

Gratitude, Appreciation, and Thanks

by Pastor Marty

I have been reading the autobiography of Agnes Sanford lately. Of course, I have read it a few times already, but some books are so good that you get something out of them each time you read them. Agnes had a great deal of wisdom when it came to healing, and it is one of the reasons she became arguably the most instrumental and foundational trailblazer of the entire Charismatic Movement. She makes one statement that I often forget and am struck by its truth when I read it again: “the flow of God’s power demands a return of gratitude.” In one instance, she had spent several months praying for a woman, who’s healing was taking place at a very slow rate. This was extremely unusual as Agnes was exceptionally gifted in praying for the specific type of need. When she asked God why healing was proceeding so slowly, God told her the reason: “His healing love is a *flow*, and she was blocking the flow because she never felt or showed any gratitude.” Now, people are all made differently, and they show gratitude in multiple ways; however, the expression should be commensurate with the gift given and with the ability of the person who receives the gift. Saying “thank you” is common courtesy, and it may be all that is necessary in return for some favors; At other times, such as when someone gives significantly of their time, substance, and ability, the receiver needs to give back in a way that reflects the value of the gift they received.

When a significant gift is given, then a response should reflect that gift’s value.

In this context, I am defining “gratitude” as an attitude resulting in a gift given in return. If you ever go out to eat, you know that a tip is a customary response when service has been good; the better the service, the better the tip. Some places actually call it a gratuity, a gift that is given in return for a service that is provided.

We do a disservice to the server and the diner when we look at the tip as a tax, for it destroys the joy in both the gifts. I have had servers who put such joy in serving that it turned the meal into a celebratory experience, and I wanted to give more than just 20%. (As far as I can recall, I have never felt that way about paying taxes). I have also seen servers receive a tip that literally made their jaws drop in awe. We should avoid viewing the gratuity as just payment for work although we know it is how people pay bills. Doing so only minimizes their acts of service. Of course, many jobs do not require or expect any gratuity, and a “thank you” is sufficient in those cases; however, there are times even then that people go above and beyond their job, when a card, an email, or a compliment to a supervisor is warranted. Even that is an act of gratitude. It is important to remember that gratitude is not just for other people; we also benefit from it.

Having gratitude doesn’t just help other people; we also receive benefit on our end.

The principle of giving and receiving can be seen throughout the Bible. Paul tells us that as we give to the Church (an act he identifies as giving to God), it is given to us in return—in the same manner as our giving but with an increase that Jesus describes as a 30, 60, or 100 fold. It is not uncommon for some Christians to view this as making an investment in God. However, I do not believe this is a good way to see it. When a person gives with the thought and the intention of getting back, it no longer qualifies as a gift; there is now an ulterior motives involved. It has instead become an investment. An offering to God must be given freely just as He freely gave His Son to us. Nevertheless, He does promise to give back to us to meet our needs. How does this work? Does God have angels keep track of our gifts in a ledger and issue spiritual checks in

emergencies? We might find more clarity if we look at another area of giving and receiving that does not involve money: forgiveness. Jesus has told us that we are to forgive others as we have been forgiven, and if we do not forgive others, we do not receive forgiveness. Forgiving others opens the doors for our forgiveness to flow. Is this also a “ledger” condition? No, we received forgiveness from God while still in all our sins. Forgiveness is part of love, and we love because He first loved us. What is it if it is not a ledger issue? It is about our hearts. What God is telling us is that when our hearts can freely give, then they can also freely receive. If we have hearts that hold onto things, like closed fists, they are unable to give and likewise unable to receive.

Giving of love, forgiveness, or gifts is not a ledger issue; it is an attitude of heart.

