



Art Holt photo

THE DYNAMIC POWER OF GRATITUDE

How will the story of your life's journey be written? Will it be a series of successes and celebrations, or will it be the tale of a downward spiral, filled with difficulties and disasters? For many, their story will be a bit of both; happy days and sad, challenges and victories, lessons faced and eventually learned, growing up and growing wiser with each new experience.

In looking at your life's events you'll probably find that some were positive and some were negative. Looking closely and honestly, you'll see how you responded to each of those events, your attitude, that determined how the event turned out.

The difference between a positive attitude and a negative one can make the difference between success and failure. As author Jim Gallery put it, "The difference between a buoyant, optimistic outlook and a pessimistic approach to life spells the difference between happiness and sadness, between

joy and despair, between action and emotional paralysis."

A few nights ago we watched a television interview with Michael J. Fox, and regardless where you might stand on stem cell research, the fact is that Fox personifies a person who is buoyant and optimistic at a time when he could be in despair. He said he knows he will never get better, that his body will continue to disintegrate because of the Parkinson's Disease, but he blesses his condition because it has brought him along a path of life that is far more meaningful than it was as just an actor.

We all go through favorable experiences and difficult challenges. We face problems we have brought upon ourselves, and circumstances that seem to be beyond our control. Life isn't always fair and not necessarily easy. But the important thing is that how our life turns out depends on how we deal with

each step along the way. When we face our adversities with optimism and faith, when we are able to rise above our challenges, we improve the quality of our lives.

If you are familiar with the life of the Apostle Paul, you'll recall that he began as a zealot, out to persecute the followers of Jesus, but after his own revelation on the road to Damascus, he became a champion for the development of Christianity. In his travels he established little missionary churches throughout the Mediterranean, but eventually had to face house arrest in Rome for his defiance of the Roman Emperor. In one of his letters to his followers in Philippi he wrote, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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."

Paul had learned that his happiness had little to do with what was going on around him and more to do with what was going on inside himself. His attitude became his path to contentment.

So, how do the rest of us find our own state of contentment? Is it simply a matter of choice or does it require that we change our outlook and our attitude first? The process is actually quite simple, but it is not one in which most of us are familiar or have been trained.

Remember our old math classes in high school when we first became exposed to 'word problems'? I remember my teacher saying that if we could first define the problem we were half way to solving it. And she was right. Going through the details we would identify all the elements of the problem, set them in order and go about solving the problem one step at a time, until it was complete. In addition to arithmetic, however, we were being trained to look at the world around us as a series of problems; all of which needed to be defined in detail and then solved. Business models have been set up that way for many years. Medicine works by examining the body for physical problems. Psychologists want you to talk about your problems. Governments are besieged with community problems. So, whether we're dealing with numbers or human relations we've been focused on the 'problem' for many years.

The time has come to think outside the box, and

something new has been introduced that is revolutionizing our approach to 'problem solving.' In short we are learning to ignore the problem and give our attention to the positive side. It's called '*Appreciative Inquiry*' and it asks us to look at all the things that are working well and seek ways to make them work even better. It appears that Pollyanna was onto something really big. '*Appreciative Inquiry*' takes into account that although there may be some problems, if we focus our energy on the positive side, look at what is working and ways to make it work better, the problems become smaller and smaller and eventually dry up from lack of energy.

"The traditional approach to change is to look at the problem, make a diagnosis, and find a solution. That means we're giving all our energy and attention to what is wrong or broken; and since we look for problems, that's what we find. By paying attention to problems, we emphasize and amplify them, and we lose sight of and take our energy away from everything that is right, good and already working. When Jesus said to 'seek and you will find,' perhaps he might have been better understood if he had said 'whatever you are finding, you've been seeking.' Looking for the problem, or looking for the good?"

For instance; we want to travel from point A to point B, but there is a large mountain directly in the middle of the two. Focusing on the problem we look for ways of blowing up the mountain or drilling a tunnel directly through it. With '*Appreciative Inquiry*' we recognize that there is a beautiful and scenic road around the mountain and so we look for ways we can straighten a few dangerous curves, add scenic outlooks at the points of spectacular view and enjoy the ride.

While *Appreciative Inquiry* is quickly becoming an effective business process, the principle behind it is a basic part of our Spiritual metaphysics... "whatever we give our attention to will multiply." ***Like attracts like:*** doubt begets failure; anger begets aggression; etc.; but, forgiveness begets understanding; faith begets success; giving begets receiving; love begets love; and gratitude begets contentment...which is why Thanksgiving could be the single most important day of the year.

