**EPISODE #191: How a Daily Inspirational Reading Practice Can Be Transformative**

**With Dr. Heather Fork**

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HF: “We often reprimand ourselves for not doing things that we never actually consciously chose to do at all. These shoulds can be rooted in guilt or obligation, and oftentimes they are the result of beliefs that others have placed upon us.”

Welcome to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctor's Crossing. As a master-certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical job, or something else. I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So, pull up a chair, my friend, and let's carpe that diem.

Hey there, and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. I'm your host, Heather Fork, and you're listening to episode number 191. I'm so glad you're here. I really appreciate you listening. I know there's a thousand other things you could be doing right now, so thank you so much for taking the time to listen to this episode. I'm going to do my best to bring value to you.

Today, I'm going to do things a little bit differently. I know in a lot of the episodes, we talk about different career options. We talk about how my guests have done their transitions and steps that you can take to move forward, and we also address the mindset piece, how to deal with challenges, the roadblocks, fears, the uncertainty, the doubts, all the different things that can keep us stuck and prevent us from reaching our goals and what we really want to do.

Today, I'm focusing on the mindset piece, and what I want to share with you is a practice that you can do ideally in the morning to help set your mindset for the day. And you may already have a practice that you do. You may have a book that you read from. You may read from a religious text. You may have journaling that you do, a meditation practice, and I think that's wonderful.

But if you don't and you're looking for something, what I want to share today are four different books, and these are daily readers. They have a lesson that you read each day, and it only takes about a minute or two, and it helps frame up a mindset for the day or have a little story or parable that teaches an idea or a concept and just have something to help us deal with the challenges in life and have a perspective to handle them versus just reacting to what happens to us.

I'm going to share these four readings, but before I launch in, I'm going to tell a little story of how the idea of having a daily practice first was mentioned to me. This story is something I've actually told on the podcast, but I didn't tell this part. This was a time in my life when I hit bottom in a way in terms of being really unhappy in my career and also being in a relationship that was really challenging and very difficult for me, and I just was incredibly unhappy.

This was midway in my career as a dermatologist. I didn't leave at that point, but sort of hit a bottom, and I was able to come up and feel a lot better and have things be a lot better before I actually left. But I talk about this in Episode 6 on the podcast about why I left dermatology, so if you haven't heard that story already and you want to listen to that episode, I'll link to it in the show notes.

I'm not going to go into the details here, once is enough, but just to paint the picture, it was a time in my life when I really hadn't let my family know or my friends really what was going on in my career or in my personal life, but then when the you-know-what hit the fan, and I just decided that this building I had bought to move the dermatology practice into was not going to serve me.

I ended up calling up my realtor and telling him, “Jeff, sell the building, I'm not doing this.” And he said to me, “Dr. Fork, are you okay?” I said, “Do I sound okay? No, I am not okay.” I had contacted a broker to sell my practice, and I really had to face what was going on in my relationship.

Long story short, I ended up calling up my mother after I called my realtor, and I told her what was happening, and my mother is not the kind of person that just jumps in and gives you a bunch of advice. She thinks about things, and then she'll follow up often with some thoughts. And what she did after she listened to me was she wrote me a letter. My mother has beautiful handwriting. She's a former English teacher, and she writes really well, and in this letter, she asked me a question.

She asked me if I had a spiritual practice to help me deal with things when things weren't going well, and she described about how when she was sick in the hospital, there was a time when they didn't know what was wrong with her. She ended up having appendicitis, but they couldn't figure it out for a while, and she thought she had eaten some bad meat and food poisoning, but so she was very sick, and it was a scary time for her, and when she was in the hospital, a friend brought her this book called “A Course in Miracles.” It's also called ACIM.

This “A Course in Miracles” has a workbook where you have a lesson for each day, and really, the overarching goal of “A Course in Miracles” is to help you really come from a different perspective in the way you see the world and yourself in a shift from fear-based thinking to love, to be able to offer forgiveness instead of judgment of people and yourself. And so, each lesson helps you work on your mindset. It's a mind training workbook.

