

Introduction

Thanksgiving: The Endangered Species of Our Time

To come to terms with our beginning requires a truthful story to acquire the skills to live in gratitude rather than resentment for the gift of life.

-STANLEY HAUERWAS

Dear friend, thank you for reading this book. The fact that you have this book in your hands right now, and have set your precious time aside from your everyday hustle and bustle to read it, is a gift to me!! Thank you so much for your time; I really appreciate you for your attention. I value you and your time greatly and I do not take it for granted, not even for a second.

You may wonder why I wrote this book on thanksgiving, seeing that there are quite a number of books in this same vein out there. I have always had a thankful heart, never forgetting from where and how far the grace of God has brought me. The urge to write a thanksgiving book, primarily to thank God for all His goodness and the people He has used to impact my life, has been with me since 2013.

With a renewed passion and vigor, I am now on a mission to help save the “species” called “thanksgiving” from total extinction in the human experience. The fact that “thanksgiving” has become an endangered species in our human interactions today should be of concern to us all irrespective of our race, creed, gender, nationality, socioeconomic status, or whatever label that the world has put on you and me.

No matter where you find yourself on this planet Earth, I believe you may have encountered one or more acts of gross or veiled ingratitude. This may have left you with a sour taste in your mouth, disappointment, complete shock, bitterness, downright anger, or anything in-between.

Consider the warning in the following scripture about an ungrateful generation and compare it to what we see today:

“People will be lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good.”

2 Timothy 3:2-3

Experiences in life may lead us to convince ourselves never to render any acts of kindness to anyone anymore, be it friends, family members, co-workers, or total strangers. Unfortunately, this fast-moving competitive world is populated with too many people after instant gratification and an entitlement mindset. It is now normal to see kindness being totally ignored by the intended beneficiaries. Ever stood up or

attempted to do so to offer your seat in the subway to someone you perceive to need it more than yourself? Maybe it could have been an old lady, a pregnant woman, or a child for that matter?

If you look back, did you receive any acknowledgment for your kindness or largess of heart? Maybe that invitation was totally ignored or you were waved off, or the seat you offered was taken without even a nod of acknowledgment. As for the actual phrase “Thank you,” please do not count too much on receiving it. Even if a “Thank you” is given at all, try not to read too much into the facial expression of the sender because you will find that the look may in no way match with the true meaning of gratitude . . . The look may go more with thoughts like, “You should have done that long ago” or “What are you doing here anyway?”

You see, in this increasingly secular and godless world that we live in now, it is becoming rarer with each passing day, for us to appreciate the simple everyday gifts of life. Most of us take such gifts for granted or we attribute them to chance. Unfortunately, those of us in the church are often as guilty, if not more than, those outside the fold. How many of us, for example, actually thank God for the air that we breathe in free of charge each day? We are all guilty of ingratitude. We complain about the heat when others are freezing to death elsewhere. We complain about the cold when intense heat is taking the lives of people in other parts of the world or even another neighborhood in the same city or town that we live in. Do we bother to thank God for rain or rather we complain when it rains when elsewhere there are people who will pay anything to get water for daily living?

This brings to mind an experience back home in Ghana in the late eighties. The sudden influx of Ghanaian deportees from Nigeria added fire to an already dire situation of shortages due to the drought. I am talking from my experience there as a professional married to another professional and living in the upscale neighborhood of Cantonments. Money was not a problem to us, but I remember in those days of scarcities even we were affected. Those were the days when people had to queue for the staples of life like bread and rice. Those were days when you ate whatever you were fortunate enough to get to buy, and not necessarily what you would normally eat. Kenkey, for example, a maize-based staple of the coastal regions among the Fantes and the Gas, suddenly became a national staple for which people had to line up to buy when it was still cooking on the fire!

Even though we always bought things like rice in large quantities for storage and to be a source of supply for our less fortunate family members and friends, on one particular fine day in this period of scarcities, believe it or not, we did not have even a single grain of rice at home! We did not have any other carbohydrate source to take with the large pot of soup that we had prepared to share.

