

**Let's begin with prayer...**

*Gracious God, we welcome You amongst us today and celebrate the gift of life. We ask that You would open our ears to hear Your voice, our minds to receive Your wisdom, and our hearts to receive Your love. In Your name we pray. Amen.*



Later this week we will be celebrating Thanksgiving and as most of you know, Thanksgiving is a federal holiday in the United States always celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November to give thanks for the harvest and for blessings like family and friends. Its origins trace back to a 1621 harvest feast shared by the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag (*Wam-pah-know-ag*) people, a feast of thanks for their mutual support and a successful harvest.

Today, it's a secular celebration focused on family gatherings, and is centered around a large meal, with roasted turkey as a traditional centerpiece, accompanied by many side dishes like mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, stuffing, cranberry sauce, and a time of reflecting on the year's good fortune and giving thanks – hence the name “Thanksgiving”. Other traditions have evolved over the years such as watching football, watching parades (*like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade*), or other festive activities.

But let's be real – it seems like people now a days, grumble more than they are grateful. I know someone that no matter what you say to them, they can only find the negative and all they do is grumble about everything.

Did you know Scripture warns against grumbling, citing its negative consequences and instructing believers to avoid it. Key scriptures include Philippians 2:14-15, which urges believers to *“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”* This verse links avoiding grumbling to being a good example to others.

And 1 Corinthians 10:10 which tells us, *“And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were destroyed by the Destroyer.”* This is a direct warning based on the history of the Israelites in the wilderness.

James 5:9 advises us, *“Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged.”* This passage highlights the relational and authoritative consequences of grumbling within the community.

Then of course, 1 Peter 4:9 says for us to *"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."* This provides a practical application of the principle by applying it to how believers should treat each other, especially guests.

Let me tell you the story of the two monks:

There were two monks, a senior and a junior, who lived in a simple hut on a mountain. One day, a fierce storm destroyed their hut, leaving only a small corner intact. The junior monk became sad and upset, grumbling and questioning why this happened to them.

The senior monk, however, was thankful for the chance to sleep under the open sky and said the destruction was an opportunity to rebuild the hut differently and improve their spiritual practice. In this story of gratitude, the two monks who, despite their hut being destroyed by a storm, were able to find the silver lining in the destruction.

I doubt many of us would think of ourselves as ungrateful. But ingratitude shows up in our lives in a variety of ways: through grumbling or complaining, bitterness, jealousy and discontentment.

Here's how it goes for me: Something bad happens—a trial or an injustice—and I gravitate to thinking: I don't have it as good as other people. I try to do everything right, and that person lives what every way they want, but they get all the breaks. Why can't I seem to catch a break?

These thoughts directly undermine my belief in God's goodness by reinforcing the lie that says, *'God isn't taking care of me.'* Instead of turning my thoughts to the many ways God has shown me His loving-kindness, I focus on my own discomfort and doubt I Him.

The story of the Israelites in the wilderness is found in in the Old Testament of the Bible in the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books detail their journey from Egypt, their time wandering the desert for 40 years, and their eventual arrival at the border of the Promised Land.



The story tells us that they experienced firsthand God's deliverance from Egyptian slavery. He parted the Red Sea, provided guidance through a pillar of cloud and fire, and miraculously gave them food from heaven — manna — each day. God did this for no other nation.

But despite all these blessings, the Israelites complained. They grumbled about the manna, longing for the food they had in Egypt and doubted God's ability to care for them.

They had opportunities to be thankful for their freedom and God's daily provision. Instead, they allowed their discontent to grow. Their constant grumbling and complaints reflected a lack of faith and gratitude.

When God brought them to the edge of the Promised Land, they chose to listen to their fear of giants, rather than trust his power and plan. So God declared that their generation wouldn't enter the Promised Land; they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years until a new generation rose in their place.

The Israelites' story teaches how ingratitude can keep us from God's best. Though God had proven his faithfulness, they focused on what they lacked. Their discontent led to rebellion and unbelief, costing them the Promised Land.