Now, it's not a religious text, but it does use Christian terminology, and I'm not in any way, shape, or form recommending people to go out and read “A Course in Miracles.” It's not going to resonate, I think, with 95 percent of people, but it was something that I really helped my mother. She's been doing A Course in Miracles for over 30 years, and I can see how it really helped her so that when things come up, she just broke her foot recently, and I saw how she has that normal reaction that we all do when bad things happen. You're upset, you're scared, you're angry, you're frustrated. But then she very quickly shifts into more of a higher level mindset where she can see the good in this, and she says, “Well, I'm in this wheelchair, and so I guess if a ride comes along, you take it, and I'll have more time to read, and I have help. I'm very lucky that my insurance covers a helper to come and be with me until I can walk again.”

My mother asked me if I had this practice to really work on my own mindset, and it didn't have to be a spiritual practice, but it was something to be able to step back from just being reactive to what was happening to me to being able to see things differently. And there's this quote I like from Wayne Dyer, and he said, “Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.” And I love that. I'll say that again. “Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.”

And so, she made this suggestion to me, and I didn't have a practice, and I didn't end up having any type of practice for probably at least a year or two after that. I think I was too busy maybe feeling sorry for myself or having a pity party or thinking like, “I don't have time to have a practice. I got problems here. Maybe when I don't have problems, I'll have time for this.”

I didn't end up doing anything with that suggestion until a few years later. Even though I didn't take her advice at that time, a few years later, I did start a meditation practice, and I started reading “A Course in Miracles.” I actually loved it, and I'm not recommending it because I think most people look at it and be like, “This isn't for me”, but I actually found it very helpful and did that for a good number of years, and currently, I read from a number of different texts, and I'll share, as I mentioned, a few of those with you.

I find this has been probably one of the most helpful things in my life and that I do on a daily basis. You might be thinking, “Oh my gosh, I get up. I have to get up super early. I try to exercise a bit, or I have to get my kids ready. I have to be at work by 07:00 or even earlier. I don't have time for anything like this.”

It doesn't have to be in the morning, but I will say that these readings typically are short. You can usually do them in one minute, and you can do meditation in one minute. I'm going to be doing a follow-up podcast where I talk about how to meditate when you can't meditate and how to get it in because it's more powerful to do one minute every day than to do 20 minutes once a week, and the point is not to be able to sit on a meditation cushion for an hour and have no thoughts and become like the Dalai Lama. It's not that at all.

It's really all this is to help us be more present in our daily life, and then when things do happen to us, which they will, inevitably, challenging things happen. It's just part of life and how we grow. We have a framework to put things in, so instead of being reactive and feeling like bad things just happen, and there are bad people out there, and we're a victim, and we're disempowered, and all these things, and uncertainty is scary, we can step back and look at our situation through a different lens, which helps us come from a more empowered perspective.

All right, without further ado, let's go to these readings. The first one that I want to share is a book called “Courage to Change: One Day at a Time in Al-Anon II.” I imagine most of you are familiar with Al-Anon, but if not, it's a support program for people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. This could be a family member or friends of an alcoholic, whether this alcoholic is still drinking or not, and they have weekly meetings.

I fortunately did not really have alcoholism in our family. We had other issues, but that wasn't one of them, but I like this book. I find a lot of value in it, and there's also one for people in AA.

This is from July 28th. “A stonecutter may strike a rock 99 times with no apparent effect, not even a crack on the surface, yet with a hundredth blow the rock splits in two. It was not the final blow that did the trick, but all that had gone before. The same is true of Al-Anon recovery. Perhaps I'm working on accepting that alcoholism is a disease or learning to detach or struggling with self-pity. I may pursue a goal for months without obvious results and become convinced that I'm wasting my time, but if I continue going to meetings, sharing about my struggle, taking it one day at a time, and being patient with myself, I may awaken to find that I have changed seemingly overnight.

Suddenly, I have the acceptance, detachment, or serenity I've been seeking. The results may have revealed themselves abruptly, but I know that all those months of faith and hard work made the changes possible.

Today's reminder. We are often reminded to keep coming back. Today, I will remember that this not only applies to meetings, but to learning the new attitudes and behavior that are long-term benefits of Al-Anon recovery. I may not see the results today, but I can trust that I am making progress. Try to be patient with yourself and your family. It took a long time for the disease of alcoholism to affect each and every one, and it may take a long time for everyone to recover.”

This made me think of a time when after I'd sold my practice after nine years, and I moved out to this cabin in the Hill Country, and I was reading “A Course in Miracles” at that time, and there were some things that I was having trouble with forgiving from my past, and that's a big theme in “A Course in Miracles.”

