

Gratitude

When we first approach gratitude, we think of it as an audit, an inventory of all we have that we like. We like all our stuff – no surprises there. In fact, we not only enjoy what we “own” but we want to make sure we *always* have and own everything we now have so we insure it. We insure our possessions at replacement value. “How dare anyone *depreciate* anything we have!” we think.

So the cycle begins.

We try to keep the terms and conditions of our insurance clauses in pace with our inexhaustible consuming and thus enters, stage right, the moth and rust to corrupt.

Things wear out. “Blue boy,” the LA Venice Beach T-shirt is so threadbare from the hundreds of washings that it can’t even be used as a car rag. But then there’s “the major appliance failure of the week.” The damn car. The roof. The basement leaks. We need more insurance, *just in case*.

To step up to the next level of action play, we add resume writing to our list of avocations. We seem to be looking for a book entitled “How To Get a Different Job Requiring More Hours For Dummies.” We figure that if we work more hours than anyone else, the powers that be will think that they couldn’t possibly do it without us. We’re a can-do-everything-to-make-it-happen-essential-central-hub of the company machinery. *A cog in the machine?*

Welcome to the conglomerate. You’re fired. That is, if your cardiovascular system hasn’t already collapsed because the better nutrition, regular exercise and cultivation of a less-stressful and more meditative lifestyle of *being* practices instead of just *doing* advice hasn’t magically flown out of the pages of the how-to magazine articles and into our life. But back to the inventory of stuff – OUR stuff – for which we’re supposed to be grateful.

We got that chiming mahogany mantle clock while on a vacation at Cape Cod. That rocker came from her mother’s family and is irreplaceable and, of course, invaluable.

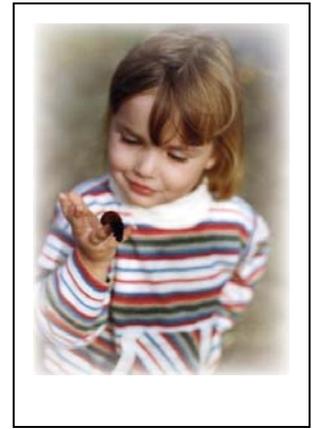
All that we’ve invested in computer technology – the training, the burning the-midnight-oil hours of hardened experience – but one, even mild, stroke – and it’s all gone. One house fire. One career loss and it’s gone. The auto accident – now that was the last thing we ever dreamt of appearing on our *Outlook*-syncing smart phone calendar. In fact, where are all of our business contacts going to be eight years from now anyway? Most of them weren’t around even three years ago.

The problem with equating gratitude as an inventory assignment is that Mr. Rogers already taught us that Mr. All-Mine was all wrapped up in himself and made a pretty small package.

As the days, weeks and years keep broadcasting to us, *everything is temporary*. We have it, then we don’t. Our frantic race to keep what we have, and acquire even more in case we do lose something, is a descent into the valley of the shadow of death – a march in cadence to the chant “If you’re not moving ahead, you’re falling behind!” *The Valley of the Dolls* (as in the movie). It is the gilded American Dream but it’s an illusion that can no longer serve as even a car towel.

Gratitude exists only in the present moment. It can’t be based on what *will* become because that’s always going to be *a maybe*. Neither can it be fully based on the past because if we are living in the past, we are missing the present and we wouldn’t be fully here.

Gratitude is now. *The Precious Present* if you will. It is an appreciation for the breath that enters our bodies and just as effortlessly leaves. It is a mindfulness that we are blessed to see what is around us *now*. An appreciation for the birds we hear and the



sweeping sound of the wind passing through the tree leaves. It is a thankfulness that the person, who is before us now, is the one whom we love unconditionally and they us. It is a sense that despite all that has transpired, in this moment, this one loves us anyway.

Gratitude is an understanding – an outlook on life. It's the gradually expanding assurance that there is an inner core within us – our soul – that is sacred. Our inner essence is holy and is something no other being can ever harm.

Gratefulness comes with an expanding awareness that our sacred core is inexorably and mystically connected to that same sacred soul within all others. This you know to be true, even though most of the time the world around us seems oblivious to our sacred connection.

Thankfulness flourishes when we are mindful that this same sacred connectedness we have with others is from and with the One Who made us – the One Whose name is too holy to utter casually. This One, Who loves us unconditionally, is even more emotionally involved with whatever is going on in our personal lives than we are with our own children.

So gratitude is about everything there is *now*. This is exactly why we live, work and play. We feel we've been given a front row center seat to this vibrant and exciting richness called "life." We are grateful by being fully alive and responsive in the present moment. It's jam-packed with a lot about for which we should be thankful. We see that as we open ourselves up to the many people, sights, sounds and things to touch and taste around us. We realize we are rich beyond our wildest dreams because we have been blessed with the capacity to reach out to those



we serve. We grateful that we already have *excess* capacity and that is why we give that extra time and attention and make the sacrifices which

we hope will make a genuine difference in the lives of the individuals with whom we



are meaningfully involved. In a way, each of us are a vital part of the great reversal of fortunes that has been running through history.

In ancient times, it might have been the birth of a child to a woman who was considered "barren" by a culture which judged a woman's worth by the number of children she bore. It happened to folk of modest means who were delighted that there was enough wine, after all, for the guests at their children's wedding. There were healings and resurrections. There was world changing and transforming power given by One without economic, political or physical power.

And now in our lives, at this time in history, we find ourselves involved in the same transformative and empowering work. You and I minister to people who feel old and frail and often abandoned by a self-absorbed and materialistic society. You and I are blessed to find ourselves helping to prevent a household from losing their home. We are fortunate in helping some regain their economic footing by finding a job or furthering their education. We heal the aching loneliness by being fully present in the lives of others.

This is why we live and work with gratitude. We are grateful that we are part of and have the means to contribute to something that is so much larger than ourselves. This is our purpose in life. That just as we feel compassion for those whom we serve, our lives are blessed to be watched over by the One Who has always passionately loved us, even before we were even born.

. . . Philip Siddons