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## The Price of Gratitude

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## The Price of Gratitude

How much does it cost, and how much effort does it entail, to give thanks? Gratitude costs nothing, requires very little expenditure of energy, and we have a limitless supply of both the causes for gratitude and our capabilities for giving thanks.

Imagine if we tried to count every benefit we have received in the past 24 hours: every thing that is required for life that we did not set in place, but which has been provided for us by God and by other people. We would grow tired from the effort long before we could complete the list. Reflecting on the realities in and around us with the intention of noting all the gifts we have been given is a powerfully beneficial activity.

Most of the processes that take place in our bodies operate properly and well, so that we can eat, think, act, and sleep, and rise refreshed for another day. We can breathe without the responsibility of consciously doing so; our heart moves blood throughout our bodies, drawing energy from food, water and air, for everything from walking and talking to sitting and listening. The world of nature supports us with our needs for daily sustenance as well as materials for clothing, housing, transportation, and communication. Society provides us with civilization, education, and human organizations. Some people love us just as we are. God loves us, continuously creates us, and relates directly with us. We have faith – a gift; we have trust and love.

All of the disparate items that have been named above are only the beginnings of a listing that can be extended for many pages.

Once we begin to reflect, we can easily find causes for giving thanks to God, or finding within us some sincere gratitude for those who taught us, helped us, worked with us, and who loved us even when we were perhaps not very lovable. The exercise of “counting blessings,” once begun, can become quite energizing.

Giving thanks is a double movement: First, we notice and appreciate the gifts we have received; and second, we become aware that the experience of giving thanks is itself an uplifting exercise. When we give thanks, we do not give away anything, but grow as human persons. God made us this way: we have an inbuilt capacity for appreciating what we have received. By acknowledging gifts, we become open to noticing more of them and to finding still further

causes for gratitude. Giving thanks is akin to floating in the middle of a stream: the only exertion required is to stay in the current.

Whenever we focus on the negatives in and around us, we waste energy, because the process is not in harmony with the ongoing movement of God's creating Spirit within us. Walking forward is easy, because it is wholly in accord with how we are made, while walking backwards is difficult, as it does not match well with our body form. Attending to all that is wrong with the world and to everything that is not as we might wish is like trying to move forward by walking backwards – an unnatural process.

If we spend even a short period of time in giving thanks to God or to other persons, we might notice how surprisingly easy and pleasurable it is. God assists and inspires us when we act according to our spiritual nature. Gratitude is as natural for us as the act of breathing. When we reflect on one or a few benefits we have received – even those that included suffering – our heart rate usually slows, our muscles relax, and we gain something priceless: peace of body, mind, and spirit.

How much does it cost, and how much effort does it require, to give thanks? If we do not regularly exercise heartfelt gratitude, our hearts and minds grow sick. When we give thanks, we freely live, literally.