

Thanksgiving 2025

LTC (Ret) Chaplin Tom Azar

As veterans November is a meaningful month where we find remembrances to celebrate with a joyful depth:

1. We give a 'hooah' on the 10th for the Marine's 250th birthday.
2. We pause to reflect on the 11th for Veterans/Armistice Day.
3. Though not a holiday, Election Day is our fought for opportunity to exercise our right to freely vote in our democracy.
4. Finally, millions of our compatriots eagerly look to Thanksgiving.

This is our time to find creative ways to thoughtfully 'Give Thanks' to our family and neighbors. I hold in high memory working with chapel teams and lay leaders who made a tremendous difference in the lives of military congregations spiritually and emotionally, at home, deployed and in war. As retirees we can play it forward.

Proverbs chapter 3 says:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”

Speaking of 'paths' I remember the snowy days at Plattsburgh and Misawa AFB when my kids and chapel groups cross country skied on the golf course, (you know that white stuff unlike our Emerald coast sand). The Services Squadron cut trails for all to travel over and later provided hot chocolate or cider on those blistery days.

One time after completing our first 9 hole's circumference, my son Daniel chose to venture off on his own. Yes, within 15 minutes he called out “dad I'm stuck!” When we make life choices outside of God's providential paths, we pay a price. Fortunately, we were able to follow his tracks and rescue him from the ditch. He was thankfully cold.

We humans are like that. We all start off wisely with home, church and school values, but over time temptations impact our life choices that lead us off the “King's highway”. We do this because we forget our roots and to be thankful.

The Good News is God is our merciful heavenly Father and once He hears our contrite calls for help, will intervene and seek to restore us. God is the Good Shepherd who wants to know, care and love each of us in a pure give and take relationship with Him.

King David wrote many Psalms thanking God for rescuing and returning him back to his spiritual roots.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men,

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.

He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains.

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.”

This Thanksgiving let us try having the ‘Attitude of Gratitude’ as we celebrate the above holidays.

When Mary and I watch the evening news, there is always an uplifting story at the broadcast’s end about good people compassionately serving others in difficult times. These unselfish individual’s echo each other— “I’m grateful and blessed; we want to help those less fortunate.”

Did you notice that the word ‘attitude’ is in the word ‘gratitude.’

This is critical because your ‘attitude’ in life will determine your ‘altitude’ both now and eternally.

Moreover, we often hear conscientious Christians say, “Every day is thanksgiving!” Sadly, ungrateful people are unhappy individuals. They are self-absorbed, proud, greedy and envious. For true disciples, every day is a day of and for Thanksgiving.

When we chat with our BHV friends, they are quick to underscore several central players who impacted their lifestyle.

First, there was respect and support afforded us from the many senior leaders we worked for. Additionally, their staff provided personal and mission support for accomplishing the ever-evolving programs at home and abroad. They gave us wisdom and discipline.

Secondly, we remember the religious education teachers, musicians, choirs, ushers, deacons, nursery, youth and those who set up and cleaned up after every program. There were food banks, clothing drives, “Toys for Tots” and Christmas basket, etc, all comprised of individuals who believed in the military core value of “Service before Self”.

Thirdly, there were the chapel attendees at religious and holiday events whose very presence made programs succeed. Prayer Breakfasts, Holocaust and Thanksgiving

services, marriage and family programs, CC/Chief/1St Sgts meetings (to name a few) made the chapel a vibrant hub and active gathering place for many active and retired families. They were humble team players and not arrogant lone rangers. They were Beatitude believers and not bean counters.

Fourthly, there were the behind-the-scenes individuals who were quiet and prayerful to those experiencing suffering and loss. Their mature faith was fueled by the lives of saints, missionaries, evangelists, spiritual writers and Biblical characters who deeply informed their compassion and truth walk with our loving God. They possessed the wisdom and experience to be with those who were facing great loss. Care and compassion guided them.

Your list may include medics, red and black berets, knuckle-busters, supply, sports and recreation, travel— it's endless when you take time to reflect and recall. You can show gratitude today by calling, visiting or writing to your friends and relatives. Pray in thanks to the God who put them in your life.

So here is your Thanks-Giving homework, (if you are so inclined), is to embark on or add to your "Attitude of Gratitude" list. It could be a benchmark for a daily walk closer with God and myriads of others. I encourage you to find a little time in a quiet place to begin your "Gratitude List." Here's some of Mary and Tom's partial list:

- Born healthy and in a freedom loving democratic country
- Parents and pastors who walked the talk with spiritual and moral values
- Our faith relationship with the Trinity and Biblically minded people of faith
- God's person, protection, provision and promises.
- Parents that lived in their 90's so we could reconnect and thank them for their love, guidance and support
- Uncles, aunts and cousins who fought wars, survived, and encouraged us to take the solemn vow
- The heroes who impacted our life and the wisdom to be a hero to others
- Siblings and children who continue to show their support and love
- Heaven's guidance to answer the call for both of us to serve on active duty in the Air Force
- Educators and mentors who gave us tools to learn and guide others
- A heavenly calling to be present-day conduits to listen and love others that God puts in our life
- Good health to exercise, travel and assist the less fortunate
- A warm home and community with running water, electricity and unlimited technology

- The gift of a meaningful and loving marriage
- Church families throughout our spiritual pilgrimage to pray and act with in truth and love
- Involved widows who are a daily reminder of their long support as dedicated military spouses
- Active brain cells to listen, learn and share with others
- The gift of daily laughter, compassion and service to those less fortunate
- Living in a country with beautiful state and national parks we can explore and see God's fingerprints
- Our evolution from kindergarten believers to a contemplative action orientated faith
- Myriad edifying Christian books and resources to read and reflect upon for growth and guidance
- Witnessing the Trinity's miraculous work in the lives of neighbors, friends and family
- Communing and appreciating God's peace in our heart, mind and soul

Well, we pray you get the drift—now go and do likewise; and if possible, encourage others to make 'Thanksgiving' not just a one-day holiday, but a forever daily attitude and experience.

From our family to yours, please have a safe, happy, healthy and holy Thanks-Giving Day and Year. Can't wait to hear your stories... hooah!