I'll never forget learning the *Appreciative Inquiry* lesson first hand. Operating a small

marketing service business I was always looking for new business or trying to collect from clients reluctant to pay their bills. It was both frustrating and a financial challenge. It went on that way for about two years, a month-to-month struggle for survival. That is, until I learned a valuable spiritual principle, the law of attraction. It's based on the vacuum principle, since nature always rushes to fill whatever vacancy has been created, but what goes in to fill the vacuum depends solely on your state of mind when the vacuum is created. Slowly, the idea began to sink in. Instead of putting my frustrated energy into soliciting clients, or running around trying to get them to pay up, I realized I needed to change my attitude and my expectations. The first step was to become thankful for the work I had been given to do, and then to complete those jobs to the very best of my ability. Since completion creates a vacuum, I began to expect good paying new assignments to fill the void. The turn around was immediate. My energy was re-directed to providing creative work, and I was empowered by a grateful heart. My expectation was that the Universe (God) would direct new assignments my way, filling the vacuum according to Spiritual principles. That was twenty-three years ago and it has been my guiding philosophy ever since. I placed a little sign on my desk that read, "The Key to Getting Business New is Gratefully Completing What I Have to Do."

Rev. Nancy Norman experienced the spiritual principle of gratitude first hand. She says: "The little dark cloud seemed to hover above me at all times, ready to pour down its doom and gloom. Recently divorced and unsure of my future, no job or career in sight, financially insecure and feeling very alone, the little dark cloud never left my side. What was I to do? I didn't even know where to start. Then an idea came to mind. It was as if someone was telling me, "Stop focusing on what isn't right about your life, and begin seeing what is good and positive." It may not have been an original idea, but it had never occurred to her before.

"A plan began to formulate. She sat down and started to list every good and positive thing she could, going back as far as she could remember. As she wrote, her world began to seem just a little friendlier, as she realized that she had much to be grateful for. Her feelings of doom and gloom began

to ebb away and she decided to carry the idea of gratitude, focusing on what was good and right in her life, a step further. She took a small notebook with her everywhere she went that day to list things she was grateful for as they occurred. When she took her morning walk she began to see the world with new eyes; the scenery began to look more alive, colorful and refreshing. The wild flowers and animals reminded her that the world is really an abundant place and she recorded her observations in her portable "Gratitude Book."

As the day progressed, blessings began pouring in. When she picked up her mail, rather than bills, three checks arrived. Unexpected income! A neighbor brought her a homemade pie, saying she didn't know why, she was just thinking about her. Another friend gave her a painting he had commissioned by a well-known artist. It all went into her Gratitude Book and by early afternoon, the little dark cloud gave way to sunshine."

That was all years ago, the bottom rung on a ladder of success that continues to this day. As to the Gratitude Book, she is still writing in it regularly, several editions later, for she has come to know there is no end to life's blessings and she wants to record as many as she can.

Gratitude is not the result of things that happen to us; it is the result of an attitude we cultivate by practice. The more we are thankful for, the more we will find to be thankful for.

Harville Hendrick's book *Getting the Love You Want* became a popular manual for relationships. The first step to getting the love you want is to *appreciate the love you have. The universe always gives you more of what you are focusing on.* Jesus taught, "To him that hath, more shall be given; to him that hath not, even that which he has will be taken away." (Matt. 13:12) Jesus was teaching a supremely important metaphysical principle, the very key to the manifestation of abundance. Jesus was teaching the importance of concentrating on what we have, rather than on what we lack.

Author Alan Cohen observes it this way. "We can look at any experience in two ways: through the eyes of lack, or the eyes of plenty. Fear sees limits, while (gratitude) sees possibilities. Our attitude will be self justified by our personal, internal belief system. When we change our attitude from fear to gratefulness, our gratitude will sustain us wherever

we go.”

Two of my colleagues have developed a whole ministry based on Gratefulness. They do gratefulness seminars and workshops and have developed a special computer program available on CD for using your computer to post a daily list of gratitude thoughts, each one prompting a positive affirmation as it is entered in the list. If you're interested in ordering a copy for yourself just go their website, www.unitynow.com.

Why focus on gratefulness? Here's what the Reverends John and Lauren McLaughlin have said, and I couldn't say it any better...

“Gratefulness fosters prosperity. When you begin to express gratefulness, intentionally, for the material things in your life that bring you joy, the Universal law of Mind-Action is activated and you begin to draw into your life experience, more things like the ones for which you are grateful.

