

"The Power of Gratitude"

Excerpts from an address by Thomas C. Asher, C.S.
Given at Arden Wood's 2007 Annual Meeting

There's one thing that I have experienced and observed over and over about gratitude: it works! It changes things. It renews. It strengthens. It heals. Gratitude awakens us to the presence of good, and thus the presence of God. Gratitude gives us joy! In the August 2nd edition of our local newspaper, *The Sacramento Bee*, there appeared an article titled, "Gratitude is the path to happiness." It told of two professors, one from the University of California at Davis, and the other from the University of Miami, who spent the past nine years researching and writing a book on the impact of gratitude. Here is a summary of their conclusions: being thankful improves not just your happiness, but your relationships and your health. On the other hand, taking things for granted or complaining is destructive to happiness, relationships and health. ("Gratitude is the path to happiness," in *The Sacramento Bee*, August 2, 2007).

Sometimes we discount the link between gratitude and health. A Christian Scientist was doubled over with debilitating stomach pain. His prayers were going nowhere, until the thought came, "If you don't feel up to praying, you can at least sing." Singing was the last thing he felt like doing, but this seemed like an angel message and not his idea, so he pulled out a hymnal. The first hymn he opened to included this refrain, "I need Thee, O, I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee; O bless me now, my Saviour, I come to Thee" (*Christian Science Hymnal*, hymn #137). His thought lifted a few notches off his body, and toward the saving truth.

He turned to another hymn that said, "Here, O God, Thy healing presence/ Lifts our thoughts from self and sin..." (Hymn #109). He was particularly taken with the word "here." He agreed that right where he was, God was a present, freeing force. Sometimes we are duped into believing that God's healing power is real, but it's in another place, or off in the future,

or maybe with a more qualified person. It's HERE! It's always HERE. Wherever you are, God's saving truth is at hand.

Now the Christian Scientist found his hope growing and his voice strengthening. He sang for another 15 minutes, and with each hymn, his gratitude to God heightened. Joy and confidence displaced discouragement. And of course he was healed. The painful disability couldn't remain in the presence of genuine gratitude for God's uninterrupted care.

What gives gratitude such power? For one thing, it's difficult to be grateful and fearful at the same time. It's almost impossible to be thankful and discouraged at the same time. When we start praising God, we quit looking at the mesmeric material evidence. Gratitude is a way of saying, "Father, I'm ready to see things Your way." We stop poring over what seems to be, and start affirming what is. Thankfulness washes away the mistaken thought of separation from good. It helps us see God's hereness.

As we listen intently for how God sees us, our prayer changes from, "God is loving me," to hearing Him say, "I am loving you." *Our* words fade as we hear God's Word proclaiming, "You belong to me. You lack nothing. I am your life." We never hear God say, "You are stuck. You are incurable." Rather our Father says, "I have made you to reflect my perfection. I have made you spiritual and eternal, and I have made you to be grateful."

There is always something wonderful to celebrate because the ocean of blessings from God to man is lawful, scientific. Good is ever present, and we have every right to see and experience it. Let's recognize God as all-embracing Love, and rejoice that we are in His arms. Our gratitude can gently move beyond the gifts, to the Giver of all gifts.

The loving Giver of all does not give us anything to grumble about. When we slide into complaining or fault-finding, we are forgetting the will of God. Paul guides us: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thes. 5:18). We can refuse to *covet* another time, place, or person. Isn't it mortal mind that tempts us to envy instead of bless? Let's treasure the beauty and order of even the most familiar sights. We can recognize that *this is* God's moment and that we dwell in His harmony. We can understand that God cannot fail to perfectly care for His children.

Mrs. Eddy leaves no room for a Christian Scientist to be a complainer. *The Manual* By-law reads: "Gratitude and love should abide in every heart each day of all the years" (*Manual of the Mother Church*, Art. XVII, Sect..2). Our Leader wasn't asking us to do the impossible. She was asking us to be ourselves. It is man's God-given nature to recognize the Father's tender mercy and to express thanks for it. God hasn't made man to be dense or unaware of His goodness. Gratitude is natural and normal to us. It's standard equipment. It's the way God has made us to be. "Deity was satisfied with His work," our Leader tells us, and so the likeness of Deity must also include full satisfaction (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 519:3 only).

