

# Thanksgiving Is...

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, October 5th, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here.! Happy Thanksgiving!

Thank you. Hello. Well, maybe you've noticed something lately like I have.

As you watch TV, as you stop in stores to shop, it's officially becoming treat season. Perhaps you've noticed. It's the time of year when pumpkin spice is suddenly a thing again, and I see some head shakes.

I don't see any big, toothy grins like I get. I would use pumpkin spice soap if I could. I'm pretty excited about pumpkin spice. That's one of my weaknesses. And Halloween candy starts to show up on the shelves too, right?

I don't know if you've noticed how expensive it is. It's very expensive all of a sudden. No Halloween around our house. But as we begin this season, we're marching towards Christmas, right?

[ 1 : 07 ] We're marching towards this time of candy and chocolate and baked goods and increasing blessings and increasing waistlines. And then we wonder why there's a sudden influx of gym memberships in the new year, right?

People are always shocked. So maybe you're not a treat person, and I can pray for you. But this time of year when comfort foods really starts to stretch their legs again, right?

It's not usually during the summer, aside from barbecues, that we think of treats. But as I've been thinking about this more, it suddenly dawned on me. And not only is it a season of treats, it's also one of the busiest times of year, right?

Our schedules, as you can see even from the church calendar, it's exciting that we're doing more things. But we get busier, right? Our schedules become packed with social events and meals and party preparations and all those kinds of things and potentially increase pressure and tension in our lives.

We become stressed. We become stressed. Is it any wonder then that as we become more stressed, we turn to that familiar source of comfort?

[ 2 : 25 ] Desserts. So yes, it is exactly the same number of letters. Yes, it is exactly reversed. You ever thought of that before?

Now you have. Yeah, it hit me like a ton of bricks and I went, oh, that is a sermon intro if I've ever seen one.

So is that a coincidence? Maybe. But I think maybe not. So my prayer is that this morning we're going to gain some more insight into how we can reduce the stress and anxiety in our lives.

Does that sound all right? So, we're pausing our sermon series in Acts right now. And some of you are celebrating that. It's been a marathon.

Only six more sermons to go. So we'll be picking up Acts again next week. But this morning I wanted to reflect on Thanksgiving today. And hopefully give you some food for thought, pun intended.

[ 3 : 27 ] I want us to focus on not the day that we call Thanksgiving Day, but on the word itself. The meaning and significance that it should have in our lives.

And I want to begin this morning with a bit of clarification. Most of you know that I love language and communication, right? You hear me say that often. I love to learn new things as well.

And so when you think of the word thanksgiving and the word gratitude, maybe, like I have in some ways, you've always considered them to be synonyms, right?

We use them maybe interchangeably. So they might, in our minds, mean the same thing. But do they? Well, I've tended to think that myself. But as I prepared this sermon, I wanted to dig a bit deeper and see if that assumption was correct or not.

What do you think? Same? Different? Similar. Oh, good. Extra star for the lady in the back.

[ 4 : 31 ] So the consensus in my research that I did seems to be that gratitude, hear this, gratitude is an inward emotional experience that we have.

When we recognize a gift, a kindness that someone does for us, a provision of some kind, and what that means to us. That's gratitude. So I may be grateful that my car started this morning.

Grateful for something someone said or did to or for me. So gratitude is generally that inward feeling and emotion that we experience.

Well, what about thanksgiving? Thanksgiving tends to come as an outward expression of the gratitude we feel in our hearts. Does that make sense?

Thanksgiving comes when we express our gratitude to someone else. Or most importantly, as we've done already a bit this morning, to God himself. So thanksgiving is praise.

[ 5 : 35 ] Thanksgiving is worship. Thanksgiving is appreciation. It's gratitude expressed outwardly and joyfully. Does that all make sense?

Our sermon this morning is titled, Thanksgiving Is. And I'm going to be guiding us as we consider a few things. Thanksgiving is the perfect antidote.

Thanksgiving is the perfect perspective. And Thanksgiving is the perfect place. So the first thing I want to consider this morning is that Thanksgiving is the perfect antidote.