And so, I felt like I wasn't making any progress, and what I decided to do is something I call tracking, where in a journal about once every three weeks, I would write about some different things that I wanted to track my progress in. The expeditions around and always trying to achieve things for perpetual self-improvement.

Anyway, I wrote down where I was with forgiveness with some things from my past that had happened and things that were still bothering me, and I ranked on a scale of zero to ten where I felt I was in terms of forgiving, and started out pretty low, and then I'd come back in about three weeks to this journal, and I'd write again where I was at with my thoughts and feelings and give it a ranking. And coming back and having some time in between and writing things in this way enabled me to see that I actually was making progress on working on this.

And what I actually came to see over time was that the deepest forgiveness that was needed was really not even for other people. It was for myself, and we often need to forgive ourselves maybe for staying in a relationship too long or not speaking up for ourselves or any number of things, but often the person we're most upset with really is ourselves. So that was a powerful exercise, and I think that rock finally split.

Okay, number two, the second reader is titled “A Year of Positive Thinking: Daily Inspiration, Wisdom, and Courage” by Cindy Spiegel. And I will link to these four books in the show notes. This selection is from the 3rd of July. It's an exercise in should.

“Write a list of all the things you think you should do. Don't overthink it. Then ask yourself, “Who said you should do each of these things?” We often reprimand ourselves for not doing things that we never actually consciously chose to do at all. These shoulds can be rooted in guilt or obligation, and oftentimes they are the result of beliefs that others have placed upon us. Are the decisions you make today out of perceived obligation still serving the life you currently lead or want to lead? Returning to your list of shoulds, cross off anything that no longer serves the life you lead today. Then take a deep breath and enjoy the freedom of deciding for yourself what you want and need to do.”

This makes me think of a lot of the physicians I work with and know because we're very much to meet and exceed expectations. There are a lot of shoulds that we take on. You may have felt you went into medicine because you should, or it's what was expected of you. You may feel like you need to stay in medicine. You should stay because you took up a spotted residency. You should stay because your patients need you. You should stay because your family needs you to have a certain income.

You should stay because you'll disappoint people if you leave. You may have heard this expression, “Don't shit all over yourself.” If you feel like you're shitting all over yourself, I think this is a great lesson and exercise to write down all your shoulds and then decide which ones are really serving you.

Before we go on with the third and fourth books, I wanted to share a short message from our wonderful sponsor. So don't go away, we'll be right back.

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Okay, welcome back. The third daily reader that I wanted to share is from a book called “The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations on Wisdom, Perseverance, and the Art of Living” by Ryan Holiday.

If you're not familiar with stoicism, I have a description here that I pulled off the internet. “Stoicism is a philosophy that teaches people to focus on what they can control, accept what they cannot, and find peace through rational thinking and self-discipline. It emphasizes inner strength, resilience, and living in harmony with nature. A key practice in stoicism is to focus on the present moment to avoid emotional suffering from the past or the future.”

This reading is from December 17th, entitled “Know Thyself Before It's Too Late”, and it begins with a quote from Seneca. “Death lies heavy upon one who, known exceedingly well by all, dies unknown to himself. Some of the most powerful and important people in the world seem to have almost no self-awareness. Although total strangers know endless amounts of trivia about them, celebrities, because they are too busy or because it hurts too much, appear to know very little about themselves.

We can be guilty of the same sin. We ignore Socrates' dictum to know thyself, often realizing we have done so at our peril. Years later, when we wake up one day and realize how rarely we have asked ourselves questions like, “Who am I? What's important to me? What do I like? What do I need?” Now, right now, you have the time to explore yourself, to understand your own mind and body. Don't wait. Know thyself before it's impossibly late.”

I love this reading and it makes me think of many of you out there, a lot of physicians that I work with, that when you're at the crossroads and it's very obvious to you what you don't want, but the question gets asked, “Well, what do you want? What do you want your life to look like? What would you like to do differently?” That's a much harder question to answer. And it makes a lot of sense because you had to subjugate a lot of your own needs and wants in service of training and medical school.

And if you really focus too much on what you wanted, what was important to you, aside from this career goal, it would be too painful because you would not be able to honor those needs and wants. There needs to be a rebalancing where you can prioritize yourself more once you've done all that training.

