



## **WOW: Word Of the Week**

### **Gratitude**

**November 25, 2020 [November 27, 2024]**

Thanksgiving week. In preaching, I could never decide whether the Thanksgiving sermon should be preached on the Sunday before Thanksgiving or the Sunday after. With Wednesday W.O.W, it is easier to decide. The day before Thanksgiving. Today I write about gratitude.

Thanksgiving is easy in times of plenty, difficult in days of doubt and distress. Think -- the Pilgrims, first Thanksgiving, half their number dead, people without a country, thankful to God. Their gratitude was not for something but was to God. That same sense of gratitude led Abraham Lincoln to formally establish Thanksgiving Day in the midst of national civil war, when the casualties seemed endless and the nation struggled for survival.

In Eph. 5:18-20, Paul describes the influence of the presence of the Holy Spirit -- encouraging, singing, praising, giving thanks, submitting. The heart filled with the Spirit overflows with gratitude. I see three aspects of gratitude -- past, present, future.

### **1. GRATITUDE DOES NOT DEPEND ON PAST EXPERIENCES IN THIS IMPERFECT, FALLEN WORLD**

Developing an attitude of gratitude does not depend on surroundings or circumstances. We have two choices -- be humbly grateful or grumbly hateful. We can grow bitter or better. Thanksgiving does not depend on the past. Thanksgiving depends on how we see the past and what we do in the present.

### **2. GRATITUDE IS POSSIBLE WHEN WE LEARN TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT**

Learn genuine gratitude, not the repetition of pious platitudes. Expressing gratitude is possible in the midst of the problems of life. Thanksgiving is not just words. Gratitude is an attitude.

A young man got a job in a small-town lumber yard, in the 1960s—before malls and supermarkets. A trip to the city, an hour away, meant 10c hamburgers and 5c fries. As a summer helper, he swept floors, helped with sales, unloaded materials, restocked shelves. He learned the pricing system. He learned how things go together. He cut window glass, he cut boards. The end of June came, and the owner said, "We need to take inventory this weekend." The young man was not familiar with taking inventory, but the manager, his wife, and that young man made a list of everything in stock. Taking inventory is simple—you just see what you have. I was that young man.

A song says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one...." Take a spiritual inventory. A first step toward gratitude. Listing the gifts, opportunities and challenges that God has given helps us be grateful. I received a check in support of the mission work. The donor included a personal note reflecting our past together: "I am forever grateful!"

### **3. OUR GRATITUDE WILL BE SEEN IN THE WAY WE LIVE FOR OTHERS**

Living with thanksgiving looks beyond the present. When we learn to be thankful, we learn to share with others. Thanksgiving takes us away from ourselves. Psalm 100 is a favorite--wonderful reasons to give thanks. Gratitude focused on others and not only on self. Gratitude for those who have come to the Lord, gratitude for hundreds of baptisms. We may never meet this side of eternity, but we will share in gratitude to God forever.

In everything give thanks. Thanksgiving is not for one day each year. The grateful spirit looks back with an attitude of gratitude. The grateful spirit regularly makes an inventory of present blessings. The grateful spirit looks to the future, committed to sharing blessings and living a life of thanksgiving, regardless.