

EQUIUS ASSET CLASSSM

Modern asset class investing principles, research, and perspectives for long-term investors

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Thanks + Giving = Health + Meaning = Abundance

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"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." - Winston Churchill

A touching scene presented itself as I walked through San Francisco's Union Square recently: Pointing to a regal, cathedral-high beauty of nature, a mom announced to her three-year-old daughter, "Look, that's a Christmas tree!" It was November 9th. Yikes! Checking the date, I was relieved I hadn't missed Thanksgiving. A good thing too, since I wouldn't want to pass on any opportunity to honor gratitude, a trait that keeps us healthy in spite of the cornucopia filling us at our Thanksgiving tables. Equally important, celebrating the giving half of our national holiday adds to life's meaning and satisfaction. The sum total of those delicious Thanksgiving dividends is abundance — something that can't be acquired; rather it's all about what we perceive.

Tribal Nourishment

The Plymouth Pilgrims reaped the harvest of satisfaction in March 1621, when they were visited by Squanto, a Native American with the Wampanoag tribe. Squanto had been kidnapped by an English sea captain, sold into slavery, escaped to London, and finally returned to his native land. He taught those Pilgrims how to harvest nature's abundance. He also helped settlers forge a 50-year alliance with the Wampanoag.

In November 1621, after the Pilgrims' first successful corn harvest, Governor William Bradford hosted a celebratory feast, inviting a group of Native Americans and initiating our first Thanksgiving feast. Edward Winslow recorded that Governor Bradford sent "four men on a 'fowling' mission in preparation for the event. The Wampanoag guests arrived bearing five deer."

What's relevant about that Wampanoag gift of five deer is brought to insightful light by

Sebastian Junger in his book, *Tribe*. He defines tribe as "the people you feel compelled to share your last food with." This in contrast to home, which Robert Frost suggested is the "place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." Junger offers a tapestry of research on tribal societies that develop deep loyalty and a sense of belonging, all of which lead to richer outcomes in our eternal quest for meaning. Junger found that what profoundly bothers humans is not hardship; what creates our disease is not feeling necessary. His book presents tasty insights into how we all might more consistently feel necessary, which, along with giving, add to life's satisfaction.

Giving Happily

This year's February Asset Class Newsletter, *Well-Being Trumps All*, listed generosity as one of four significant factors explaining well-being — with optimism, resilience and mindfulness rounding out the quartet. Research by the Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) concluded that generous people are happier than those who don't give, regardless of gender and marital status — and the more they give, the happier they are. Gender does appear to matter in households where women drive or participate equally in charitable decisions. In those cases, the entire family is happier. Research also indicates that volunteering for charitable organizations results in increased psychological well-being, enriched social relationships, and improved physical health.

More broadly, the act of thoughtful and mindful giving to those (family and/or charities) meaningful to us stimulates the neurochemicals that drive happiness: dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. Dopamine motivates us. Serotonin helps us sleep and digest better. Oxytocin decreases blood pressure and inflammation while increasing trust and empathy.

Even modest forms of generosity make people happier. In one case, researchers gave university students a \$5 or \$20 bill to spend. Half the participants were told to treat themselves; the other half were asked to give away the money. People who spent money on someone else reported feeling happier than those who spent money on themselves. We now have a solution for cranky family members during this season: give them \$5 and tell them to give it away! That'll even beat the returns on small value stocks!

To test the physiological effects of generosity, magnetic resonance imaging tracked givers' brain mechanisms. Participants were asked to spend money on others. The control group was asked to spend money on themselves. Brain imaging revealed significantly higher levels of happiness for those who spent money on others, providing neural evidence that generosity and happiness are highly correlated.

Thankfully Healthy

In the nourishing season of Thanksgiving, stuffed with tales and turkey, and as we prepare for priceless holiday traditions, not only can we feel richer by giving, there also is evidence that our health improves if we practice the other half of our national holiday: gratitude. Although we traditionally count our blessings on Thanksgiving, being consistently thankful throughout the year can impact life's quality. Gratitude may be one of our most overlooked and unlimited resources. Cultivating it doesn't cost a thing or take much time, but it offers enormous rewards. Research, as summarized by Amy Morin in her November 2014 article¹ in *Forbes*, reveals at least seven dimensions of returns:

1. Gratitude is a portal to lasting relationships.
2. Gratitude improves physical health. Thankful people suffer fewer maladies and feel healthier than their less-appreciative brethren. Grateful people also are more likely to care for their health by regularly exercising and checking in with their doctors.
3. Gratitude improves psychological health. Gratitude reduces toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert A. Emmons, a recognized researcher of gratitude and well-being, found that being consistently grateful increases happiness and reduces depression. It also can reduce blood pressure and improve our immune systems and heart health. Emmons explains, "Grati-

tude, as a way of perceiving and interpreting life, recruits other positive emotions that directly benefit the immune and endocrine system."

4. Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression. Grateful people are more social, even when others are grumpy. Participants who ranked high on gratitude scales were less likely to retaliate against others, even in the face of negative feedback. They're also more sensitive and empathic.
5. Grateful people sleep better. Although the tryptophan in turkey won't make you sleepy, keeping a gratitude journal might — all it takes is 15 minutes of listing thankful sentiments before bed.
6. Gratitude improves self-esteem. Gratitude increases athletes' self-esteem, promoting optimal performance. It also limits social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who have more money or better jobs (a major contributor to low self-esteem), grateful folks more easily appreciate others' accomplishments.
7. Gratitude increases mental strength. Gratitude reduces stress and may help overcome trauma. Recognizing all for which you have to be thankful, even during the worst of times, fosters resilience, one of the four components of well-being. And so life-satisfaction's happy wheel turns.

Abundantly Wealthy

There are many reasons to express "Happy" before "Thanksgiving" as we extend gratitude to those who bless us with their presence during this magical season and throughout any year. As we flow into the month that reminds us all too often of giving, perhaps we can neutralize the cacophony of noise with our own flood tide of offerings that sources from the organ that benefits the most from our generosity: our hearts.

All of us at Equius send you and your tribe heartfelt waves of gratitude and invitations to tune into the unlimited abundance that surrounds us. Thank you for helping us appreciate our true wealth with the rich currency of your relationship.

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1. "7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude That Will Motivate You To Give Thanks Year-Round," Amy Morin, *Forbes*.

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