

The Man Who Had Nothing

Ingratitude is natural-like weeds. Gratitude is like a rose. It has to be fed and watered and cultivated and loved and protected.

I loved visiting Granny and Papa when I was a little girl. I thought their little house in the country was wonderful. Papa had a couple of hens that laid blue eggs. I don't know if he ever ate the blue eggs but he was proud of the funny looking hens. Granny and Papa also had a gentle old dog that let me dress him in my doll clothes and push him in my doll carriage. The dog seemed to have taken on their patience and gentleness, and he tolerated me with confused brown eyes.

We had a ritual that I came to love. Papa always kept peppermint candy in his overalls pocket and when I was small I thought it was the best candy in the world. At odd moments **(not expected, regular, or planned)**, always unexpected, he would reach into his pocket and take out a peppermint for me.

Papa also had an old school bus parked in the back yard that he was always tinkering with **(to make unskilled efforts at repairing)**. His plan was to fix it up and take Granny on a road trip one day. He let me sit behind the wheel and pretend I was driving while he worked on the engine.

Papa was the most satisfied, content man I ever knew. I grew up hearing him speak often of how blessed he was. He adored Granny and she was at the top of the list of the things he was grateful for. She was a tiny woman and he could never walk past her without putting one of his huge hands on top of her head or gently touching her shoulder.

One evening, as we sat on the porch after supper, he went inside and brought out a photograph and handed it to me. It was a picture of a petite dark haired woman ... in red high heels, "This is your granny when she was young. Wasn't she a beauty?" He then glanced at Granny with loving eyes. "She still is."

Confused, I looked at Granny in her shapeless dress and apron, her curly gray hair in disarray **(mess)**, her small face stitched in fine wrinkles. I was too young to know that he saw her with his heart and not with his eyes.

As I grew older I visited Papa and Granny less and less. Their small crowded house seemed run down and poorly furnished to my critical eyes. I was inwardly disdainful **(full of contempt for someone regarded as inferior)** when I heard Papa speak of how blessed he was when I knew he could barely put food on the table. He was good with his hands and he made a meager **(insufficient)** living as a handyman but that old school bus was rusted now and sitting on flat tires. It would never get road worthy to go on that road trip with Granny.

I had started to view my grandfather's life as a failure. Oh, I still loved Papa and Granny and I would always have fond memories of my childhood days spent with them and the funny hens and the sweet old hound dog. But I had lost the admiration I had for him when I was a child. I thought he was poor, and not smart enough to know it.

Papa died of a heart attack when I was in my second year of college. When I walked into the chapel for his funeral I was shocked at the people who packed that little church. There wasn't even standing room... bankers, and clergy among the factory workers, farmers, and clerks. It seemed as if everyone in the town, from every walk of life, was represented.

Standing at the casket was Bill Fletcher, a wealthy landowner who often hired Papa to do odd jobs. With tears in his eyes, he turned to me. "Your grandfather was the most honest, kindest, gentlest man I have ever known. No matter what was going wrong in my life I always felt better after a little chat with him. He always helped me keep things in proper prospective (The ability to perceive things in their actual interrelations). He always found life wonderful. He got more pleasure out of his simple lifestyle than I could ever muster (to gather) from mine even though I probably had more money in my wallet than he had in the bank."

Mr. Fletcher shook his head and rubbed tears from his cheeks. "He never lost the wonder of a child. He used to talk about those hens that laid blue eggs as if he had a rare treasure. And how he loved Annie. A woman has never been loved more than she." He put his arm around my waist. "You are lucky to have grown up around such a wonderful man. He never had much money but oh, what priceless treasures he did possess! I wish I was half the man he was." He glanced around at the people in the crowded chapel. "Everybody who knew him loved him. How many people can you say that about?"

