

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with ingratitude. Paul wrote that long ago when men knew God, they glorified Him not as God, and neither were thankful (Rom. 1:21). I think this broad brush of condemnation even included Adam and Eve. Since they lived in paradise, why would they possibly want anything else? Just think of it. Everything about them was good. The weather was good. Their health was good. The garden was good. Their food was good. Everything was good! If only they had appreciated all the good that God had provided Satan would have had no chance to trick them into disobeying God. Apparently, however, they didn't appreciate the goodness of God as they should have.

When I think about gratitude my mind invariably goes back some 60 years ago to the story of Marie Napier. Her story is in the book "Personal Vignettes" but some of you, I'm sure, have not yet read it. Marie graduated from the San Jose Bible College and went to Homer, Alaska to work as a missionary in a Christian Children's Home. In 1954 she came down with polio and was paralyzed for the rest of her life.

I first met Marie in Sunnyvale, California where she was living with her brother Harold. She was in a rocking bed. I have never seen another one before or since. The bed, patient and all, was rocking back and forth in huge gyrations designed to force air in and out of her paralyzed lungs. At the time she had been swinging back and forth like this for five long years. I awkwardly looked at the floor but finally mustered up the courage to raise my eyes and try to process the pain and suffering she was experiencing. Her face revealed a broad understanding smile. Her eyes flashed back and forth and she was making small lateral movements with her head.

Gradually I grew more comfortable and we began to talk. Even simple conversations presented her with a challenge. She spoke in short staccato sentences for she had to time her words to coincide with the gyrations of the bed. I visited her on other occasions and every time she had the same contagious smile. In one respect I wanted to help her, but invariably I received more than I gave.

The last time I saw Marie was in the Santa Clara County Hospital in San Jose. I was there with my good friend Warren Phelps. Both Marie and her brother Harold were a part of the East Side congregation where Warren preached. A power failure had stopped the rhythm of her bed and by the time she arrived at the hospital she was barely alive. She demonstrated to us what she called "frog breathing" which consisted of lapping air with her tongue and trying to force it into her lungs.

When she arrived at the hospital she was placed in an iron lung. This was a familiar sight during the polio epidemic of my childhood. This device completely encased her body and forced air in and out of her lungs. The pulsing rubber collar, however, had left her neck chaffed and raw. Just before Warren and I came into her room the doctor had granted her a brief reprieve from the painful iron lung to a less efficient breathing shell. This shell only covered her torso, giving her neck

a much needed rest.

Too weak and low for sham or hypocrisy, she revealed the true nature of her heart and said: “I’m . . . so . . . thankful. . . for . . . my . . . shell” How beautiful! How godly! How Christlike! While others would have cursed God for the paralysis, the power failure, and the pain, she was thankful. It would have been easy, and perhaps even understandable for her to complain about something, but she did not. While life was ebbing from her frail body she rose above the maze of pain and confusion to place another jewel in her treasure chest in heaven. I had always admired her, but now in the finale of her life she bequeathed to me a precious memory too wonderful for words. Adam and Eve may not have been thankful, but she was! What a wonderful commentary she provides for these inspired words:

“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess. 5:18).

The Word of God commands us to do everything without complaining (Phil. 2:14). When you are ungrateful and complain you are not only disobeying God but also demonstrating your vulnerability to Satan. If there are ten people in the room the devil will consistently target those who are complaining and ungrateful for invariably they are the easiest ones to tempt.

There is an old hymn that puts it like this: When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed. When you are discouraged thinking all is lost. Count your many blessings, name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce