

**Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart**  
**Philippians 4:6-9**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**  
**James 1:17**  
**Thanksgiving**  
**November 23, 2025**

1. Read all three passages and pray.
2. Challenges presented by this sermon.
  - a. Thanksgiving is a cliché topic. We think we already know all there is to know.
  - b. Some of us are enduring. . .
    - i. Devastating news or ongoing battles with health, family problems, or career.
    - ii. The grind of life and the feeling of never being able to catch a break.
    - iii. These make giving thanks VERY hard.
  - c. The problem of “foreboding joy” (a term coined by Brene Brown).
    - i. “Foreboding joy” is the feeling of impending doom that immediately follows moments of joy. It is fear of the unknown; fear of the unrevealed future.
    - ii. Foreboding Joy inhibits feelings of gratitude because we are afraid of. . .
      1. The dark—the unrevealed future.
      2. Scarcity—we are not and/or will not have enough to face future challenges.
  - d. Help me by setting aside your assumptions, heartaches, and fears for the next 40 minutes or so. Discipline yourself to really listen and apply what you hear. This topic, *thanksgiving*, is essential to your well being.
3. Brene Brown’s Research—The Gifts of Imperfection
  - a. The relationship between thanksgiving and joy.
    - i. Common assumption: joyful people express gratitude.
    - ii. Research finding: people who express gratitude *as a spiritual practice* are joyful.
    - iii. “Without exception, every person I interviewed who described living a joyful life or who described themselves as joyful actively practiced gratitude and attributed their joyfulness to their gratitude practice.” (p. 102)

- b. “Both joy and gratitude were described as spiritual practices that were bound to a belief in human interconnectedness and a power greater than us.”
  - i. Brown discovered two truths we consider obvious:
    - 1. The connections between us
    - 2. The existence and importance of “a power greater than us.”
  - ii. The last part of the sentence exposes the deep error of trying to achieve spiritual goals on our own, apart from God, in a manner of our own choosing rather than under His direction.
- c. “People were quick to point out the difference between happiness and joy as the difference between a human emotion that’s connected to circumstances and a spiritual way of engaging with the world that’s connected to practicing gratitude.”
  - i. Because happiness is tied to circumstances, it dies a painful death in the face of hardship.
    - 1. The pursuit of happiness is idolatry.
      - a. If we achieve our goal, the happiness we feel is temporary. We quickly grow tired of the thing we thought would most satisfy us.
      - b. If we do not achieve our goal, the idol curses us; labeling us a failure.
    - 2. The *feeling* of happiness is not bad or evil. It is a God-given reward. The *pursuit* of happiness is the problem.
  - ii. Joy, on the other hand, transcends our circumstances.
    - 1. The intentional practice of gratitude allows us to discover diamonds in the mud of our lives.
    - 2. Gratitude does not reach completion until appreciation is expressed to the giver.
      - a. All of the things we receive in life come from God, directly or indirectly. If we do not have a relationship with Him through Jesus we cannot close the loop!
      - b. Brown’s refusal to acknowledge God’s role in producing joy forces her to apply her research selfishly.
- d. Conclusions:
  - i. Joy is rooted in the practice of gratitude.
  - ii. Joy and gratitude are rooted in two beliefs:

1. We are intimately connected with one another.
2. God plays a critical role in the production of joy in our lives (that's why it's a fruit of the Spirit!). The practice of gratitude is the means He has ordained.
- iii. Joy is essential to our long-term health. Happiness is a temporary rush when we receive something we wanted.
4. Transition: Why did I refer to Brown's research?
  - a. It is helpful to see how effective research expands our understanding of the "how" and "why" of God's commands.
  - b. It gave me a powerful illustration of the bankruptcy of trying to meet our basic human needs apart from God.
5. James 1:17: this is our foundation. The proper expression of gratitude is rightfully directed primarily to God Himself because He is the Source.  
 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
6. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: This is God's will for you!  
 Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
  - a. Paul described only two things as "the will of God"
    - i. Your sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
    - ii. Joyful prayer with thanksgiving.
  - b. Remember Romans 12:2—When we move away from the world's view and practice to follow Jesus, we discern the will of God for our lives.
7. Philippians 4:6-9: This is how to practice the discipline of gratitude.  
 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
  - a. Quick point: Anxiety is *not* sin! It is a check engine light! I always told my children, "Do not let the check engine light come on!" I then explained the behaviors needed to follow my warning: practice the *discipline* of routine maintenance.

- b. Be people who pray, making specific requests. We are going to discuss the prayer part of this command next week when we visit the Garden of Gethsemane.
  - c. Always pray with gratitude!
    - i. Be specific.
    - ii. Say, "Thank you!" to God and to all the people who have blessed you.
    - iii. Verse 8 provides a framework for analysing our circumstances and focusing our gratitude.
8. Practical suggestions to make gratitude a daily practice:
- a. Go on a "God Hunt". Keep your antennas up, looking for blessings you have received.
    - i. "Everyday" blessings
    - ii. Spiritual blessings
    - iii. Remember James 1:17
  - b. Set an alarm to periodically pause to find reasons to be thankful and express them.
  - c. Keep records.
    - i. Gratitude journal
    - ii. Gratitude jar
    - iii. Be creative.
  - d. Practice gratitude in community.
    - i. Your family
    - ii. The church family
    - iii. Anyone you cross paths with
  - e. "Focus determines reality!"
    - i. What you focus on grows in your life.
    - ii. Choose to focus on God and His blessings in your life.
    - iii. Use feelings of fear to trigger you to look to God and be thankful. Take control of your feelings by shifting your focus.
  - f. "Dig your well before you're thirsty!"