

## **THE SECRET OF APPRECIATION I Thessalonians 5:16-18**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Ethnic cuisine is increasing in popularity in the United States. Mexican food is the most popular (not surprising given the growing Latino population) followed by Italian and then Chinese.

Chinese restaurants seem ubiquitous. Almost every little town has one or two Chinese restaurants, very often buffets.

Happy Family is a name for a menu item at many Chinese restaurants. Happy Family is typically a dish that contains lobster, pork, chicken, beef, shrimp, scallops and sautéed broccoli with vegetables in a tasty brown sauce. It is not hard to imagine why it is called “Happy Family”. There are many distinct and dissimilar ingredients, including five different types of meat, all in one recipe yet they combine to result in one very pleasant entrée.

Our happy families ought to be a little like that. We ought to be able to appreciate one another’s individuality while still combining for the common good.

Appreciation for one another’s individuality: that is a secret to a happy family. In fact, that is a secret to happiness in any relationship. Here’s the takeaway: “We don’t have to be like each other to like each other.”

Somehow, that truth often seems to escape us – in the family more than anywhere else. We can value a range of opinion in the workplace. We can celebrate individuality in the entertainment world. We can see the advantage of diversity among our friends. But all too often, when it comes to the home, it can feel as if there is an obligation to conformity: to uniformity.

Let a friend or colleague disagree with us and we can listen, learn and love regardless. But let a family member disagree and we frequently feel the need to pressure them to our point of view.

Appreciation is key to a happy family. Accept one another and celebrate the uniqueness of each member of your family. Remember: we don’t have to be like each other to like each other.

In I Thessalonians 5:16-18, the apostle Paul wrote:

*<sup>16</sup> Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup> pray continually; <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

It is God's will for us to give thanks. It is God's will for us to be grateful; and that includes being grateful for one another: appreciation in the family.

## I. THE IMPORTANCE OF APPRECIATION

It is easy to begin to take people for granted. We don't mean to but we can readily fall into the trap of simply expecting certain things of one another. We expect that the lawn will be mowed, the meals will be prepared, the house will be cleaned, the mail will be retrieved, the bills will be paid, the laundry will be washed, the clothes will be folded, the beds will be made and on, and on, and on. These are jobs that have had to be done regularly for years and in most homes, there is a kind of routine that develops in which the same people usually do the same jobs on a regular basis. And when someone does something routinely, it is pretty easy to simply accept and assume rather than to appreciate.

But let Mom get sick; let Dad go out of town for a few weeks on business or let the kids go to church camp and suddenly the routine changes and suddenly we miss the help...and appreciate what that person used to do.

Not only do we come to miss that person's work, we come to miss that person. We miss his personality, his quirks and even his bad habits.

Very often, after a youth goes off to college, he comes to appreciate Mom and Dad more than he ever thought he would. And very often, Mom and Dad come to appreciate their child more than they ever realized they might.

Laurie Israel, a divorce lawyer from Boston, has identified a lack of appreciation as one of the major reasons for divorce in the clients for whom she works. In our homes, it is a sad fact but, over time, people simply don't value one another like they should. And a lack of appreciation can drive spouses, children and even parents from their homes.

Another facet of appreciation is that when we appreciate someone, we actually bless ourselves. Voltaire, the French philosopher, said, "*Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.*" That is true. It is the very qualities we appreciate in others that we want to possess ourselves. If we admire another's strong character, it is because we want to be a person of strong character. If we recognize a person's kindness, it's because we, too, want to be a caring person. We would be well advised to have the insight to appreciate the strengths of others. As Voltaire said, "appreciation is a wonderful thing" and can help *you* develop into a more excellent human being.

Do yourself a big favor and learn to be appreciative.

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSING APPRECIATION

Dr. Ernest Mellor, in the magazine *Homemade*, wrote:

*Recently my wife and I sat charmed at an outdoor performance by young Suzuki violin students. After the concert, an instructor spoke briefly on how children as young as two, three and four years old are taught to play violin. The first thing the children learn, he said, is a proper stance. And the second thing the children learn--even before they pick up the violin--is how to take a bow. "If the children just play the violin and stop, people may forget to show their appreciation," the instructor said. "But when the children bow, the audience invariably applauds. And applause is the best motivator we've found to make children feel good about performing and want to do it well."*

*Adults love applause too. Being affirmed makes us feel wonderful. If you want to rekindle or keep the flame of love glowing in your home through the years, try showing and expressing your appreciation for the other members of your family. Put some applause in your home and watch love grow.*

You see, it is important that we appreciate one another in the home but it is also important that we express that appreciation. Appreciation is an attitude. Expressing appreciation is an action. To express appreciation without meaning it is hypocritical. To appreciate without expressing is neglectful. Neither is acceptable.

