

**“An Attitude of Gratitude” by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 19041010**  
**Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 and Luke 17:11-19**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 10 October, 2004**

A rich billionaire was flying to Chicago, when all of a sudden one of the starboard engines began trailing black smoke. He became very nervous and prayed, “O Lord, if you land this plane safely, I'll give one quarter of my fortune to you.” All of a sudden, one of the port engines began trailing black smoke, sputtered, and died.

The man prayed, “O Lord, if you land this plane, I'll give one half of all I have to you.” Just like that, the engines recovered, the plane leveled off, and it landed safely in Chicago.

As the billionaire got off the plane, a minister who had been seated behind him said, “I heard your prayer, and I just wanted you to know that I'd like to help you carry it out.”

The billionaire answered, “That's okay. God and I made a new deal. I promised if I ever flew again, I'd give it all to God!”

Other than being an example of the poor theological practice of bargaining with God, this incident is an example of how too many people fail to show gratitude to God. It is difficult to give thanks. Perhaps it is one of our most difficult tasks. Thankfulness or gratitude is an important part our lives.

Our culture is losing its manners. How many times have you given something to a child and he or she takes it without saying “thank you.”?

Have you said “thank you” yet today? Saying “thank you” to other people is important for building society and making it better. Do you say “thank you” to someone for passing the potatoes at dinner? For ushering? For cooking dinner? or for bringing home a paycheck? Do we thank our parents for giving us life, for feeding us and clothing us all these years? Do we thank our teachers for giving of their time and sharing their knowledge?

Saying “thank you” to God is so important for the building up of our personal lives. I hear the phrase, “Thank God” a lot, but I don't think we really thank God as often as I hear that phrase! It is simply an expression. Our gratitude to God too frequently is as generous as that of the billionaire's on the airplane.

There are two reasons we are not thankful enough. We keep our minds on things that are not going right and we believe we have more power than we actually do.

We keep our minds on things that are not going right. We worry too much. We don't thank the person passing the potatoes because we concerned about getting the gravy next. We don't thank our employer for a paycheck because we are worried that it isn't enough to pay all of our bills. We are too preoccupied with what is not going right to be thankful for what is going right. Our attention turns to what pains and hurts we have so that we neglect to give thanks for what is going well. I worry about whether you are listening rather than being thankful you came here in the first place when you could have been home sleeping in bed!

We believe we have more power than we really do have. We must constantly fight the crazy notion that we are God. We grow in knowledge, in size, in control of people or objects, and we begin believing that we are all-powerful. When I begin thinking I am successful because of my own efforts, it is time to remember that I am fortunate that I came from a caring family of origin and have had fortunate breaks, and that I should be thankful to God.

Gratitude is an important part of our lives. It is closely connected to our health. The story about Jesus and the ten lepers indicates a close connection between health and gratitude. Leprosy (now called “Hansen's Disease”) is a communicable disease. In Biblical times, if one contracted the disease, he or she had to leave home and live in a leper colony outside town. The ten persons suffering from leprosy said, “Jesus, have mercy on us. Heal us!”

Jesus said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” Priests in those days were like the doctor, the

police officer, and the judge all rolled into one. The priest had power. If you were healed, it was the priest's duty to check you and say whether or not you could return to your family and town.

The ten took off, looking for nearest priest. *While they were on their way*, they discovered they were cleansed—cured of disease. Only one came back to thank Jesus. What happened to the other nine? They were probably overjoyed. They probably ran home to tell their families whom they had not seen in years.

Ten were cured, but only one came back to thank Jesus. Jesus said to the one who had prostrated himself at Jesus' feet, "Get up and go on your way, your faith has *made you well*." Ten were cured of a disease, but only one was made well! The dictionary says that good health is to be sound in body and mind." This implies that although we are not physically ill, we are not sound in mind if we are not thankful.

The word "health" comes from the Old English word which is the same root of our word "whole."<sup>1</sup> The old word was pronounced "*Wholth*." You can hear the similarity to "health," "soundness of mind and body."

Ten people suffering from leprosy were cured of a physical disease, but only one was made whole. The one was made whole because gratitude. Gratitude makes better relationships with God and better relationships among people. When we are thanked, we want to do more. When we are not thanked, we don't care to do things again for others. Our gratitude, then, brings about a better spirit in society.

Gratitude is a big part of the Judeo-Christian faith. In the Hebrew Testament, thirteen times we find the phrase, "Give thanks to God, for God's steadfast love endures forever." It is said that a good Jewish person gives thanks one hundred times a day. And you thought it was a lot just to say grace at meal!

The proper stance of a grateful person is to give thanks to God when you awake in morning, thanks for a new day, thanks that the sun has arisen, that water flows out of the faucet in the bathroom so you can shave, wash your face, and brush your teeth, that the toilet flushes right, that you have clothes to put on, that you have silverware and dishes to set, food to eat, and gas and electricity to cook it with. You can see there is reason to give continual thanks to God.

Paul says that we are to give thanks to God even when we are suffering adversity.<sup>2</sup> What about negative times? Are we to give thanks? Are you kidding? Am I supposed to give thanks when I smash up the car? When I am sick with a cold? That sounds crazy.

I am not implying that we should say, "Gee God, I really love this cold. Thanks a lot!" That is masochism. I am speaking about our outlook on life, an outlook that produces growth. Even in adversity, we can find something to be thankful for. A thankful heart will pick up on our mistakes, improve upon them, and help you grow to be better person. With a non-thankful heart, on the other hand, you begin to feel a downward spiral. You suffer adversity and think that everything is going wrong and that you can't do anything right. With a thankful heart you will say, "If I just work on this skill, I will get better.

Your gratitude will make you whole; it will make you better person and bring you closer to what God wants for you. It will bring you closer to God.

I would like for us to close with a moment of silent prayer while each of us thinks of three things for which we are thankful.

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<sup>1</sup>*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*, © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Co.

<sup>2</sup>1 Thessalonians 5:18