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The Power of Gratitude for You and for Others

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Perhaps, the most powerful motivation on earth is gratitude! And, it may also be true that gratitude is the rarest of gifts. The Bible tells of ten lepers who were healed by Jesus Christ. Ten had faith to believe they could be healed, but only one was grateful enough to give thanks for having been healed. The Bible relates Christ's response, "Were there not ten healed and is there only one who returns to give thanks?" He knew that more important than health was the spirit of gratitude, because without it, the newly gained health would bring few benefits. And, He knew that faith-to-be-healed, without gratitude to the Healer, would produce religion rather than dynamic relationship with God.

Gratitude is at the root of the noblest of human actions. And, at its root, gratitude stems from humility, just as certainly as ingratitude stems from pride and arrogance. When a person expresses gratitude – which in its most common example is with the words, "Thank you" – the person actually is saying, "That's very kind of you; I didn't expect it and I don't deserve it, but I am grateful for it." On the other hand, the absence of an expression of gratitude flows from a heart which expects and demands, because in its pride, that heart believes it deserves all that it gets and more. Gratitude is attractive; ingratitude is ugly and offensive.

Even commercial enterprises leave room for expressions of gratitude borne of humility. A waitress or waiter – or in the politically correct, but strained, lexicon, "waitperson" – who receives an expression of gratitude has their service ennobled and finds a spring in his or her step. A "gratuity" is a tangible expression of gratitude, but the benefit of words of kindness and of thanksgiving will endure longer than the money given in a "tip." Often, it is not the food or the prices, which bring people back to a restaurant, but the genuine expression of gratitude on the part of the owners, management and employees for the patronage. Gratitude is seductive and life giving. Gratitude invests dignity and honor into any legitimate activity, and genuine, sincere gratitude invests respect and value in the life of the one toward whom gratitude is expressed.

There is another dynamic to gratitude. Slothfulness is one of the curses of our age. Lassitude, indifference, laziness are characteristics of many in our society. And, at its root, slothfulness, like ingratitude, is borne of pride. Slothfulness is borne of the pride, which argues, "I deserve better and I shouldn't have to work for it!"

On the other hand, gratitude, which is borne of humility, engenders diligence, perseverance and industry. When a person humbly is grateful for what they have received, they will work harder. Even a person who has worked hard for what he or she has, must realize that others have worked hard, also, and have not been as “blessed,” or as “fortunate.” Therefore, even the “self-made” man or woman should act out of humility to express gratitude with diligence and hard work.

Slothfulness is one of the three great temptations of man, which were first manifested in the Garden of Eden. The wish to take a short-cut, to find an easier way, or to get out of work, is a common human motive. And, always, in all of its manifestations, slothfulness is borne of pride and arrogance. Slothfulness is borne of the ideas

- “I don’t have to do it the way others do it, I deserve an easier way.”
- “I’ll let others do my work for me, and I’ll take the credit.”
- “It’s unreasonable for anyone to have to work this hard.”

In all of its manifestations slothfulness is pride in action. And, the only solution to slothfulness is humility – the recognition that all of life is a function of grace, of receiving that which we did not deserve – for out of humility will grow gratitude and out of gratitude will grow diligence.

There are many for whom I am thankful today. God, parents, my brother, my wife, my children, my grandchildren (especially my grandchildren), my friends, my partners, my employees, and my patients. The reality and substance of that gratitude will be manifested in the efforts, which I put forth every day on the behalf of each of these. And, all of that effort is birthed of the knowledge that:

- I have more than I deserve;
- I am treated better than I should expect, and
- I have been blessed more abundantly than I could have ever anticipated.

At this season, and on this day, when we celebrate one of the noblest of human motives – gratitude -- let us manifest the effect of thanksgiving, which is diligence, perseverance, and industry. Today, let us all give thanksgiving out of a heart filled with gratitude. And, throughout the coming year, may each of us manifest that gratitude with our efforts on the behalf of those for whom we are grateful.

Health and Gratitude

In a 2009, article in the journal, *Critical Care Nurse* (December, 2009, an article appeared entitled, “Extending the Tradition of Giving Thanks Recognizing the Health Benefits of Gratitude.” The article quoted Cicero, who said, “*Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.*”

The article stated, “Much of the existing body of research on gratitude... has focused primarily on aspects related to psychological and interpersonal outcomes...some of this work has ...inform how a grateful disposition may enhance one’s physiologic health...(concluding) grateful people take better care of themselves and engage in more protective health behaviors like regular exercise, a healthy diet, and regular physical examinations.”

The article concluded that, “Some of the physical health benefits of practicing gratitude identified include the following:

- “Have higher levels of alertness, vitality, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness, and energy
- “Spend more time exercising
- “Report more hours of nightly sleep
- “Report a better quality sleep
- “Experience fewer physical symptoms such as headaches, coughing, nausea, or pain
- “Show heightened immunity in both healthy and sick persons.”

The article recommended, “As you gather with friends and family this holiday season, enjoying each other’s company, kindness, and affection, try to hold onto that warm glow that emanates when you let your loved ones know just how important they are and how much they mean to you. Rather than allowing that glow to evaporate, keep regenerating it throughout the year and distributing it as often as you can to those who mean the most to you. Gratitude is good for your head, good for your heart, and good for your soul.”

Happy Thanksgiving to you and your thanksgiving will be richer as you thank others and as you do it every day of the year.