

“It was inevitable,” writes Beverly Nichols in his memoir *All I Could Never Be*, “that in the garden I should begin, at long last, to ask myself what lay behind all this beauty. When guests were gone and I had the flowers all to myself, I was so happy that I wondered why at the same time I was haunted by a sense of emptiness.”

“It was as though I wanted to thank somebody, but had nobody to thank; which is another way of saying that I felt the need for worship. That is, perhaps, the kindest way in which a person may come to God.”

“There is an interminable literature on the origins of the religious impulse, but to me it is simpler than that. It is summed up in the image of a person at sundown, watching the crimson flowering of the sky and saying—to somebody—‘Thank you.’”

Gratitude, according to recent research, is good for you. Grateful people report higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels of depression and stress. Gratitude often nurtures generalized compassion and altruistic behavior. And there is some evidence that gratitude is good for your heart.

This doesn’t mean, reports Dr. Robert Emmons, that grateful people take a Pollyannaish view of the world. They don’t ignore complaints, burdens, hassles. But when they look at life as a whole, gratitude encourages them to identify some amount of goodness in life. People who cultivate the *practice* of gratitude are leading happier and healthier lives.

These current studies are confirming what philosophers and religious teachers have known for centuries. Cicero, a hundred years before Jesus, wrote “There is no quality I would rather have, and be thought to have, than gratitude. For it is not only the greatest virtue, but is the mother of all the rest.”

Meister Eckhart (13th century CE) famously declared, “If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, ‘Thank you,’ that would suffice.” And G. K. Chesterton (early 20th century) believed, “The test of all happiness is gratitude.”

Jesus sends ten lepers to see the priests, who must verify their healing so they can be reintegrated into society. If these lepers had looked at their skin when Jesus sent them off, they could only protest, “Why are we going to the priests while we are still lepers?” It was only *on the way* “they were made clean.”

What if these lepers protested, “Do you know what will happen to us if we breach the boundary between the clean and the unclean?” What propelled these ten lepers to do what they were told without any evidence to support their action? Hope? Faith?

If they all had hope, faith even, Luke implies only one had gratitude. And true to form, Luke tells us the grateful one was a Samaritan. He was not only physically ill, but a social outcast and a religious heretic. Isolated by illness, by culture, by religion, he turns back and gives praise to God.

When the Samaritan realized he was healed he must have also remembered he was a Samaritan. He couldn't show up with the others, the Jews, to be blessed by the priests. He was still an outcast, culturally and religiously.

The others, the Jews, did what Jesus told them to do and what their culture and religion required them to do. Does that make them ungrateful?

Gratitude is a learned skill. Nothing is owed to us in this life, not even the innocence of a blue sky. Great art is the art of thankfulness for the abundance of every moment. (Christian Bobin)