

Fresh out of business school, a young man answered a want ad for an accountant. Now he was being interviewed by a very nervous businessman who ran a small business that he had started himself.

“I need someone with an accounting degree,” the businessman said. “But mainly, I’m looking for someone to do my worrying for me.” “Excuse me?” the accountant said. “I worry about a lot of things,” the business man said. “But I don’t want to have to worry about money. Your job will be to take all the money worries off my back.”

“I see,” the accountant said. “And how much does the job pay?” “I’ll start you at eighty thousand,” said the businessman. “\$8000!” the accountant exclaimed. “How can such a small business afford a sum like that?” “That,” the businessman said, “is your first worry.”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could pay somebody to do our worrying for us? It is amazing how many things we can find to stress us out—even at Thanksgiving. Or maybe—for those of you responsible for cooking for a large family or those who are entertaining relatives—we find ways to stress out especially at Thanksgiving.

A certain woman tells about visiting her parents for Thanksgiving. Even though the Mother was over 80, she was determined to put on a traditional dinner.

After having spent the day preparing all the food, her mother was getting ready for bed. Her daughter noticed her mother had set her alarm clock to go off at 4 a.m. Her mom explained that she had to turn the oven on at 4:00 a.m. to cook the turkey.

The daughter knew her mother’s oven had a timer and asked her 80-year-old mom if she knew how to use it.

“Of course,” her mother said, “but I’ve been getting up for over 60 Thanksgivings to turn the oven on, and it just wouldn’t be the same to have the stove do it for me!”

Don’t you suspect that her mom didn’t really trust the timer on the oven? She would worry if she personally didn’t check to get the turkey started on time. **Anybody know a worrier like that?**

There is an old Irish poem by an unknown author that goes like this: “Why worry? In life there are only two things to worry about: Whether you are well, or whether you are sick. Now if you are well, you have nothing to worry about. And if you are sick, you only have two things to worry about: whether you get better, or whether you die. If you get better, you have nothing to worry about. ***And if you die, you only have two things to worry about: whether you go to heaven, or whether you go to hell.*** Now, if you go to heaven, you have nothing to worry about. And if you go to hell, you’ll be too busy shaking hands with your friends that you won’t have time to worry. **So why worry?**”

The word “worry” comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning to strangle or to choke. While we need to be attentive to life’s concerns, worrying about them “chokes” the joy out of life. Worrying is like driving a car with one foot on the accelerator and the other foot on the brake. The wheels are spinning, a lot of rubber is being burnt, but you are going nowhere.

Or as someone has said: ***“Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do but it won’t get you anywhere!”***

It is interesting that the lessons that prepare us for Thanksgiving Day—like our lesson from the Gospel today, should be on being ANXIOUS, BEING WORRIED. Listen again to what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So, do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

This is an interesting text for this Thanksgiving Season. WHY? First of all, it shows us that...GRATITUDE IS THE PERFECT “CURE” FOR “ANXIETY.” Looking over the total scope of your life, hasn't God been good to you? Do you think the future will be any different?

One of the most appealing stories from an earlier generation is Jean Webster's "Daddy Long Legs." It's the story of a young girl in an orphanage who is befriended by a person she does not know. This kind stranger takes a fancy to her when she is a small child and befriends her. But he does not reveal his identity. Year after year the favors flow in from her unknown friend. She passes through her childhood years and all the way through college, pursuing opportunities provided to her by a friend whose name she does not know.

One day she happens to encounter her unknown benefactor, but she does not recognize him. He does not look like she had imagined he would look. But she finally learns his true identity and loves him--her longtime unknown friend.

Is this not a parable of our lives? We can all think of times when Christ has blessed our lives and we were not even aware of it and we love Him for it.

In our scripture lesson Jesus points out that God has been and will continue to be extremely generous toward us. In his typically down-to-earth way, Jesus tells us to look at the birds. They neither sow nor reap, yet God doesn't let them starve. If God feeds the most insignificant bird, don't you think he will provide for us who are His very special, dearly loved, children?

The flowers don't fuss and worry over what they will wear. God clothes the wild flowers which are here one day and gone the next with the finest and most beautiful colors. If God does that for something growing in the wild surely God will care for those whom He has created "a little lower than angels" and crowned us "with glory and honor" as the Psalm says (8:5). Gratitude is the perfect antidote for anxiety.