So over the past few years, I was starting to talk about, God has kind of shown to me that there are really only two main emotions, two main human emotions. Hogwash, you think to yourself.

But I believe, and I'll make a case for it here, that the two main emotions that we experience that are at the root of everything are love and fear.

[ 6 : 42 ] And all sinful behavior we can trace to fear as the root. So Swiss psychologist, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, you maybe heard of her.

She's most well known for this love and fear perspective. And here's a quote from her. She said, there are only two emotions, love and fear. All positive emotions come from love.

All negative emotions come from fear. From love flows happiness and contentment, peace, joy. From fear comes anger and hate and anxiety and guilt.

It's true that there are only two primary emotions, love and fear. But it's more accurate to say that there's only love or fear. For we cannot feel these two emotions together at exactly the same time because they are opposites.

If we're in fear, she says, we're not in a place of love. And when we're in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear.

[ 7 : 50 ] So, what does fear look like in attitude or action? I had to think about this a lot. I believe resistance to change comes from a fear of change.

A fear of losing the things that we value most from our past. Because if we hold on to that past, we can remain safely grounded in what we know.

In what is familiar. And then not have to face the fear, potentially, of an unknown future that lies ahead. Gossip or criticism.

Those things come from a fear of being forgotten. A fear of losing value in some way. If we know things, we may perceive that we have status or influence or value in some way.

Greed or envy. Those things tend to come over what other people have. What we perceive they have tangibly or as gifts or skills. And those things come from a sense of a fear of insecurity in ourselves.

[ 9 : 00 ] And also a fear of the inadequacy of being who we are. Rather than recognizing we are exactly who God created us to be. What about seeking attention or praise for our skills?

Or our contribution? Or our inherent value that we might have? So it's forgetting those things.

Those things are forgetting that we're not seeking the attention of people.

We're not seeking approval from people. At least we shouldn't be. We're seeking to please and serve God alone. So my friends, being fearful in any way really is sinful.

And you may be thinking, well, but if I'm afraid of something, that's fair, isn't it? Well, why are you afraid? Are you afraid because you don't trust?

Are you afraid because you're anticipating a worst case scenario that will never come? So fear really means that we're not trusting, ultimately.

[ 10 : 07 ] It means we're not hoping for the future. It means we're not believing in God's plan for our lives and for the world. That's where fear comes from. Fear is destructive.

It is poisonous. And it does not come from God. When someone has been poisoned in some way, this should be easy, I hope, we can recognize that we need a what?

An antidote. Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 1 verse 7, For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

So with the Holy Spirit living in us, we have access to God's perfect love. What Scripture tells us will cast out fear.

Period. Friends, by being thankful, we have access to God's perfect love. We're seeking to trust God in the good times and the bad.

[ 11 : 12 ] And we'll be giving ourselves, by trusting God, an antidote to fear and the negative effects that it can definitely have in our lives. So that's where thanksgiving really is the perfect antidote.

Second thing I want us to consider this morning is that thanksgiving is the perfect perspective. So here's the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 12 verse 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Paul's metaphor of races and runners is a well-known one.

And you don't even have to be a jogger or even a speed walker to get that message, get that what he's after there. I don't know about you, but when I don't fix my eyes on Jesus, when I don't look to him as my example and my encouragement, I begin to drift.

I begin to forget my identity in Christ. I begin to put myself first and I begin to worry. It can be so easy for us to be tangled up and lost in cycles of regret, loss, grief, envy, or even misplaced desires in our lives.

[ 12 : 50 ] And our world has shifting priorities, maybe you've noticed. Different allegiances that happen. Different messages that are communicated.

And all of these things pull people in so many different directions. And the messages, hopefully you know this, the messages we receive and adopt and incorporate in our lives begin to shape us.

And most often in ways that we really don't want to be shaped. So the self-interested and self-serving voices of the world, they ultimately come from a single source.

Satan wants nothing more than for you and me to lose our way. What you experience there for me is a moment of grief over people being lost.

And also deep emotion and anger at Satan. He wants people to be lost and distracted and confused and fearful and alone.

[ 14 : 06 ] When we lose our focus, when we drift from Jesus, we lose that perfect perspective that we can only gain by focusing on him.

