

Gratitude - What is it?

“Gratitude” - that word seems to be a topic of many “discussion” meetings. But how many, who claim to be “Grateful” in these meetings, comprehend the meaning of this often used word? One of my friends seemed to properly define it when he made this statement, “I don’t give a damn what you think or how you feel when you say you are “grateful”. Just tell me what it is that you are doing to show God how much you appreciate what He has done and is doing for you”.

Bill Wilson, in a letter written in 1959, wrote:

“Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward. In other words, if you carry the message to still others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given you.”

(As Bill Sees It - pg. 29)

So “Gratitude” is far more than an attitude, as is so often heard in our meetings. “Gratitude” is ACTION!!! That is search out (AA, pg 96), go to (AA, pg 102), try to carry this message to other alcoholics! (AA, pg 60 & 89).

The first example we have of “Gratitude” in past history is Ebby’s efforts to help Bill Wilson. Ebby, two months sober, had heard that Bill was in serious trouble with his drinking. The first thing he had to do was to find out where Bill was, take a subway and go to Bill’s residence with a single thought, “Can I help my old friend?” Ebby “sought out”, “went to” and “tried to carry” his message of hope to a suffering alcoholic.

The second example we are given of “Gratitude” is Bill’s desperate search for an alcoholic he might try to carry his message to on the evening of May 11, 1935. True, his motive was a pretty selfish one. Over the previous five months, he had stayed sober only by searching out and trying to carry his message of hope to serious drinkers in New York. The only success he had was that he, himself, had stayed sober. He knew that his only hope on that most disappointing day was to find a suffering serious drinker to whom he could tell his story. So, he decided to “search out”, “go to” and “try to carry his message of hope” to a problem drinker. It took a call to a local minister plus eleven more telephone calls to reach a lady who said, “Yes, I know of a problem drinker. Please come on out while I will contact him”. Bill’s selfish motive turned into a selfless motive when he finally found a man who did, in fact, want to learn how to live sober. To help insure the sobriety of his new found friend and to help insure his own sobriety, Bill most willingly stayed in Akron until the Fall of 1935. The end result was that a miraculous Solution for Alcoholism became a reality; Alcoholics Anonymous.

Since that time, there have been literally thousands upon thousands of similar demonstrations of “Gratitude” within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of my favorite such stories is that of a very dear friend who passed away with almost 31 years of Big Book sobriety. His name was Jack F. Jack took sober on February 11, 1991 in Texarkana, TX. He had only been sober a few weeks when he stopped by the Club one day and there was his sponsor having a cup of coffee. His sponsor said, “Good Morning Jack. How’s all going?” Jack said, “Not too good. My damn car is burning oil”. His

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sponsor said, "Well Jack, there are service stations all up and down the highway". Jack got a cup of coffee, came back to where his sponsor was sitting and said, "You sound like you are a little put out with me". His sponsor said, "Yes I am you ungrateful SOB (not abbreviated). You showed up here a few weeks ago with 3 dollars in your pocket. You didn't have a job. You didn't have a car. Your wife wouldn't let you in the house. Today, you have a job, you have a car, you have money in your pocket and your wife has let you back in the bedroom and you are complaining about a car you don't deserve that is burning some oil. You go over there, sit down and make a list of your blessings. Then, you get off your ass and go find a sick alcoholic and tell him what God has been doing for you that you couldn't do for yourself". Jack learned his lesson well. Eight years later, having moved to Dallas, he and a few other "Grateful" members of the old Town North Group dug into their pockets and came up with enough money to start the 24 Hour Club; a refuge for suffering alcoholics.

Another on my favorite stories is that of Bob W. Bob is a legend in our part of the country because of the many alcoholics who were sponsored into sobriety by this man. Bob was near death on his parents ranch in West Texas. A sober and "Grateful" member of Alcoholics Anonymous, living in the Panhandle of Texas, heard of Bob's plight from Bob's brother. When he asked where Bob was, it proved to be a 335 mile trip, one way. He picked up a couple of his "Grateful" proteges and drove, uninvited, the 335 miles. Bob was so sick that he was hardly aware that these men had come, uninvited, to see him. Three days later, these men returned to their homes and Bob White was on his way to recovery. They weren't asked but the drove 670 miles and invested 3 days to try to carry a single message; "We have had a spiritual awakening as the result of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous". That is "Gratitude"!!!

Wesley Parish, another legend because of the large number of alcoholics who found sobriety resulting from his "Gratitude" clarified the difference between being "Thankful" and being "Grateful". He said when we are "Thankful" it is enough to say "Thank you". But, if we claim to be "Grateful", we have spent some of our spare time in search of suffering alcoholics so we might have the opportunity to pass on to them what has been so freely given us. It is only by giving that we might receive or as my 2nd Sponsor would say, "Givein' is livin', usin' is losin' and lyin' is dyin'" That seems to state why we learn to live by the Twelve Steps, "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us. (AA, pg 77)

So it would appear that most folks who claim to be "Grateful" are in reality just "Thankful". So, if you are "Grateful", what have you done to deserve this day of life and sobriety?

PASS IT ON!!!