There is no "versus" in man. There is no thankfulness versus moaning, no fidelity versus indifference, no humility versus pride, no obedience versus disobedience. Man has *one* real nature. It is filled with unopposed attention to the goodness of God and His creation. Man is not in a perpetual tug-of-war between right and wrong. Each one of us is made to prize and cherish the Father's ever-new provision for His children.

God allows no disorder, no deformity in man. Let's release this burdensome notion that we have to re-create some aspect of health. Our work is to understand God, pure good, as the *only* source, the uninterrupted source of our being. We are not praying to add or subtract anything from our identity. We are praying to see our original and eternal being. We don't re-introduce perfection to God's man, rather we discover that perfection is the unchanging divine design. Eternal Love knows only eternal Love.

Every bit of our identity comes from Spirit. Man is not a blend of immortal and mortal elements. Paul asked the Corinthians, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" One Bible translation puts it this way, "Isn't everything you have and everything you are sheer gifts from God?" (I Cor. 4:7 in *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson). We can place less and less credence in the belief that man is a hodgepodge of genetic and environmental factors. We actually are God-defined. We receive all that we will ever need from divine Love, including a grateful heart.

Even if we feel stranded in an unhealable problem, we can prove the liberating power of acknowledging God's present love. Paul and Silas proved this when they "prayed and sang praises unto God" at midnight in the Roman prison (Acts 16:25). What was there to be grateful for? Wasn't it the truth of God's care? In spite of the injustice and pain, they saw God's presence and were thankful for it. God's love was more palpable, more certain, than the marks left on their backs by the whips. By giving thanks they refused to bow to the intimidation of mortal mind and soon found themselves liberated.

We too can be liberated by the truth that a perfect God manifests Himself as a painless and unbound man. We can understand that since God is un-decaying, His precise likeness is un-decaying. The Christ, the eternal unity of cause and effect, Father and son, shows us that man cannot really experience what God doesn't experience. The Christ, Truth, breaks the apparent grip of suffering.

A young girl, a Christian Scientist, faced an aggressive seasonal breathing problem that kept her out of school for weeks at a time. During these periods she struggled for even the slightest bit of air, and she was able to retain little food. At a particularly desperate period, her parents called for a Christian Science nurse to visit. The nurse sat gently, calmly, next to the struggling girl. The nurse read several passages from *Prose Works* by Mary Baker Eddy, including this one: "In this eternal harmony of Science, man is not fallen; he is governed in the same rhythm that the Scripture describes, when 'the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy'" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, 259:18).

It dawned on her that *before* she ever knew her human parents, she had a spiritual relationship with God. She saw that she was not bound to time, but actually forever at one with God. She felt she was *there* when ‘the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.’ In the glow of this insight, she got out of bed, happy and free. The difficulty tried to present itself a couple more times in the next few years, but it was met with assurance, and completely vanquished. The truth she saw that day has stayed with her and remained a foundation of her prayers.

In Christian Science healing, we look for the *God-honoring* thought. We contradict, or speak against disease by employing what Mrs. Eddy calls “opposite thoughts.” In dealing with patients, she writes, “Show them how mortal mind seems to induce disease by certain fears and false conclusions, and how divine Mind can cure by opposite thoughts” (*Science and Health*, 417:29-31). By taking opposite thoughts—thoughts exactly opposed to the specific claim—we find ourselves getting off the mountain side and on the mountain top.

How do we stay confident and thankful when the evidence of disease seems unchanged for a long period of time? A sentence in the textbook pinpoints three reasons why a cure may seem difficult. Our Leader writes, “What renders both sin and sickness difficult of cure is, that the human mind is the sinner, disinclined to self-correction, and believing that the body can be sick independently of mortal mind and that the divine Mind has no jurisdiction over the body” (*Science and Health*, 218:12).

It may be helpful in healing to take the opposite of these beliefs: First, I am inclined to self-correction; I am ready to oppose and abandon the belief of fear, or intemperance, or any other godless habit. I reflect self-control and self-government. Second, I recognize that the body cannot be sick independent of mortal mind. I understand that healing is not about adjusting matter, but disarming any seeming power of individual or collective mortal belief. Third, I realize that divine Mind has total jurisdiction over the body. Divine Mind is the basis of all action and health.

