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## The Thank You Antidote

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## The Thank You Antidote

In a confidence-building seminar, I learned to deal with negative comments directed to me in public situations by thanking the person for his or her remark or question, and finding something in what was said that could be restated, but also turned to the benefit of what I was trying to communicate in the first place. I found that the practice of searching quickly for a way to interpret negative comments in a helpful manner circumvented my tendency to make angry responses, and enabled me to become even more focused on my primary intention of conveying something of value to my listeners.

Of course it is easier and more natural to thank someone for a lovely dinner than to find reasons for gratitude when someone leaves a mess that we have to clean. But perhaps we can actually choose to build a very helpful habit, of using "thank you" as an antidote to bothersome and unwelcome thoughts and feelings of hurt or anger, even if we do not speak the words to anyone.

Most of us can recall one or more incidents when we were frustrated by our inability to obtain a desired response from another person, or by being unable to finish a small task. But soon afterwards, we found that we were better off precisely because the response we received, though not at first welcomed, enable us to turn to improve our relationship, or the task that we were not able to complete when we wanted, we now brought to a different and much better completion. Reflecting upon similar experiences gives us valuable information: some of the events that initially cause feelings of disappointment, hurt, or irritation turn out to be beneficial.

We can learn, through observation, that we have fewer and less intense occurrences of negative feelings when we intentionally consider that we can make different and more deeply satisfying decisions than if we had not encountered initial constraints to our plans or intentions. In a remarkable but completely human fashion, we can develop trust in our capacity for discovering fresh options, new possibilities, and helpful inspirations, when we look for realistic causes for gratitude instead of remaining with a disposition of disappointment and anger.

Honesty is essential when using the antidote of seeking reasons for giving thanks as a remedy for situations where our first reactions are of anger and hurt. God did not make us like robots, programmed to perform a very limited range of activities, without error. Rather, we are capable of new thoughts and alternatives, and we very often learn through making mistakes and through experiences of suffering.

Though many of us turn to God with our needs for help or healing, sometimes it seems as though we receive no answers. We might be caught in our own circle of negativity, incapable of seeing any solutions other than assistance for doing what we have in mind, or cessation of whatever causes suffering. We might be ready to give thanks if and when our prayers are answered in the manner we expect. But if we make an immediate search within ourselves for a basis for saying "thank you," we will often discover the beginnings of real help and healing, though in ways we had not imagined. For example, in accompaniment with a prayer for help, we can also give thanks for the trust we have in God that "all will be well." And it will, in the time and manner that is best for us.

In ever-surprising ways, the antidote of "thank you" has its gracious effect upon all that disturbs us.