Papa, who, in my eyes, had nothing, was envied by some who had everything that the world could offer. But I learned that day that the world is very limited in what it can offer. And what it does offer can be easily lost, such as money, fame, and worldly goods. I realized that the blessings that Papa often spoke of were not tangible things that could easily slip from your grasp. He was speaking of love, friendship, a stellar (heavenly) reputation, respect, and a good woman by his side for seventy-two years.

I found Granny and hugged her tight. "I am a lucky woman," she said. "I had the love of a good man for seventy-two years. I am blessed."

I kissed her wet cheeks. "Yes, you are." I said firmly. I could honestly say it now that I finally know what real blessings were.

(The Power of Gratitude: 101 Stories about How Being Thankful Can Change Your Life. pp. 254-6).

Questions:

1. As a child why did the author like to visit Granny and Papa?
2. Describe Papa.
3. Why did Papa want to fix the old school bus?
4. How did Papa feel about Granny?
5. How did the author's feelings for Granny and Papa change as she grew older?
6. Describe Papa's funeral.
7. Who was Bill Fletcher? What did he say to the author about her grandfather?
8. What did the author learn at the end of the story?
9. What is the moral of the story?

The Pearl: A Faith Story

"Whatever the future brings, have faith that you can't fall deeper than in God's hands."

The cheerful girl with golden curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink box. "Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please?" Quickly the mother checked the back of the little box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's face. "A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$2.00. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma." As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores.

On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace. Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere - Sunday, school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or took a bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green. Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story.

One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?" "Oh yes, Daddy. You know that love you." "Then give me your pearls."

"Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess - the white horse from my collection (of toys), the one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite."

"That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?" "Daddy, you know I love you." "Then give me your pearls." "Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper."

"That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you" And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek.

"What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?" Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you." With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet (a closely woven fabric of silk, cotton, or nylon, that has a thick short pile on one side) case with a strand (a ropelike length of something) of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her the genuine treasure...Sometimes it is so hard to see what is in the other hand, but do believe this one thing..... **God will never take away something without giving you something better to take its place.**

Questions:

1. What did Jenny ask her mother to buy her? What was her mother's response?
2. Why did Jenny like her pearl neckless so much?
3. When and where did she wear her neckless?
4. Describe Jenny's relationship with her father.
5. What did her father ask Jenny to give him? What was her reaction?

6. What was Jenny's response to her father's question the second time?
7. How does the story end?
8. What is the moral of the story?

Downward Comparison

The smog (fog) in Calcutta...is horrendous (terrible) and as I was leaving I noticed an unpleasant tickle in my throat. Sure enough, by the time I reached Benares, one of India's holiest cities and the place where many Hindus come to die, I had developed bronchitis. I lay in my hotel room for most of the day, thousands of miles from anyone I knew, feeling lonely, sick, and sorry for myself. Late that night I came to a startling realization. I might be mildly ill, but at least I had medicine, food, and a comfortable bed. However, below my window, on the streets... lay literally thousands of homeless, penniless, sick, and dying people. Suddenly my own problems seemed very minor, and my heart went out to the suffering paupers below me. Compassion replaced self-pity.

Research shows that this kind of "downward comparison," comparing oneself with someone who is worse off, is an effective strategy for combating feelings of pain and depression. (Essential Spirituality pp.270-1)

Questions:

1. What happened to the author in Calcutta?
2. What is downward comparison? What is its benefit?

Nothing but My Philosophy and My Faith

My friend built a house in Topanga Canyon— a beautiful place in an attractive, wild setting. I was in Los Angeles when a fire swept through the canyon and destroyed 565 houses. My friend's house was among the ruined buildings. I telephoned and said, "I'm sorry that your house burned down."

"Why, what are you worrying about me for?" he said. Sure it burned. But my wife and kids are safe."

Did you save anything from the house?" I asked.

"Nothing but my philosophy and my faith," he said, but that's all I need. I'm going to build again. Don't worry about me until I get into some real trouble." (Positive Living Day by Day, Peale, p. 183)

Question: What is the main message?