The same can be true for us. We should strive to maintain gratitude in difficult times, praising him for his miraculous deliverance, salvation, and provision, or we might lose the amazing blessings he has prepared for us.



In 1 Thessalonians, Paul doesn't mince words when he tells Christians, *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

At times I've struggled to know what that means. Thanking God doesn't seem like an authentic reaction to tragedy or suffering. But I think this verse is urging us to give thanks in the midst of all circumstances.

I may not be grateful for something bad that has happened, but I can still find something to be thankful for, such as God's love, comfort and faithfulness.

There is a story of a blind boy who sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which read, "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat – spare change from folks as they hurried past.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. Then he put the sign back in the boy's hand so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy.

That afternoon, the man who had changed the sign returned to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"

The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way. I wrote, Today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it." Both signs spoke the truth. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind, while the second sign conveyed to everyone walking by how grateful they should be to be able to see...

When your life seems full of troubles, it seems difficult to maintain an attitude of gratitude, doesn't it? All we see are our problems, like a blackened storm cloud casting a dark shadow over our lives and we grumble, oh how we grumble.

And the times when everything just seems to be going smoothly? We often take these precious moments for granted too, don't we? Caught up in the bliss, comfort, and familiarity of it all, we can simply forget to be thankful.

Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness for gifts received, whether they are big or small. It involves noticing and appreciating the good things in life, from a supportive friend to a beautiful sunset. This emotion can lead to a calmer, more joyful life and is associated with positive outcomes like a better immune system and lower blood pressure. Practicing gratitude is not only beneficial for one's own well-being but is also seen as a fundamental virtue that fosters other positive traits.

Ultimately, expressing thankfulness can strengthen relationships and create a greater sense of contentment.

- Gratitude is the feeling of being thankful for the good things in your life, big or small.

- It involves a conscious awareness and appreciation of the kindness, support, and positive moments you experience.
- Practicing gratitude can lead to a calmer life and even improve physical health by reducing stress and strengthening the immune system.
- It is considered a virtue that strengthens relationships and makes people feel more content.
- Taking time to acknowledge what you are grateful for can help you focus on abundance rather than what you lack.

What did Jesus say about gratitude? Jesus's teachings on gratitude emphasized a life of thankfulness to God, even in difficult circumstances. He modeled gratitude by giving thanks for answered prayers, the provision of food, and God's will, and he taught his followers to include thanks in their prayers.

The core message was that thankfulness should be a constant attitude, a way of worship that acknowledges God's sovereignty and leads to peace.

God gave us everything. He gave us life, every single moment, every single breath, every single second. God gave us talents, our ability to talk, to create, to earn money. God gave us our body, our eyes, our ears, our mouth, our hands, our feet, our heart. He gave us our mind, our imagination, our emotions, our reasoning, our language. God gave us opportunities, some taken some lost. God gave us all we have.

God does not deserve our grumbling. God is deserving of our thanks. He deserves more than a holiday, more than a cute sign, more than a week at the top of our list. As we take the time to recognize the countless joys He is affording us—such as a delicious meal, a good book, or a beautiful sunset—our focus shifts from the things we lack to the things we already possess, including God himself. And as we reflect on all that He's done for us, we are able to lay down the burden of ungratefulness and grumbling and be truly grateful.



When you sit down at your Thanksgiving table this week with your friends or family, take a moment to think of all that God has done for you in your life, and then give him thanks with a grateful heart.

### **Let us pray...**

*Heavenly Father, we come before you with a heart full of gratitude and praise. Thank you for your abundant love, mercy, and the countless blessings you pour into our lives. For every moment of joy, every prayer answered, and even for the challenges that teach us and draw us closer to you, we give thanks. We express our sincere thanks for all that you have done and continue to do. Help us to live each day with a spirit of gratitude, recognizing your hand in every blessing and trusting you in every moment. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

### **Benediction**

May you live for one another and for God like never before, with open hands, minds, and a heart filled with gratitude, not just during the short days of this thanksgiving season, but for each and every day to come. May you be blessed on this day. Amen.