

Grace, Giving, Gratitude & Becoming Christlike (November 1989)

Tithing and fasting, Jesus said, should be a part of the Christian life. If it becomes a prideful thing, all meaning is gone. We are to give our obedience unto God, not for man to notice. Jesus did not condemn public prayer, tithing one's income or disciplined fasting. He said those were good things. But He reminded us that prayer is a condition of the heart—not mere choices done out of compulsion or convenience, not just a bunch of words.

My father died at the age of 87. On his 81st birthday I drove down the Florida coast to his home to spend part of the day with him.

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"If you had to list the ten most significant things that have happened to you during your 80th year, what would they be?" I asked.

He smiled and said, "I'd have to think about the last nine. But I can show you number one."

He got up from his chair at his desk and walked over to his filing cabinet. Sorting through the top drawer, he pulled out a letter and returned to his desk. It was from the chairman of the department of English literature in a large Midwestern university.

He read it to me as if he were reading from the Bible.

"Sixty years ago," the professor said, "I sat in your high school English class at Delph, Indiana. Rudyard Kipling, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—they all came alive to me through your teaching. I went on to get my doctorate and eventually became chairman of the department of English literature at this university. Now I am retiring. I've thought of you many times but have never written. Today I write to say 'thank you.'"

My daddy lowered the letter. Tears glistened in his eyes and ran down his cheeks.

"This," he said, smiling through his tears, "is the finest thing to happen to me this last year."

Thankful people smile. Self-righteous people sneer. Selfish people scowl. Recently, while walking through the supermarket, I passed a man wheeling a big cart of groceries. He looked at me and smiled. Even though I was scowling at the time (I always scowl in grocery stores), I found myself smiling back. Suddenly I felt good—and I smiled at the next person who passed. She, startled, smiled back. If we keep this up, I thought, the whole store will be smiling.

I appeared at a conference at the Christian Broadcasting Network a few years ago. I was to be Pat Robertson's guest on *The 700 Club* that Friday morning. I checked in at the lodge and went to my room... which did not have a bed.

Strange. I opened doors. Closet. Bathroom. No bed. A double door led to another room, but was locked. I stepped into the hall and asked one of the housekeepers about the room's absent bed.

"It's our best room, we reserve it especially for visiting speakers," she smiled.

"It doesn't have a bed."

"Don't worry, we'll come this evening and fold down the sofa," she said.

That night, trying to get comfortable on a four-inch-thick mattress with an iron bar running across my back, I thought I heard God say, "Sleeping on the sofa is good for you."

"It's not good for my back," I grumped.

"No, it's good for your soul. People who think they are important need to sleep on sofas once in a while. Just be thankful you're not sleeping on the ground," He told me.

The next morning, I recounted the tale over breakfast. A staff coordinator heard, and that afternoon when I returned to my room, the door to the adjoining room had been opened—a suite, with a beautiful king-sized bed, sheets folded down and little candies greeting me from the pillows. It had waited for me all night, only I couldn't get to it.

The housekeeper happened by, beaming at me from the doorway. "I can't thank you enough," I said, and we laughed together.

That's the way is it with saying, "thank you." It's not enough to feel it. You need to express it. With a letter, a phone call or in person.

And in the process, we can become a little more like Jesus.

Jamie Buckingham wrote 153 columns for Charisma over 13 years, first known as "Dry Bones" but later as it's most recognized "Last Word." His writing brought his singular voice that was animated by a heart for Jesus that was baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit in 1967 at a Full Gospel Businessmen's convention. Buckingham provided a steadying force during the scandals of the 1980s, penning the seminal article on the PTL scandal, "God Is Shaking His Church" in May 1986.