We don’t admit to authentic sin or sickness and then

try to knock these down with darts of truth. We immerse ourselves in the scientific fact that God cannot do less than lovingly sustain His child. We refuse to label ourselves as anything but “man.” Whatever the challenge, it is never too powerful, too entrenched, too advanced, for God’s love to destroy. The sometimes tempting “quick fix” offered by medicine turns out to be a trap, for it subtly leads us into more and more dependence on matter, and less and less trust in Spirit. Let’s stay on the pathway Jesus has marked out. Jesus’ way of healing is simple, full-hearted reliance on our Father.

Animal magnetism, the seeming action of evil, wants us to feel as though certain problems are inescapable. So we need a daily rejection of belief in a power distinct from God. God is the only true power. Animal magnetism wants us to neglect this work, and to feel reluctant to open the Bible and *Science and Health*. Defeat this resistance! Love the books. Open the books. Love our Way-shower and Leader enough to ponder and obey their teachings. Great things will happen!

One of the tactics of animal magnetism is to dupe us into blaming. Be careful what words you put after the word “because.” We are affirming a cause apart from God when we think or say, “This problem is because of my age, or because of my parents, or because of that accident, or because of my fear. The real “because” is always divine Love. Because divine Love has always moved and owned you, fear has never moved or owned you. We disprove the seeming cause by understanding the true cause.

The essence of this Science, and the point that we are supremely grateful for, is that God creates no wickedness, no suffering, so these have no authority. God could never empower anything to oppose the goodness of His creation. God is loving us, each of us; we understand this and are forever thankful. There can never be decline or decay in God’s love for us. There is no breakdown of the divine order in which Love maintains the consistent identity of all its ideas. We have not lost any of our “man-ness.” Our spiritual, eternal, God-defined identity is intact. This is cause for deep thanksgiving.

Testimonies of Healing and Gratitude

Several testimonies from guests, patients, and residents of Arden Wood were shared by Lesleah L. De Frisco, the Director of Christian Science Nursing, and by Carolyn Lewis, the Director of Residential Services, at the 2007 Annual Meeting.

Here is a selection:

This past year, one of our residents was finding it increasingly difficult to read the print of the *Christian Science Sentinel*. He was thinking it was time to write to the Christian Science Publishing Society and inquire about the print in the periodicals being improved to make it easier to read for persons having trouble with their vision. Then one day, as this dedicated metaphysician was in the midst of their daily prayerful listening and acknowledging, there was a sudden feeling of the Christ presence. It came as a sense of warmth and an abiding presence that he recognized as entertaining an angel. It lasted for almost an hour. At this point, the resident picked up a *Christian Science Sentinel* and read it without any difficulty. He took off his glasses and the print remained clear, distinct and easy to read. His eyesight was healed, and he no longer needed his glasses!

The resident experienced an ever clearer realization of the unchanging spiritual identity of man that is never separate from Soul, always intact, functioning in perfect order, and the reflected image of Father-Mother God.

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An individual came to Arden Wood for Spiritual Renewal and after a few days was presented with a challenge that required support and assistance on the nursing floor. This challenge included a severe, constant headache that interfered with her regular activities and made it difficult to move at times. She

spent a few weeks studying and praying and was so grateful for the all of the nurses' tender loving care and support. She said that there were times that she wasn't sure she was going to make it, but then one of the nurses would come in and share just the supportive Truth that was needed. She said she really needed to feel the love of God, and she felt it like she never had in her lifetime—and it was expressed through each one of the nurses. One day she realized the pain was completely gone and she had regained her freedom and dominion. Love was indeed the healing balm. She returned home, healed, to a grateful and loving husband.

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Another healing that we have witnessed is a woman who fell while out in the public with some friends. They helped her to get up and drove her home. She lived alone in a large house with several flights of stairs. There was a deep gash in one elbow and she was having difficulty with mobility, unable to get up the stairs. The next day she couldn't get out of bed. She called Arden Wood, and after a home visit from the Christian Science Visiting Nurse to assess her care needs, she arrived by ambulance and was cared for in bed for the first several days. The nurses skillfully cleansed and bandaged her elbow. Her mobility and freedom of movement increased daily and she was soon able to sit up, and stand and move to a chair with two nurses assisting. In a few weeks, the wound had healed perfectly and she was able to take a few steps with a nurse. Before long, she was walking in the hall with a walker and then the nurses were able to instruct her in safely going up and down the stairs. She has returned to her home healed and is doing well.



ArdenWood

445 Wawona Street
San Francisco, CA 94116-3058
PH (415) 681-5500 FX (415) 379-2112
www.ardenwood.org

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Thank you.