If you find these questions hard to answer, I think it's great to have a practice and some way to start really honoring that these are important questions for you and it's not selfish to ask them.

The fourth and final reading that I want to share is from “The Book of Awakening: Having the Life You Want by Being Present to the Life You Have” by Mark Nepo. The reading I'm going to share is from January 24th and titled “Miracle Thinking.”

“There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle” by Albert Einstein. I love this quote. Let me just read it once more. “There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

“There is no end to worry because there is no end to what exists out of view beyond our very small eyes. So worry is a way to gamble with what might or might not happen. It reminds me of a friend who had a flat tire on a country road. After finding he had no jack, he began walking hoping to find a nearby farmer who would help him. It was getting dark and the crickets were getting louder. As he walked the overgrown road, he began to throw the dice of worry in his mind. What if the farmer's not home? What if he is and won't let me use his jack? What if he won't let me use his phone? What if he's frightened of me? I never did anything to him. Why won't he just let me use his phone?

By the time he knocked on the farmer's door, my friend was so preoccupied with what could go wrong that when the friendly old man answered, my friend bellowed, well, you can keep your gosh darn jack. Being human, we struggle constantly to stay with the miracle of what is and not to fall constantly into the black hole of what is not.

This is an ancient challenge. As a Sufi poet believes that centuries ago, every particle of creation sings its own song of what is and what is not. Hearing what is can make you wise. Hearing what is not can drive you mad.” And then he follows with a meditation.

Each of the daily readings has a different meditation that you can do. “Sit quietly and consider a situation that is causing you to worry. Breathe slowly and as you inhale, focus on accepting what is. Try to let in both the gifts and the hardships of the reality you are in. Breathe evenly and as you exhale, focus on releasing what is not. Try to let go of all the imagined outcomes that are not yet real. Settle into the miracle of what is.”

I love this reading. There's so many things about it that really resonate with me. And it reminds me that in “A Course in Miracles”, when they mentioned miracles, what they're really describing is a shift in perception, a shift in the way we look at things. And I know as physicians we're trained to look for what could go wrong, do that what if thinking, that's skeptical thinking, critical thinking. Well, what if that chest pain is not indigestion, but it's really an MI? Or what if that headache is a Goomba in the brain?

It's important for us to do “what if” thinking to the negative. But like anything, if it's overused or misused, it becomes a liability. And I've noticed with so many physicians at the crossroads that we really have to have this shift in perception to be able to instead say, “Well, what if things went right? What if when I make changes, they actually worked out well?” And that slight shift is actually a miraculous shift because it helps us move forward and not stay stuck.

I just wanted to review the four books that I read from. And again, they'll be in the show notes. The first one is “Courage to Change: One Day at a Time in Al-Anon.”, the second one was “A Year of Positive Thinking” by Cindy Spiegel, the third one, “The Daily Stoic” by Ryan Holiday, the fourth was “The Book of Awakening” by Mark Nepo.

Now, each of these books is different. They come in a different package. They have a different approach. However, these daily readers, like anything else you might be reading, whether it's a religious or spiritual text or some type of self-help book, they often point to the same fundamental truth. They just do so with different stories, different languages. They may reference God or higher power. They may not. The stories are different. And we need to have different packaging for a variety of reasons.

But an interesting thing, when I read a couple different readers, even on one day, sometimes the message is exactly the same. It's just come out from a different perspective.

It's important for you, if you're going to have this practice, maybe you already do, like I said, but to find something that really resonates with you and works for your belief system, what helps inspire and motivate you. You can go on Google and search on “Daily Readers” and look for something that might be a great fit for you. And as I mentioned, combining reading a motivational and inspirational passage each day with even a very, very short bit of meditation is a powerful combination. I guess I'll follow up probably in about four weeks or so with a podcast with my techniques for anyone to be able to meditate who's struggling with this practice.

One last thing before I go, I just wanted to mention again, our wonderful sponsor of the podcast, PearsonRavitz, a life insurance and disability insurance company. If you would like to schedule a consult, talk to them about the coverage that you have or look into new coverage, feel free to reach out to them at pearsonravitz.com. And I'll have that link in the show notes.

And lastly, lastly, if you could share this podcast with even just one person today, then more people than my mother will be listening to it. I’d be so grateful. And as always, don’t forget to carpe that diem and I’ll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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