilities. And then there are some rules that have proven to be surprisingly timeless.

Among expressing gratitude and cutting back on gossip, A.J. found the deliberate weekly break of the Sabbath -- as prescribed by ancient scripture -- relevant to reducing modern-day stresses.

"The Sabbath is almost like a digital detox from 2,000 years ago," says A.J., "this idea, starting Friday at sundown (or depending on your religion, Sunday)...stop working. Devote it to what's around you. Look around. Devote it to your friends, to your family, to having meals, having wine."

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Challenge yourself to take a Sabbath-like break once a week on a day of your choosing to spend time connecting with family and friends. If you're inclined to work every day (like me), force yourself to step away from the instruments of that work and do something completely different. Write down how you plan to enact this voluntary Sabbath and how it makes you feel afterward. Is this something you could do every week? If not, what's really holding you back?

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Who's In Your Family Forest?

While looking for an angle for his next book -- which became [*It's All Relative: Adventures Up and Down the World's Family Tree*](#) -- A.J. got a note out of the blue from someone claiming to be his eighth cousin.

"I of course thought, 'Okay, he's going to ask me to wire \$10,000 to Liberia.' But he didn't. It turned out he was legitimate and he was one of this group of thousands of people -- scientists and researchers -- who are trying to do something unprecedented, which is to build the biggest family tree in history. And it's not a tree. It's a forest...right now it's about 150 million people all connected...from over a hundred countries, every ethnicity you can think of."

"One part of me was like, 'Do I really want 150 million cousins?' I have some members of my family now that I'd be happy to cut out! But another part of me was like, 'This is astounding! We've been taught this cliché from when we were kids that we're all one big family, but now you can see it concretely through DNA, through these massive Wikipedia-like family trees where thousands of people are working together...Barack Obama is my fifth great aunt's husband's brother's wife's seventh great nephew!"

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If you were to explore your own family history, how would you feel upon discovering world-famous names among your cousins? Would it make you feel more connected to the world at large? Would it tempt you to reach out to them? Would you ever attend a family reunion to meet relations close or distant -- famous or non-famous?

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Your Appreciation is Appreciated

A.J. was inspired -- by the connections he discovered while exploring his family tree and its extended forest -- to see how other parts of our lives are connected in ways we don't even think about. While expressing gratitude for the people responsible for his breakfast and morning coffee, his son gave him the idea [for his next book](#): to personally thank those people. But A.J. aimed high: to thank *a thousand* of those people.

"It was way more than I anticipated!" A.J. admits. "I went wide, so I thanked the obvious people, like the farmer of the coffee beans, and the barista, but I also would go out and meet the truck driver who drove the coffee beans. I remember I called the woman who did pest control for the warehouse where my coffee beans are stored, and I said, 'I know this is a little strange, but I just want to thank you for keeping the insects out of my coffee!' And she said, 'Yeah, that is strange, but thank you! I don't get a lot of appreciation!'"

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It's not necessary to commit to thanking a thousand people responsible for bringing you something you love, but consider how you might express appreciation to three people today for what they do -- especially people who aren't used to receiving appreciation. These could be couriers, custodians, dry cleaners, gardeners, plumbers, or even podcast worksheet writers! Try to thank three people every day for a week and note not only the responses of those you thank, but how their responses make *you* feel. Sure, this might seem like a selfish exercise for that reason alone, but if it helps you channel your inner Mister Rogers to nudge aside your inner Larry David for a while, it's ultimately good for the world at large.



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Gratitude Hacks

Here are a few of the hacks A.J. and I use to goad gratitude on days when it doesn't particularly feel natural.

- When he's having trouble falling asleep, A.J. will count things for which he's grateful -- alphabetically.
- Before meals, A.J. will give thanks to the people who made his food possible (which was what prompted his son to give him the idea for his latest book).
- When A.J. is in a store's checkout line that's moving faster than the others, he'll make it a point to mention it out loud so he'll remember it later.
- Whenever something registers as negative, I try to think of three easily relatable positives: like a faraway airplane gate giving me the opportunity to get my steps in, the extra calories this will allow me to eat later, and the extra time it gives me to listen to whatever's in my headphones at the time.
- When bad things happen to him, A.J. tries to revel in self-schadenfreude -- the joy of his own suffering -- because of the great grist for stories it will provide for later.

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here](#).

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We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth -- and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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