“Gratefulness accelerates healing. Recent medical studies have proven that people who are ill, heal more quickly and are able to resume their normal lifestyle much sooner, if their attitude toward their healing process and the gift of life in general, is one of gratefulness.

“Gratefulness harmonizes relationships. Expressing gratefulness for the good relationships in your life expands and improves those relationships. And gratefulness is also a wonderful tool for healing past relationships, releasing old hurts, because gratefulness evokes healing in the heart, as well as in the body.

“Gratefulness establishes the climate for joy. Gratefulness is the highest level of consciousness over which we have control, so by learning to establish and maintain a high level of gratefulness, we open the door to much higher levels of joy in our everyday experiences.

Often times as families gather around the table for Thanksgiving, each member takes a turn in expressing something for which they are grateful, and often the remarks are made in the spur of the moment. This year, in the days leading up to your Thanksgiving celebration, I invite you each to take some quiet personal time alone to contemplate and perhaps list the things that have had major impact on

your life. Acknowledge those things that have truly been positive and a powerful influence, but recognize as well the challenges you have faced and the lessons learned as a result, for in many cases, these may have had an even greater influence and made you all the more stronger and more capable.

Then bless them all and give thanks. Your feelings of gratitude at your Thanksgiving table will not only lift your spirits, they will do the same for everyone else as well.

Richest blessings,

Art & Dottie Holt



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A C H R I S T M A S E V E M E D I T A T I O N

Take a few moments to sit quietly and allow yourself to be in a state of reflection and meditation. Breathe deeply and slowly as you begin to relax. Feel the freedom of spirit filling your imagination with mystical visions of wonder and enlightenment.

Christmas Eve!

There is no other evening quite like it. It is a time of joy and celebration, and perhaps a time for a mystical voyage in your imagination.

Christmas Eve. Outside, winter has set upon the land, a soft, light blanket of snow freshly covers the evergreens and lawns and the roof tops throughout the neighborhoods. In town the shops are sparkling with bright and colorful lights strung up and down the street, and as people hurry from store to store, the festiveness and the glitter of the season calls out to everyone. Horse drawn carriages glide along the streets, with couples sitting close together beneath the warming blankets of wool and fleece, while the melodies of Christmas music drift through the crisp night air.

It's a time of merriment, laughter, neighborhood parties and gatherings. For many it's a time for traveling, to be together with family and friends. It is a frenzied time of shopping, and wrapping, and decorating your home. But it's also a relaxing fire in the fireplace and a mug of spiced cider; candles flickering on the mantel reflected in the silver and gold ornaments hanging on the tree. It's a time of gift giving, of thinking of others more than yourself. It's a time to love and forgive, and be filled with joy and peace, like no other time of the year.

Love, joy, and peace! A special inner peace fills us, a peace that may be the greatest gift of the season. Where did it begin? Perhaps it was all a part of the original Christmas eve.

On that night, two millennia ago, in a little

town called Bethlehem, the people in the inns, on the streets, and in the homes were not celebrating, for they were unaware that there was anything to celebrate; they were in a state of anxiety about the roman census. There were no festive lights filling the town, or happy carolers singing joyous songs; just a few torches anchored to the corners of adobe clad buildings, casting flickering shadows on the nearly empty streets, and in the clear but moonless sky, darkness abounded.

As the night progressed, people began to settle down on their straw filled cots, children nestled together to share their warmth with each other while a small dog curled up on the floor at their feet; in the window the cat, waking up for the night, sat keeping careful watch on the path below. The conversation between mother and father came to an end and they too began to settle down for the night.

Out on the edge of town a young man walked beside the donkey which carried his very pregnant and tired young wife, along with a small bundle of their clothes and other simple possessions. This was the end of their long journey, but they had arrived after dark, the hour was late, and the few homes that had rooms to let were now full.

All was quiet, and the couple who had knocked on numerous doors only to be turned away, made themselves as comfortable as they could in a shed that they were finally able to arrange, sharing the space with the resident farm animals. Together they gathered fresh straw and covered it with a small clean blanket they had carried just for this occasion. The mother-to-be prepared to give birth, and her husband kneeled at her side.

Meanwhile, one-by-one in some of the dwellings -- an elderly woman just three doors down - a couple together next door to her, and a man on a roof-top across the street - and a few others here and there -- all lay awake in the silence of the night, feeling a growing sense of God's presence, stronger than they had ever felt it before. What was their

feeling? Anxiety, perhaps? Or was it somehow more an inner sense of peace, of harmony, of greatness, of expectation, of wonder ...Of light.