Suddenly I realized that there was nothing distinguishing those of us in Cantonments from those starving in the inner city slums and villages. I still remember to this day the speed with which I jumped into my car to make the short journey to my workplace at the hospital. We had just received the news that the much-anticipated rice donations from the Catholic Relief Service had been finally delivered that afternoon. We could now go for our allocations which turned out to be 50 kilograms bags each for us officers!

To say that I thanked God for that intervention will be an understatement, because the depth of gratitude that welled up in my heart that afternoon was beyond description. That bag of rice sustained us as a family and tied us over until the scarcities eased and we went back to our regular food and other supplies.

I want us to pause here for a moment and think about the timeliness of this bag of rice. Sure it was a donation from the Catholic Relief Service but why did it arrive at the time that it did and in those quantities?

Would you say that it was just by chance or mere coincidence that the donations arrived that afternoon? Even if you may want to attribute this to a chance event, what would be the probability of me being a beneficiary of this if at that time I was not working at the Police Hospital? The Police Hospital, just like the Military Hospital, was a regular recipient of such supplies because of our service to the people.

You see, my going to work at the Police Hospital in Accra as a young freshly-minted pharmacy graduate with “no connections” in a society where “connections” and “whom you know” were, and still are, the order of the day was nothing short of a miracle! Here I was, just fresh out of pharmacy school and waiting to be posted by the Pharmacy Council to undertake my mandatory one year internship training/National Service before taking my Pharmacy Qualifying Examination. The Police Hospital had just been opened in Cantonments, Accra, not too far away from the Police Headquarters and I remember wishing in my heart that somehow I would be posted there for my training. So you can imagine my joy when the Daily Graphic, the daily national newspaper, publication of the list of postings had my name as the first on the list of those going to the Police Hospital!

This was a wish come true for me and that was the beginning of a career path and life that still leave me speechless with gratitude. . . More to come later . . .

So you see, my dear friend, my attitude of gratitude is borne out of my life experiences of the grace of God which is always sufficient for us who choose to walk and abide in that grace no matter who we are or where we come from.

Listen to St Paul attesting to this inner peace and contentment in Philippians 4:12:

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

What a testimony!! What peace it exudes and what a place to attain to be!

By the way, when was the last time you actually took stock of your life and counted your blessings? Do you get time to reflect on your life as a gift from God? Do you realize how blessed you are that you have eyes to see the beauty of nature and ears to hear the musical notes of the nightingale?

This reminds me of the chorus of the 1897 “*Count Your Blessings*” song of Johnson Oatman Jr.

Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God has done! Count your blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

Perhaps the extraordinary life story of Helen Keller, the world-renowned author, educator, and activist, will inspire you into a life of daily thanksgiving. Did you know that Helen lost the gift of both eyesight and hearing at the tender age of 19 months after a short bout of “brain fever” as per her family doctor’s description? Are you aware that even though it was a struggle to learn to “communicate” with others, she did not allow her obvious disadvantage to prevent her from receiving the education she needed to be a blessing unto others? Are you aware that she received many accolades for championing better lives for people with disabilities? Listen to Helen Keller thanking God for her life here on earth and beyond in spite of her obvious limitations:

“For three things I thank God every day of my life: thanks that He has vouchsafed me knowledge of His Works; deep thanks that He has set in my darkness the lamp of faith; deep, deepest thanks that I have

another life to look forward to—a life joyous with light and flowers and heavenly song.”

My dear reader, let us learn to count our blessings every day for eyes to see, ears to hear, voice to speak, and the ability to take in the wonderful perfume of the flowers in bloom. Let us come along with Stevie Wonder, the famous musician, singer, and songwriter and sing “I just called to say I Love You,” to our God who has gifted us with all our five senses and faculties around us. If Stevie can sing that, surely we have no right to complain and be cynical; we have every reason to thank our God on a daily basis and show appreciation for all His manifold blessings that He daily pours on us (Psalm 68:19).

I pray that through the pages of this book we will be reminded of the many blessings to be thankful for. I pray that we will learn proven ways of developing this essential attitude of gratitude, how to express gratitude as a way of life, and above all experience the many spiritual and physical benefits of gratitude.

Happy reading and I am so grateful for you!!