How To Be Thankful When We Don’t Feel Grateful!

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*“Do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*[Philippians 4:6-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+4%3A6-7&version=ESV)ESV

It is Thanksgiving week and traditionally this is the week when we are supposed to be especially grateful for all the blessings in our lives. Now, for some of us, that feeling of gratitude just isn’t working right now. It feels off, wrong, inadequate in the face of the national divide post-election, in the realities some of us are living with difficult diagnosis, lack of financial resources, loneliness, the end of relationships and not a safe place to call home.

I get it. It’s a hard year to be thankful. And that ambivalence is not only ok, its normal, it’s a healthy response to living in unhealthy times. When I worry, when I despair, I have found several places to go to rest and find hope again.

I run to the woods and pay attention to what the leaves, wind, water and birds are telling me to listen to. I watch my golden retriever Ida and pay attention to what she pays attention to. I love the poetry of Wendell Berry, a farmer from Kentucky who has written about his small farm and the state of the nation since the late 1960’s. This poem, *The Peace of Wild Things*, is an excellent place to begin when despair and worry set in.

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Berry knows that sometimes despair is so present he cannot sleep. While I don’t leave my home to wander the woods at night, I do wake and wander most mornings. There, in the early morning light, hope begins again.

As we seek a sense of gratitude, wander into nature. Pay attention to the frost. Listen to the sounds of geese honking overhead. What do the squirrels have to teach us about storing up food for the long winter? What beauty is there in being like a leaf and letting go?

I urge you to get into nature or pay close attention to the natural world outside your windows in the coming weeks and months. The Earth always has lessons to teach us.

The second thing I encourage all of us to do to find a sense of gratitude is look to family and friends. I miss my adult children, and I am so grateful for the group family text conversation that is always running through my phone. A silly photo, a thought about the present, a question is easily accessible by group text, and I am grateful for that connectivity.

Not all of us have family around or family that is helpful. Let us look to friends and this church community of faithful friends to be supports in our lives. Show up for some of the small group ministries we have here at West Parish. Maybe the crafters on Thursday mornings, the knitters on Friday mornings, men’s breakfast group at Jack’s Outback or Women in the Spirit. There is our Bible Study group on Wednesdays as well. You matter. We need you in small groups, in friendships, in one-on-one conversations.

As the winter approaches, I am finding gratitude in my warm house. I try to be thankful when I hear the old heater kicking on and the walls groan as the heat comes through the radiators. When I light a candle and watch the flame flicker, the light reminds me to keep on trying to let my own light shine in the world. I smell the slight scent of the candle and try to find some hope in the senses that connect me with smell as well as sight. I can see and smell. Everything may not be as I wished, but I can witness the beauty of a small flame in the quiet of my home. My sweet dog stretches and sighs. She reminds me that I need to let her out and walk her soon. And if I ignore her, she falls back asleep, sighing and dreaming of chasing rabbits and squirrels and spending time with me, her favorite person.

As we work together as a church, let us remember our calling to feed the world. We can bring food to fill the food pantry bucket each week. Let us welcome the stranger. Let us help our local non-profits to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. We can keep showing up for the world in need. And we don’t have to do it alone. We do it together. I love the African proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

If you cannot seem to find anything to be grateful for, reach out and let someone know. We all need someone to lean on. There may be tough days that linger and letting someone in on the loneliness will help. Call me. I care.

When we show love and gratitude, we help both the one we share it with and ourselves. We need to share this kind of gratitude so that we become more and more intertwined. Our dependence on one another is a beautiful gift. We are built to be in community, to love one another and to be grateful.

Anne Lamott, who is always one of my favorite authors to turn to when it all seems to be too much, has been going through her own struggles lately considering our nation’s challenges. And her writing reminds me that asking for help from God is always the right way to begin. We can always implore God to “help me, help me, help me.” Sometimes it will take a lot of help me prayers before we will be ready for us to say thank you, thank you, thank you prayers. And yet, no matter how dark the times may seem, Anne Lamott reminds us that it is her firm belief that “grace bats last.” Grace is the strongest hitter. We may feel that we are surrounded by folks that aren’t cheering for us to succeed. And yet, that is not the final answer. Grace bats last. We are all part of a team where grace continues to bat. And we will all be called home, and safe, in the end.

For now, let us walk together into the light. And when it is dark outside, let us see how the stars shine. The light gets through and we, will make it as well. Amen.

1. <https://onbeing.org/poetry/the-peace-of-wild-things/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)