People who struggle to forgive usually also find it difficult to receive forgiveness; people who are stingy with love normally don't value love in return; and people who don't give money freely to God are almost always in bondage. If there is no outward flow, there is little inward flow. When we have a heart that is open to giving, then it is also open to receiving. Gratitude is the attitude of heart that compels a person to put giving into action. The more we can give freely, the more we are able to receive in return. (Of course, there may be instances when people's brokenness prevents them from receiving even when they do not struggle with giving, but God provides healing for that). If we find that the flow in and out of our hearts isn't as free as we desire, is there something we can do? Absolutely! We can choose to nurture the heart attitude that brings forth gratitude. How? We form a habit of giving whenever we receive something, whether from God or from another person. However, we must be aware that the devil seeks to sabotage this good work. How? We start to think in terms of “paying back” any favor or gift, making them no longer free gifts.

How do we avoid that pitfall, that attitude that cannot receive a gift as it is meant? We become creative in our own giving, making it a personal challenge to find the most perfect action for a gift received. We take time to pray for God to supernaturally give us ideas; we give in more ways than just money or favors in return; we give in secret on occasion so the person is not able to associate the gift with us; we “pay it forward” to someone else who has a need; and at times, we receive and allow it to end there—for we seek a flow, not a zero-balanced ledger.

Gratitude in our hearts will eventually become something natural and inspired.

A few weeks ago, I attended a training session for a type of healing prayer intended to develop trust in God and help people with PTSD symptoms. One of the aspects stood out to me as sorely lacking in the lives of many Christians today. When we have nurtured gratitude in our hearts, it will bring forth another special type of fruit: appreciation. In this context, I am defining “appreciation” as an attitude that looks beyond the gift and is able to recognize and truly value the character in God and others that led to the gift in the first place. We may have nurtured in ourselves a habit of thanking God for the things He gives us, but that is only part of the process. Consider a scenario: you are driving to the store one day, and a rock hits your windshield. It was thrown up from someone mowing their lawn. It is a warm spring day, so a lot of people are out mowing their lawns, so you don't know who is responsible. Perhaps your insurance covers part of it, perhaps not. Either way, you find you have to pay \$200 out of your own pocket to fix the windshield, which now has a huge crack in it—and it is getting bigger. However, you simply do not have the money this month. You ask God to help you, and you suddenly get a check for \$200. You begin thanking God for providing the money you need. You are giving thanks to the Giver for the gift, so is anything missing? Yes.

You have thanked God for the gift, which is very good, but you have not yet shown appreciation. This is when you go beyond the gift to identify the reality behind it. You have said, “Thank You, God, for this wonderful gift.” However, you still need to identify what that gift means. What does it say about God Himself? Appreciation goes to the next level: “Thank You, God, that You are caring and generous and gracious and compassionate and trustworthy ...” and the list goes on. You have appropriately seen beyond a gift to recognize what it says about the giver.

Appreciation looks beyond a gift to see what it actually says about the giver.

Paul had a lot of reprimands for many of the churches he addressed in his letters. A few churches received relatively positive letters, like the church at Thessalonica. Paul didn’t need to reprimand them very much. On the contrary, it seems they were doing a pretty good job loving one another. However, he still encouraged that they “excel still more” in loving one another. It is the nature of Christianity that we are always able to become more like Christ; perfection has infinite potential. We can always grow more in love; likewise, we can always grow in character. Let’s compare the Christian life with education: If we say “Thank you” (and mean it), we have passed Elementary school; if we show gratitude for a gift, we have passed High school; when we have learned to turn thanks into appreciation, we are now in College. Appreciation means we look beyond the gift itself to the giver of the gift and the heart of the giver. However, as James tells us, all good things are from God above. All the true love we see in the world is a reflection of the love of the Father. As we know, we love because He first loved us. This is not just about an act of reciprocation: it is about the source of all that is good. There would be no life without His Life sustaining all of creation. All life comes from Him. Similarly, any time we see something good in this world, it is only present and

possible because He created us in His image. It may be a broken image now, but even shards of a shattered mirror still reflect bits of light. Every time we see something good in another person, it can remind us about the goodness of God.

