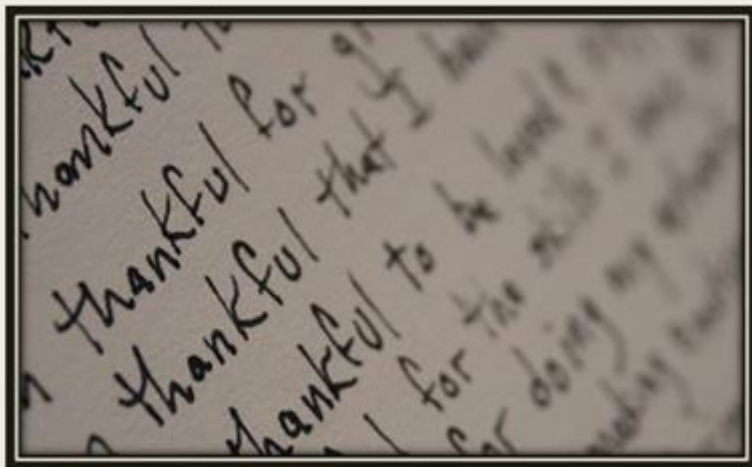


PRACTICING GRATITUDE



If only we could invite gratitude to Thanksgiving with an invitation card from the Hallmark store. If only gratitude could magically appear when we pull out Grandmother's china to set the table. If only we could scoop gratitude into a bowl and serve it as a side dish, next to the cranberry sauce. If only we could purchase gratitude at Pottery Barn, like the fall wreath on the front door.

We teach and train our children in gratitude, "Can you say thank-you?" How do we train and remind ourselves, even our sometimes cynical, grumpy, forgetful, grown-up selves? Gratitude for life. For home. For family. For material blessings. For spiritual blessings.

Here are two reminders as we consider gratitude this year.

First, many of us are simply not very thankful people, and we need to confess that. The holiday is a good wake-up call that we are often too distracted by details and worries to notice life's wonders and be thankful. Wendell Berry offers a helpful guide:

I confess my sins: that I have not been happy enough, considering my good luck; have listened to too much noise; have been inattentive to wonders; have lusted after praise.

Secondly, gratitude should not be seasonal. It comes with practice in all our days and months and years. Like playing the piano or shooting a free throw, gratitude requires practice and repetition. Gratitude will not show up for Thanksgiving dinner if we are not hospitable to its presence all year round. G.K. Chesterton wrote,

*You say grace before meals.
All right.
But I say grace before the concert and the opera,
And grace before the play and pantomime,
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting,
Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.*

This Thanksgiving and this year, may we nurture hearts of gratitude for the abundance we receive. Like little children, may we respond to the blessings of life with pure and simple gratitude.

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Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18