However, there is a second thing about gratitude we ought to recognize. GRATITUDE KEEPS BLESSINGS FLOWING IN OUR LIVES. Call it a self-fulfilling prophecy if you like. But grateful people seem to attract blessings.

A recent study found that people who jot down what they are thankful for each week feel more optimistic about their lives, exercise more, and even have fewer visits to the doctor than people who write down things that annoy them or even neutral events. There is something about the spirit of gratitude that is healing to the body and the soul.

When University of Connecticut psychologist Glenn Affleck interviewed 287 people recovering from a heart attack, he discovered that people who found some positive benefit from their attack were less likely to suffer another attack within eight years. He recommends that each day we write down one or more things we are grateful for, and read the journal once a week.

Dr. Joseph Murphy agrees. In his book *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* he describes a man who epitomized this kind of outlook on life. He says: "A number of years ago, I stayed for about a week in a farmer's house in Connemarra on the west coast of Ireland. He seemed to be always singing and whistling and was full of humor. I asked him the secret of his happiness, and his reply was: 'It's a habit of mine to be happy. Every morning when I awaken and every night before I go to sleep, I bless my family, the crops, the cattle, and I thank God for the wonderful harvest.'"

Was this farmer always blessed with good harvests? No, but he did consider every harvest regardless of how large or how small, a blessing. There is something about a grateful attitude that seems to cause blessings to flow into a life.

Maybe it has something to do with the fact that worry “strangles” or “chokes” life, as we noted earlier. Gratitude allows for blessings to flow whereas anxiety chokes them off.

But there’s a 3rd thing we can learn from this “Thankful Season.” *A person who experiences true gratitude SEEKS TO BE A CHANNEL OF BLESSINGS TO OTHERS.* A truly grateful person cannot hoard God’s blessings. *A GRATEFUL PERSON SEEKS TO ALLOW HIS/HER BLESSINGS TO FLOW THROUGH THEMSELVES TO OTHERS.*

There is a story that comes out of World War II about a man with a truly grateful heart. His name was Fred “Hargy” Hargesheimer. Hargy’s plane was shot down over the Pacific Ocean on June 5, 1943. Hargy parachuted into enemy territory in Papua, New Guinea. Finding shelter in an abandoned native hut, he lived for weeks on snails he found in a riverbed. Daily he recited the 23rd Psalm and reflected on the hope his faith gave him.

Natives in the area found Hargesheimer after a month. They showed him a note written by an Australian soldier that said that they could be trusted because they had saved other pilots. They were Christians, and at great risk they protected the American pilot from capture by the enemy.

Eventually, Hargy made his way off the island by submarine. Years later, while corresponding with a missionary, he discovered his native rescuers needed a school. All on his own, Hargy raised \$15,000 for a school building. That would easily be \$100,000 in today’s dollars. He also brought in volunteer teachers. A few years later he built a library and clinic. Then, 27 years after his rescue, he and his wife moved to New Guinea *“to say thank you [to the people of the island] in a meaningful way.”*

Fred Hargesheimer knew he had lived a blessed life, so he decided to return those blessings to those in greater need than he.

That’s not the exception but the rule for people who are truly grateful. They want to pass on those blessings to others. But you already know that, don’t you? You are here this day to give your thanks to God for your many blessings, and you long to pass on the blessings that you have received. You have discovered that gratitude is the perfect antidote for anxiety. You have discovered that a grateful attitude causes blessings to flow into your life. And you have discovered that a person who experiences true gratitude seeks to be a channel that blessings can flow through to others.

On the radio sometime back there was a funny, but also pitifully true, story about a family of atheists. They had joined hands around a Thanksgiving table. Then they said, *“Thank you, Paine-Webber.”*

Says James Jerritt, ***“It is sad when people think of thankfulness for success as being something they alone did or they and their Wall Street investments did.”***

Jerritt gives his definition of a Christian, *“A Christian is someone who does not have to consult his bankbook to see how wealthy he really is.”*

And that is true of us. We may or may not have full bank accounts. But we know ourselves to be wealthy people because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

AND DURING THIS SPECIAL SEASON OF THANKS MAY WE NEVER FORGET TO GIVE THANKS TO THE ONE WHO HAS BLESSED US WITH THE FULLNESS OF LIFE AND LOVE.

AMEN.