The direction we will be pulled in when we drift from Jesus leads to our destruction. So having recognized that God gives us a way out of being overcome by fear, that should really help us develop then a better perspective on our lives and our circumstances.

Being grateful and expressing that gratitude through thanksgiving to God, it restores that proper healthy balance and perspective in our lives.

It keeps us from being me-focused. And it reminds us to be God-focused. Are you thankful for what God has done for you?

Are you thankful that God's plan includes you specifically? Keep your focus on that.

[ 15 : 20 ] Because thanksgiving is the perfect perspective. The third thing I want us to consider this morning is that thanksgiving is the perfect place.

In Sunday school, when I was little, we would leave our dinosaurs outside the church. And we sang a fun little song that had lots of actions.

I think 99% of you know it. It was memorable. It talked about rain and floods and sand and rock.

That song was, The wise man built his house. And if you now have it stuck in your head, you are welcome. But little did we know that we were being taught and that that song taught us a powerful, powerful story.

It taught us one of Jesus' most important parables. The story of the wise and foolish builders. It's a story that reminds us of the importance of having a strong foundation in our lives.

[ 16 : 34 ] As we've considered, without the proper foundation, we're more susceptible to negative influences, right? We're more susceptible to fearful motives and actions.

We're more susceptible from drifting away from God. But when we seek God and we ask him to help us to trust him, when we have confidence in his plans for our lives, when we have faith in his promises and in his love for us, none of those facts about God are just facts.

They are truth. We're building a firm foundation. We're building a perfect place that will anchor our lives. I want to acknowledge that it can often be hard for us to be thankful in tough circumstances. Is that fair? When we're facing health issues, when we're worried about our job or our finances, when our most important relationships are struggling, And maybe you can recognize now that those things in our lives are the cracks through which fear can get in.

It can creep back into our lives. It's ironic, isn't it? When we face struggles and temptation, those are the times that we sometimes turn away from God.

[ 18 : 04 ] Right? We forget him. Shouldn't we be running towards him during those times? Our ultimate source of comfort, of wisdom, of peace, and encouragement is available to us at all times.

And yet, God is often the last place we turn in those times of struggle. Even when things are going well in our lives, God is the last place, I think, that we tend to turn to express gratitude.

To just declare our thanksgiving to him for what he has done. I think sometimes we take blessings for granted. Or worse, we give ourselves somehow the misplaced credit for them.

As you can imagine, the Apostle Paul had a lot to say about thanksgiving. He wrote to churches at his time, during his time, and the wisdom that he expressed to those churches is still applicable to us today.

He said in 1 Thessalonians 5, 16-18, Rejoice once in a while. Rejoice always.

[ 19 : 28 ] Pray when you remember. Pray continually. Give thanks when you're happy. Give thanks in all circumstances.

For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Not a suggestion, but a command, because God knows that is right for us.

Giving thanks always, continually, and in all circumstances. Sounds easy sometimes.

Hard other times, maybe. In Ephesians 5, verse 20, Paul said, Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Giving thanks for everything, good and bad, in Jesus' name. In Colossians 3, verse 17, Paul encourages us that whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[ 20 : 47 ] Giving thanks to God the Father through him. All these alignment pieces of Jesus to God the Father. All these pieces about giving thanks and gratitude.

Pretty hard to complain with this mouth if you're praising God with it at the same time. Remember, fear and love can't coexist at the same time.

Thanksgiving really is the perfect foundation. It's the perfect place to anchor our lives, no matter our circumstances.

This morning we've spent some time focusing on thanksgiving. How it is the perfect antidote to fear that can affect us and distance us from God and his plan for us.

It's the perfect perspective reminding us to focus on Jesus. And it is the perfect place from which to anchor our lives and serve us as a strong foundation.

[ 21 : 55 ] Friends, when we focus on gratitude, thankfulness, thanksgiving, we will refocus our priorities and our energy on what God is doing for us, in us, and through us.

We'll also be better able to adjust our perspective from a negative and defeated what now to a hopeful and thankful what's next.

Make gratitude, thankfulness, and thanksgiving to God a daily practice. Friends, make all your days Thanksgiving Day. Amen.