

A Little More Than “Thanks for Everything”

Neal Watkins
Minister for Vision & Vitality

I’ve learned that it’s good form to start with gratitude. Before making a request, asking a favor, or explaining what we need, begin with a thank-you.

Reading that back, I realize how transactional it sounds—as though gratitude is the polite opening act before getting to what I want. I’m working on that. I want gratitude to change me: to help me celebrate what God has already done, what is unfolding now, and what continues through the faithful generosity of others.

Somewhere between “God, help me” and “God, seriously, a little help here,” I’m trying to be more specific about what I’m grateful for.

As a partner, parent, and colleague, I’m practicing the same thing. “Thanks for everything” is a start. But “Thank you for taking care of that when you knew I was overwhelmed” tells someone I noticed. It names the difference they made.

Fortunately, God has not yet instituted a limit on prayers of desperation.

I’m mindful of how busy you are. And I’m mindful of how much busier things are likely to get over the next twelve weeks. We will be asking our congregations for their time, talents, and, in this stewardship season, financial commitments.

There will be dinners to prepare, ministries to support, and budgets to build. Someone will need a truck. Somewhere in every congregation is a person with a truck who has learned to avoid eye contact during announcements.

These invitations matter. Our churches depend on people sharing what they have. As we prepare to ask, let’s be specific about our thanks.

“Thank you for supporting our church” is a beginning. “Your generosity helped make sure our neighbors had groceries this week” helps people see what their giving means.

“Thanks for volunteering” is kind. “Thank you for noticing who was sitting alone and making room at your table” names a particular gift.

That kind of gratitude takes attention. The coffee did not brew itself, and the fellowship hall was not restored overnight by an industrious branch of the Holy Spirit.

Someone gave their time. Someone shared a skill. Someone made room in their budget for our ministry together.

Jesus noticed people whose gifts others overlooked. Practicing that attention can shape how we see our congregations and invite generosity.

And a thank-you deserves room to stand on its own. “We appreciate you—and could you chair something?” is an invitation wearing a thank-you’s clothing. Church volunteers can spot that outfit from the parking lot.

This week, I’m going to offer a few more specific thank-yous. At home. At work. In prayer. Perhaps you’ll join me.

As we enter stewardship season, let’s name what people’s generosity has made possible, then speak hopefully about what comes next. Being specific helps us recognize how God is working among us. These stories deserve to be remembered, shared, and celebrated together, especially when the next request is already waiting in the wings.

“To God be the glory, great things God hath done.” Let’s tell people which great things we mean.