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An act of generosity by a friend can be turned into a moment of appreciation as we recognize how truly generous our Father is. As we are forgiven by another for something we did or forgive someone else for their sin against us, it can remind us how perfectly forgiving the Father is toward us all. And most importantly—especially if we want to frustrate the devil to no end—when somebody does something hurtful to us, we can remind ourselves how God is **not** like that and focus on what He really is like. For example, if someone steals from us, we turn it into an opportunity to appreciate God for being generous and caring about our needs. Again, appreciation goes beyond thanking Him for the gift itself to become an act of identifying what it says about His character and nature. Still, this is not always as easy as it may sound at first. If we have any negative beliefs about God, doing this will immediately bring them to the front of our consciousness. At those times, we may feel dishonest about affirming His goodness, for our heart says otherwise. Developing a true habit of appreciation will force us to face the unhealed and unredeemed parts of us. Memories of the past that taint our image of God may surface. We must then remember that avoiding those things will only let them continue to pollute our image of God on a deep level. Instead, we now are able to confess to Him the doubts, fears, lies, and questions that plague us. This gives us the opportunity to listen to Him and allow Him to sanctify our hearts on an even deeper level.

Appreciation allows us to identify false beliefs compromising our image of God.

Once we have learned to have gratitude and trained ourselves to appreciate the infinite aspects of God's character (and good in others), we will begin to know true thankfulness. In this context, I am defining "thankfulness" as a way of looking at the world. This is a different type of consciousness than most of us know. Instead of gratitude or appreciation (or even a "thank you") being the result of an event, it becomes a constant thought and feeling inside us. We live as if we were just born on this planet, looking at everything with wonder and joy toward God. Let us think for a moment about Heaven. Most of us don't know what it looks like, and we may even have unhealthy concept of that. However, it will be better than anything we can imagine. In *The Last Battle*, C. S. Lewis describes it as the "Narnia within the Narnia" where every good thing is restored, better than it was before. If we can imagine anything beautiful, we are only imagining a sidewalk drawing of the real thing. If God were to let us visit for an hour, we would be filled with awe and wonder at the look, feel, and smell of it all. We would be overwhelmed at every plant and animal: every flower, tree, and blade of grass; every bird, butterfly, and beast of the field; and every waterfall, ocean, and landscape. Each thing we saw or touched would fill us with joy, both in its being what it is and in our being able to enjoy it. When we have a heart of true thanksgiving, we have that same sense of joy and wonder toward everything in this world, for we start to recognize that it was made by Him, and He gave it to us out of love.

True thankfulness sees everything in the world as made by God and given to us.

Developing gratitude, appreciation, and thankfulness takes work. Paul tells us that the more we behold Jesus, the more we become transformed from glory to glory. He is not just talking about seeing Him at the second coming; he is talking about seeing Him in our daily lives. Choosing to turn each event in our lives into a

glimpse of Him is practicing His Presence. Every moment we practice His Presence, taking the time and effort to imagine Him with us and in us, we are seeing Him with the eyes of our heart and spirit and are being transformed to be a little more like Him. However, this doesn't happen without effort. We are called to be the disciples of Christ. A word related to disciple is discipline. The writer of Hebrews tells us that if we are true children, we are disciplined. To be honest, I don't like that verse. However, there is something we often miss in that concept: the parent does not need to discipline a child if the child is self-disciplined—is showing self-control. Discipline (punishment) is only required where the disciplines (good habits) are missing. If we continue to grow in Christ and teach ourselves to be disciplined, there is no need of discipline.

Being disciplined is only required when we are living an undisciplined lifestyle.

Jesus said the Father will prune a vine so it will produce more fruit, an image related to discipline; however, He then said they were ***already pruned*** by the word He spoke to them. Listening and committing to do what His Word says negates any need for discipline. In the Our Father, it states that if we grow in the discipline of forgiving others, we never need to carry the crushing weight of our own past sins. The book of James tells us we gain strength in our faith if we hold fast to God as we experience troubles, and Jesus told us trials will come in this life. However, James tells us we bring extra troubles upon ourselves when we fail to follow through with those things we find in His Word. Trials may always come, but some can be avoided. If we take an active approach to transformation instead of a passive one, we can choose where we begin many of those lessons. If we begin to develop a heart of gratitude, appreciation, and thankfulness, we may find that we start to see the hand of God all around us—and perhaps we won't be distracted by the wind and the waves.