

# For want of a thank-you

## We need gratitude to stave off barbarism

by Andrée Seu Peterson, November 17, 2022

An exchange between my daughter and her toddler needing formation of manners:

“Say ‘Thank you’, honey.”

“Why?!”

“Because you’ll go further in life.”

I was witnessing a rudimentary instance of civilization being transmitted to the next generation. It is sobering to realize that for want of these early moments with our parents, a nation reverts to barbarism.

Speaking of things we wrongly assume will be passed down automatically, have today’s kids heard this one by Benjamin Franklin?

**For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.**

**For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.**

**For want of a horse, the rider was lost.**

**For want of a rider, the battle was lost.**

**For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.**

**All for the want of a horseshoe nail.**

I ask because the other day I used the expression “as rare as hen’s teeth” in a sentence, and my adult son had never heard of it.

Anyway, in the end much is lost for want of teaching “*thank you*” to tykes. Namely, Christendom. So let us not assume but be diligent.

UPenn law professor Amy Wax made what she thought to be a commonplace point in a 2017 *Philadelphia Inquirer* op-ed. It unleashed all the wrath of pent-up barbarism. She commended the 1950s virtues of hard work, temperance, promptness, thrift, and *gratitude*. Practicing these would “significantly reduce society’s pathologies.”

As a Jew, she extolled these Anglo-Protestant cultural norms as “superior.” But you can’t say things like that anymore — and for saying it Wax now clings to her tenured Ivy League faculty position by a fingernail.

“Thank you” is a powerful lubricant of social interaction and career advancement.

What remains less obvious is the personal effect it has on the *sayer* of those two simple words. “Thank you” *gives one a peace that grumbling does not* — though grumbling satisfies for the first five seconds. Consider the truth in this meme I came across:

**“Before I was a parent I didn’t realize it was possible to ruin someone’s life by cutting their pancake the wrong way.”**

The child in this breakfast table incident has yet to learn that saying *thank you* for an unsatisfactorily dissected pancake — rather than carrying on

about it — would have made *her* feel better, (not to mention her parent). It is the business of all children everywhere to come to terms with this law of the universe: Saying “thank you” helps the giver as much as the receiver. It is the business of parents to see to it.

So let’s practice. The *easy* thank-you’s to God are for life’s bullets we have dodged — the boys we wanted as teenagers who didn’t want us; the cars we didn’t crash while DUI; getting fired from *Rocky’s*. Stuff like that.

But then comes the *radical* gratitude:

- Thank You for how my hair got thinner so that You trimmed my fleshly pride.
- Thank You that when computers arrived in the ’90s I discovered I have *no* aptitude in technology, so that You trimmed my fleshly pride. (Most of my thank-you’s for painful experiences involve trimming of fleshly pride.)

On his deathbed at age 46, my husband confided it was good that he was dying because he knew he would have turned away from God again if he had lived.

If you’re looking for a logical reason to be thankful when bad things happen, the best I can do is say ***Life is more complex than you realize.*** You don’t know how your current situation will play out in five years. In fact, we don’t even know what will happen in the next five minutes.

My grandson greatly enjoys a children’s book called **That’s Good! That’s Bad!** It concerns a young boy visiting the zoo. He gets unexpectedly lifted up and away from his parents, which leads to a grand, day-long adventure. The parts of it that *seem good* turn out bad, and the parts that *seem bad* turn out good. Gratefully, in the end the boy gets reunited with his father.

As will all of God’s children who trust Him. **That’s good reason to be thankful.**

~ *Andrée is a senior writer for WORLD Magazine. Her columns have been compiled into three books, including Won't Let You Go Unless You Bless Me. Andrée resides near Philadelphia.*