The little courtesies of "please" and "thank-you", the consideration of compliments, the thoughtfulness of helping out, all of these can go a long ways toward building a sense of acceptance, affection, affirmation and appreciation in a home.

Business coaches have learned that it is important to express appreciation to employees if you plan to keep them. Raises, bonuses, positive reviews, affirming words and other such inducements have been found to keep morale and productivity up.

Gregory P. Smith, a noted business consultant has said:

*Money may attract people to the front door, but something else keeps them from going out the back. Although many people claim they are quitting for a better paying job elsewhere, survey after survey shows that a lack of appreciation and recognition is a primary reason why people quit their jobs.*

Why can't we learn to apply this same principle in our homes? In the same way that expressions of appreciation keep people from going out the

back door of a business, expressions of appreciation keep people from going out the back door of our homes...and, ultimately, out the back door of our lives.

### **III. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSISTENTLY EXPRESSING APPRECIATION**

Mothers' Day was just three weeks ago. If your mother is still living, I suspect you sent her a card. I certainly hope so. You probably telephoned her. You might have bought her a gift, sent her flowers, taken her out to eat or found some other way to tell her you are glad she's your Mom.

But what about last Sunday? Or yesterday? I suspect most mothers would trade a mountain of Mothers' Day cards for regular and consistent demonstrations of gratitude.

Fathers' Day is coming up in three more weeks. Sure, get him a shirt, a power tool or a fishing lure. But don't you think Dad would love to have some thanks the other 364 days out of the year?

Eighth grade, high school and college graduations are pretty much behind us for another year. Students received awards and certificates to recognize their achievements. Just today, the church recognized the accomplishments of our graduates. All of that is as it should be.

But do you suppose there were any students for whom all of this might have felt a little hollow? Some may have worked hard day after day, year after year and only now, for a moment, people tell them they've done a good job. I know for a fact because some of them have told me, what they are really hungry for isn't some honor from the school or a civic organization; what they really want is for Dad or Mom to give out an "at-a-boy" or an "at-a-girl" once in a while. Not just on special occasions when they may feel obligated to say the right thing but for no occasion and no purpose other than the fact that they truly mean it.

To regularly show that you value another person is critical to building and to sustaining a healthy relationship. And that is as true in the home as it is anywhere else in life.

May I give you some practical tips for consistently expressing appreciation?

1. Know what motivates the other person. It is human nature that we often give what we wish to receive. If one person is motivated by a token gift, he is apt to offer that as encouragement to another. That is fine if the other person is wired like he is. But perhaps what the other person would really choose would some act of service, some

word of praise or some quality time together. To make meaningful expression of appreciation, find out what motivates the people in your home. And don't assume you already know: ask.

2. Add variety. Any expression, however profuse, can grow stale if it is not varied. But similarly, something that seems rather ordinary can take on special significance if it is a surprise.

Did you know our local grocery store has a deli section where they make plate lunches every day? I know that the Clay City Market is not the fanciest place to eat in the state of Illinois but you can make it a special place to take your wife. Stop by the store ahead of time and give Will or Steve a white table cloth and a couple of candlesticks and ask them to set up a table in the corner. Then, when you show up for lunch, let them see you to the table. I promise you that you will have a meal that your wife will remember for the rest of her life.

It is the same grocery store that it was last week. And the food is the same type of food they've been preparing for months. But the meal becomes a special occasion because you went to the effort to add some variety.

Now, apply that same principle to the ways you express appreciation to your family. Don't get in a rut. Be creative and have fun telling them that you treasure them and that you are glad to be a family.

### **CONCLUSION:**

A few months ago, a businessman in our community told me he had bragged on his wife at the coffee shop one day. That evening, when he got home, his wife told him she'd heard what he'd said about her. He thought she was going to thank him for speaking well of her to others. But instead, what she said was, "Next time, tell me, too."

People, we ALL need to know we are appreciated. It is not enough to feel it. It is not enough to tell other people. Tell your family that you love them, that you accept them and that you value them.

Old Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, used to say:

*Appreciate everything your associates do for the business. Nothing else can quite substitute for a few well-chosen, well-timed, sincere words of praise. They're absolutely free and worth a fortune.*

Well-chosen, well-timed, sincere words of praise are absolutely free and worth a fortune – in the home as well as at Wal-Mart!

05/31/09

**INVITATION:** #170 – *“Give Thanks”*