In the sky overhead, three stars that had been getting closer each night for the past week, came together now as one, illuminating the sky and the earth below, with a light brighter than a full moon, yet softer than dusk. It was as though the light of the bright star-cluster brought with it a special quality, a warmth, a sense of contentment, and a knowing.

In the silence, other individuals became more alert to a clearness in the air, a great sense of awareness and anticipation. Lying in their darkened rooms, their eyes were focused through the open windows on the iridescence of the sky. One-by-one they were drawn to rise from their beds and stand silently in awe. Closing their eyes, their attention was finally drawn deep within their own inner being, to a place in their consciousness they had never been before, and yet a place they now realized had always been there for them.

This was a special moment, a moment of magnitude never experienced in human consciousness before, suddenly available to everyone who had entered into the silence...in peace...and with expectation.

For down the street and around the bend in the little dirt road, in a shed only a hundred paces past the last building at the edge of town, human-kind was at a point of transformation. In that little manger only blocks away from the people transfixed in their inner silence, the baby Jesus was born into the world.

And in the windows, and on the roof tops, and lying on straw filled cots, wherever the people had awakened and turned within to experience the silence of a Divine Presence; in the hearts of all who listened, the Christ was born ... *And it was good.*

...And the angel said to them, *“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which has come to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior, who is Christ the lord.”**

And so it is....

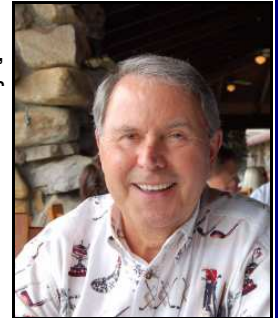
Amen

* (Luke 2: 10-11)

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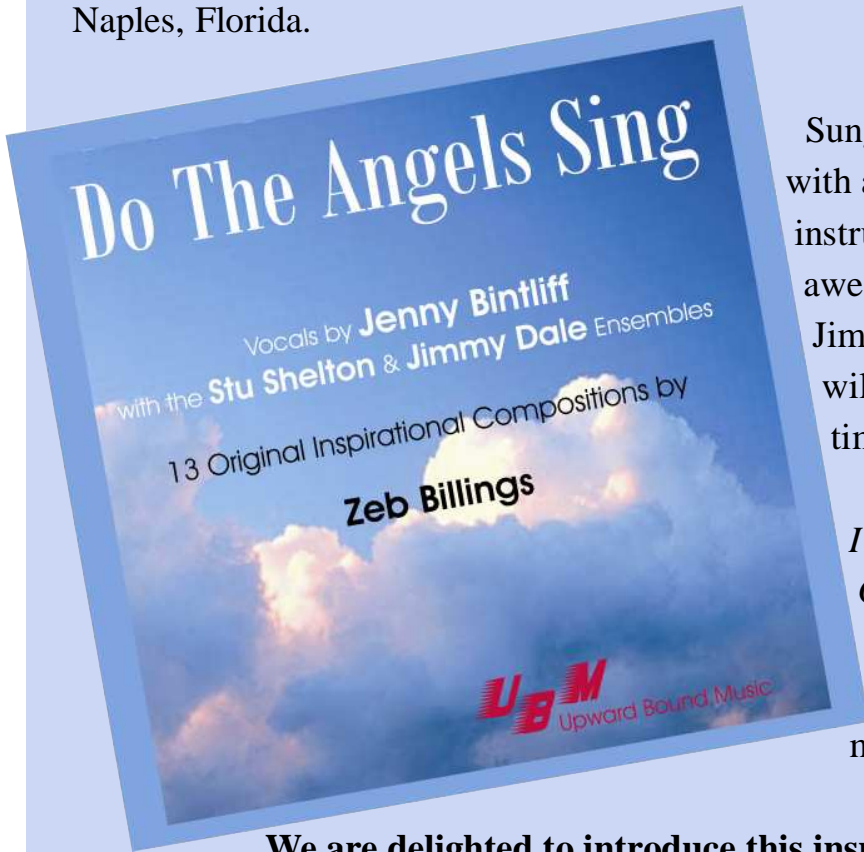
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May you be blessed with laughter, love, joy, health and prosperity as you experience the presence of God everywhere in your life.

Rev. Art & Dottie Holt