

Eric Butterworth Speaks

Essay #9
ON GRATITUDE

I read an article somewhere that was entitled, "When in Doubt, Give Thanks!" It's an interesting thought, isn't it? How good it would be if we could just remember this simple slogan in every situation.

When things are going right for us, it is very easy and quite natural for us to give thanks; it is easy then for us to feel grateful and appreciative of things. But when things are trying our patience, our trust, and our faith, we may find it difficult to give thanks for our blessings; it seems that our problems and our troubles stand out much more boldly than our blessings. It is so much easier to criticize or condemn, to feel despondent, than it is to work up a sense of gratitude within you. If you haven't tried to give thanks in the face of uncertainty, why not try it? Nothing will draw you closer to God or to the sense of universal support than your feeling and expression of thankfulness.

Many homes have been destroyed because the art of thanksgiving was lost. Giving thanks does something positive both for the giver and the receiver. When a young man marries a woman, he is appreciative of the little things she does for him, and she is appreciative and thankful for him. But as it happens all too often gradually as the responsibilities mount, financial obligations must be met, and the newness of married life kind of wears off, where once there were words of thanksgiving, now there develops an attitude of criticism. This is sad. Will thanksgiving and appreciation restore happiness and harmony? Well, if your home relationships are not ideal, I suggest you may want to try it. Maybe you think it will be a last resort, but try it.

Remember, that thanksgiving is a quality of the heart, a feeling of gladness, gratitude to God for the bountiful and great good received, a sense of gratitude for the flow of life. Of course, there can be no real sense of thankfulness or praise or appreciation without this sense of oneness in and thankfulness to God.

Parents teach your children to be thankful. Bring them up in an atmosphere of thanksgiving and praise to God in the practice of thanking one another for every good received. Hearth and home will shine with happiness. Few of us really appreciate all of our blessings. We generally take all too much for granted. We forget to say, "Thank you," in terms of gratitude for the creative process, or to the people around us who may have been channels for its expression. We forget that there are millions of people in actual need of the benefits that we take so much for granted. We seldom think what it would mean to be blind or deaf, without food or shelter; we forget the many persons throughout the world who are homeless, hungry, and lonely, probably persons we can think of in our own community. We are so accustomed to our parents and families, that we do not think of the numerous children and adults who long to know where their parents are, who search for a father or a mother, a brother, a sister, an aunt, an uncle, just to feel that they belong somewhere, to have a sense of being loved and loving. Or occasionally we may consider another person's status in life, and we may admit that we really don't need a microscope to see our blessings. Usually, so many of us go along unmindful of the importance of maintaining an attitude of thankfulness regardless of how prosperous our affairs may seem to be.

John D. Rockefeller, whose name has long been a symbol of boundless wealth, was envied by many persons throughout his lifetime. But they forgot that he had extremely poor health, and no doubt he would have gladly exchanged all of his wealth for the good health of one person. Great wealth and fame entail burdens. You want to be thankful for small blessings, and remember that as our possessions increase, so do our responsibilities. Real happiness and contentment are not necessarily possessed by the rich and the famous; they are often found in some quiet, unpretentious individual who daily enjoys and appreciates small gifts and blessings.

Have you ever known someone who prayed for something earnestly that he deeply desired, and when his prayer was granted, he was so delighted that he consciously

forgot to say "Thank you?" A man once said, "If this prayer of mine is granted, I will never doubt again." Well, there came an outworkment in his life that was obviously an answer to the prayer, but a short time afterwards, he was wanting something else very much. Instead of affirming absolute faith the man was again at his old habit of doubting and wondering what the outcome of his prayers would be. This man would have resented a friend or relative accepting favors from him the way he was accepting favors from the divine flow in his life. Fortunately, the creative flow of the whole universe pays no attention to our selfish, thoughtless rudeness; God forgives and listens.

Does anyone have a right to resent the seeming lack of appreciation of his companions, when he himself is so indifferent about the blessings of life? It is elementary to say many persons are extremely religious when enveloped in trouble and almost irreligious when happy and successful. Fortunately, the source for all good within doesn't treat us according to our human whims but according to the divine standard. When we are tempted to criticize our fellow men and women of ingratitude and unkindness, we should instead be patient with them and remember those times when we have forgotten to be thankful. We need to count our blessings for each of the 356 days of the year instead of just on Thanksgiving Day or sabbath days. All of us have endless resources everyday, and endless reasons why we should be thankful for them. Some gifts we so often take for granted, our sight, our hearing, just the ability to talk and to eat. If we have never placed a value on these gifts, then let us try just to imagine being without them.

Giving thanks is like tithing--the primary object is to benefit others, but our giving thanks does increase our own benefit and joy. Let's don't weigh the reward of saying "Thank you." For the sake of our own self-respect and love, we want to make each day of the year a day of gratitude, and selfless thanksgiving. Usually, we link together such words as praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude. Samuel Johnson once said, "Gratitude is the fruit of great cultivation." Many centuries before him Aesop, the wise and witty Greek story teller, said, "Gratitude is the sign and spirit of a noble soul." Another writer has said that gratitude is the memory of the heart. But can gratitude ever be defined? At least can it be described more beautifully or more accurately than these above-mentioned observations?

So often a person may say, "That's gratitude for you." It suggests a lack of understanding of what gratitude means. Expectation of gratitude which may or may not be due destroys the spiritual worth of the gift and grooms the giver of the gift to certain disappointment. Real gratitude is so much more than a verbal "thank you." Gratitude is many things and has many characteristics. It is spontaneous, it needs no prompting. It comes free-flowing from the heart. Gratitude gives warmth and strength to the handclasp of friends. Gratitude is thanksgiving for every day and every moment of every day. Gratitude is independent of material things; it is self-perpetuating. The receiver of gratitude expresses gratitude. Gratitude is being alive to the good, visible and invisible. Gratitude is the joy one feels when he reawakens to another glorious day; it is the unspoken prayer in one's heart. Gratitude is an unlooked for gift of the giver, that blesses him much more than the receiver. Gratitude is given with love rather than with the expectation of remuneration. Gratitude in the heart of the giver begets gratitude in the heart of the receiver. Gratitude is a silent "thank you" deep in one's heart that thrills each of us with the daily wonders of just being alive and living. Gratitude is a strong desire to share with others the good one knows, the fullness of one's heart.

So whenever we say in a negative sense, "That's gratitude!" let us just remember some of these things we have just outlined. They give it a little bit better definition. This is gratitude. Gratitude is oneness. Gratitude is being in the flow.