



Gratitude

We have seen those who possess every advantage and yet are ungrateful, anxious and generally dissatisfied with life. In contrast, we have seen those who possess few of the world's advantages and yet are marked by gratitude, peace and joy. Like peace and joy, gratitude is a function of disposition, not situation.

Those with the habit of being grateful have eyes to see and ears to hear the many gifts that are daily given – a blue sky, a friendly smile, fruitful work, good food, bright colored autumn leaves, a helping hand, an encouraging word. Yet, is there ever a day when we cannot find some excuse for ingratitude, anxiety and dissatisfaction? We can always find justifiable reasons for these, if it is our habit to do so. But, what is the fruit of this bad habit?

Not only do the grateful see and hear, but they also have a heart to appreciate. Appreciation, the pause of delight, the enjoyment of the giftedness of a thing. Appreciation discerns one who stands behind the gift and enjoys not only the gift, but also the giver. Appreciation is relational joy mediated through a manifestation of the Good, True and Beautiful. Gratitude and appreciation are mutually reinforcing; one does not last long without the other.

We are made for both gratitude and appreciation, and when these are missing, the world becomes a dark, lonely and miserable place.

No other 'Lord of the Heart' should do more to guide us into joyous and happy living than Gratitude. How good and glad it is to be grateful! The joy is not merely that we have received a favor or a little kindness which speaks of goodwill and love, but that a beautiful thing has come out of some other person's beautiful heart for us; and joy in that other's beauty of character gives more delight than any gain or pleasure which can come to us from favors.

We lose this joy often enough because we are too self-absorbed to be aware of kindness, or are too self-complacent to think any kindness more than our desert. Young people are apt to take the abounding, overflowing kindnesses of their parents as matters of course; and so they come to miss the double joy they might have in a touch, a word, a look, a little arrangement for their pleasure, a thousand things over and above, so to speak, the love that is due from parent to child.

A kindness is like a flower that has bloomed upon you unawares, and to be on the watch for such flowers adds very much to our joy in other people, as well as to the happy sense of being loved and cared for. You go into a shop, and the shopkeeper who knows you (I am not speaking of big stores) adds a pleasant something to your purchase which sends you cheerily on your way—some little kindness of look or word, some inquiry that shows his interest in you and yours, perhaps no more than a genial smile, but you have got into pleasant human relations with him because he has given you a kindness. There are two courses open to the receiver of this small kindness. One is to feel himself such an important person that it is to the interest of shopkeepers and the like to show him attention. The other is to go away with the springing gladness of a grateful heart, knowing that he takes with him more than he has bought.¹

As we prepare for the upcoming Thanksgiving Day, let us go beyond the benign annual ritual of the turkey-laden table, “Tell us something for which you are thankful.” And, in the quiet of our heart, let us pause to remember some good gift given by one who cares. Let us contemplate the gift and the giver until the corners of our mouth turn up in a faint smile. Then, if possible, let us communicate our gratitude and be twice blessed.

¹ Mason, Charlotte, *Ourselves*.