

Things to Consider

- ▶ What was your first response to what is written in this Brochure – intellectually? In your heart? That is, what do you *think* and what do you *feel* about this? Are the responses from your *head* and your *heart* the same? Don't be judgmental with yourself; just notice.
 - ▶ Might you allow God to love you unconditionally? Could you simply bask in His love for you as you might lie on the beach allowing the sun's rays to warm you, rather than mistakenly thinking you have to earn His love? If you can't, what is the blockage? Stand in the sun and imagine it as God's love pouring upon you. You don't have to earn the right to enjoy sunshine.
 - ▶ This Brochure is really about an underlying attitude that is perhaps there in many lives – of life being all about us. Think and pray about that 'next step' suggested – of developing a grateful or thankful heart. Can you take steps to develop this as a concrete habit in your life? What could you do? How might you maintain a grateful heart?
 - ▶ Spend time thinking about the Scripture verses mentioned; can you think of others that speak to this theme?
 - ▶ If your life is not about you but about God it can also remove a burden from your shoulders for you do not need some perfect image of yourself to be acceptable to Him. It means God has called you, knowing you as you really are and not as you feel you should be. He knows you 'warts and all' (see Psalm 139) and despite this, still loves you immensely, to a degree you cannot comprehend.
- ✓ Perhaps you feel a sense of delight at this truth and Psalms 18.1-3,31-32 and 63.1-9 may help you verbally express that delight.
 - ✓ Equally, you may find Psalm 107.1-7 helpful, but in a different way. The ancient Jewish people, like us, wandered far from God, but in His love He drew them back, as He does each of us. That is cause for gratitude!



'It's about
God
... not you!'

But don't forget
compassion for yourself
and others ...

Totally dependent, small babies presume the world is there to serve them and their needs. Naturally, for their very survival, they need to use tears and their cuteness to have those needs met. If, at this stage, they could consciously reflect, it would be: 'Of course you are just there to meet my needs! Why wouldn't you be! Life is about me!'

It would have come as a rude shock to me as a child, as it does to all children, to discover otherwise; that the world is not simply there to serve our needs. At one level we can feel for the small child moving through the stage of tantrums, vaguely sensing these truths and struggling with the consequences.

As adults, we would like to think that life is still all about us and our needs. In varying degrees everyone does. We just become more subtle in our going about getting those needs met. The word that describes this is narcissism, a preoccupation with self, and it is at epidemic proportions in today's society.

Without realising it, we can behave this way with God. We may be thinking about becoming a Christian, or perhaps we are already. By so doing, we may think that we are doing God a favour. We mirror Peter, one of Jesus' disciples who at one point exclaimed to Jesus, 'We've left all this to follow you; what do we get?' (Matthew 19.27) It's a quid pro quo attitude; I've done this, so you must do that!

This is a serious mistake and we need to consciously reflect on it. And even when we have moved beyond this pattern of thinking, there is always the danger of slipping back into old habits as we can also do in other areas of life.

Let me repeat the mistake. We can think that we are doing God a favour by following Him, by being a Christian, by doing His work, by being His disciple: 'God should be quite pleased with me because of all I am doing for Him and how I am serving Him!' It is an approach that focuses on *our works, our efforts*, rather than *God's grace*, to use rather more technical language.

The truth is otherwise. God owes us nothing. And you and I owe God everything. Three verses of Scripture remind us of this important fact.

☪ 'In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.' (1 John 4.10)

☪ At the Last Supper Jesus said to His disciples: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last ...' (John 15.16)

☪ 'Know that the Lord He is God: it is He who has made us and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.' (Psalm 100.2)

So we may need to shift our perspective or, at the very least, keep reminding ourselves of it, for it is very easy to slip into the habit so commonplace in the world – that life is all about you or me.

One consequence of this wrong-thinking is to think that God is there simply to serve *my* needs. We make something of a 'sugar-daddy' or the equivalent of a fairy godmother of Him. But just as the small child will need to learn that father or mother are not there in life simply to minister to their every whim and desire, so too do we have to learn that lesson in relation to God.

It is a very humbling experience, but the good news is, in learning this lesson we actually start to make real progress on our spiritual journey and in our relationship with God!

At this point you may feel slightly overwhelmed and not know where to begin. But we only ever have to do the next thing, whatever that might be; nothing more. And a good 'next thing' here would be to start trying to develop what David Steindl-Rast calls a 'grateful heart'. In other words this is having a 'thankful heart'.

Even if you are not really sure about what I am trying to get at in this brochure, but yet in some small way sense that maybe your attitude and approach to God are wrong, give thanks for this new truth. It is slowly being revealed to you by God and so go on giving thanks. Gradually it will become clear.

And what about all those other things in life you could give thanks for – from the very small things that could easily be missed, to the larger things of life? Do this every day and you will find yourself starting to develop a grateful heart. And then, almost unconsciously, you will start to realise, as I think Eugene Peterson puts it, that your life is not about you, but about God.