

Rev Rita Message Oct 11 2020 (Thanksgiving)

Happy Thanksgiving! One of my favorite Thanksgiving stories is a Peanuts Cartoon showing Charlie Brown bringing his dog Snoopy his dinner on Thanksgiving Day. It is his usual dog food. Snoopy looks at his bowl and says, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world today is eating turkey with all the trimmings, and all I get is dog food. Because I'm a dog, all I get is dog food." Snoopy stares at his food for a while and then says, "I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."

Giving thanks and expressing gratitude is at the center of any expression of spirituality. Like any action that improves our well-being albeit mental, physical, or spiritual, learning to be thankful, developing an attitude of gratitude, creating a lifestyle of thanksgiving takes repetition, happens slowly, and in phases. When it becomes a strong habit, it changes our lives in significant ways.

Gratitude researchers have found that the simple act of making a list on a regular basis of what you are grateful list had many positive effects. People felt closer to God, slept better, felt more connected to others, and made more progress toward important personal goals. They also reported fewer symptoms of illness and higher levels of energy than do those in control groups. In the most recent BUC newsletter that you received via my Thursday email, has instructions for a Gratitude Jar. When winter comes and covid continues, it just might be helpful to keep our spirits up.

At the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century, a British preacher by the name of John Henry Jowett concluded that gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic. What did he mean? Well, gratitude, like a vaccine, can prevent the invasion of a disgruntled, discouraged spirit. Like an antitoxin, gratitude can soothe and heal the most troubled spirit. Like an antiseptic, it is a good preventive measure to help us feel well.

Charles Dickens once told Americans that they were all mixed up. He suggested that instead of having one Thanksgiving Day each year we should have 364. Spend one day complaining and griping. Use the other 364 to thank God each day for the many blessings God has showered upon them.

The Bible speaks a great deal about thanksgiving. There are many verses that encourage, remind, and instruct us to give God thanks for the many blessings in our lives.

In the Old Testament, there are many psalms that speak about gratitude and praising God for all of God's goodness and care.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, for God's steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting."(Psalm 103)

“Let us come before God’s presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto God.”

“Give thanks the Lord, for God is good; God’s love endures forever.” (Psalm 136)

In the New Testament of the Bible, the gospel writer Luke shares a story about thankfulness from the life of Jesus.

Luke 17:11-17 (The Message)

It happened that as he made his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met him. They kept their distance but raised their voices, calling out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Taking a good look at them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." They went, and while still on their way, became clean. One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. He knelt at Jesus' feet, so grateful. He couldn't thank him enough—and he was a Samaritan.(a.k.a. outsider)

Jesus said, "Were not ten healed? Where are the nine? Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?" Then he said to him, "Get up. On your way. Your faith has healed and saved you."

With this vignette in which only 1 out of 10 takes time to give thanks to the One who had made his recovery possible, Luke emphasizes both the rarity and the importance of a thankful spirit.

A man addressing an envelope at a post office counter was approached by a fellow who had a post card in his hand. The fellow said, “Sir, could you please address this post card to me?” The man gladly did so, and he agreed to write a short message on the post card, and he even signed it for the man, too.

Finally the man doing the writing said to the fellow, “Now, is there anything else I can do for you?”

The old fellow thought about it for a minute, and he said, “Yes, at the end could you just put, “P.S. Please excuse the sloppy handwriting.”

How often do you hear expressions of gratitude? Try an experiment. Keep track of the number of complaints you hear each day, and compare that with the number of times you hear people express sincere words of thankfulness. Include your own comments in the count.

In the midst of the frustrations and chaos of daily life, in the midst of pandemics and restrictions, it is so easy to overlook thanking God and thanking others.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells about an incident that taught her the principle of giving thanks in all things. It was during World War II, Corrie, and her sister, Betsy, had been harboring Jewish people in their home, so they were arrested and imprisoned at Ravensbruck Camp.

The barracks was extremely crowded and infested with fleas. One morning they read, in their tattered Bible, the words from the writer Paul found in I Thessalonians:

“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (I Thessalonians 5:18)

Betsy said, “Corrie, we’ve got to give thanks for this barracks and even for these fleas.”

Corrie replied, “No way I am going to thank God for fleas.” But Betsy was persuasive, and they did thank God even for the fleas.

During the months that followed, they found that their barracks was left relatively unsupervised, and they could do Bible study, talk openly, and even pray in the barracks. It was their only place of refuge. Several months later they learned that the reason the guards never entered their barracks was because of those blasted fleas.

Thankfulness doesn’t always come naturally to us. The dock worker turned philosopher Eric Hoffer, put it this way: “The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.”

Gratitude, thanksgiving, thankfulness unlocks the fullness of life. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, and a stranger into a friend.

Thanks be to God! Amen!