

# Editorial: Thanks will lift your soul

November 22, 2013

Here's a leadoff item for your gratitude list this Thanksgiving: Thank God you're not a turkey.

If you were a turkey, chances are, you'd only be around to "celebrate" one Thanksgiving. Of course, you would be the guest of honor at the feast table. And you probably would agree with what Mark Twain said about being run out of town on a rail: "Except for the honor, I'd just as soon pass."



Editor Marv Knox Since you're not a turkey and your vocabulary consists of more than "gobble," you can amaze your family and friends this Thanksgiving by sharing turkey trivia:

- About [88 percent of Americans](#) say they eat turkey at Thanksgiving, according to what appears to be the turkey union, the [National Turkey Federation](#). (My friend George observes that, if the NTF is indeed the turkeys' union, they need a better union.)
- Americans eat approximately [46 million turkeys](#) at Thanksgiving. That translates to about three pounds of poultry per Thanksgiving gobbler.
- Americans consume turkey all year 'round, not just at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Americans ate an average of [16.2 pounds of turkey per](#)

[person](#) in 2011.

- The latest [price per pound](#) of frozen turkey is \$1.66
- Turkeys are the [only breed of poultry](#) native to North America and naturally range from northern Mexico to the eastern United States.
- Minnesota is the [top turkey-producing state](#), delivering 46.5 million birds a couple of years ago. Texas didn't crack the top eight turkey territories.
- While he considered turkeys "vain and silly," Benjamin Franklin advocated the turkey should be named [the national symbol](#) over the bald eagle, which he called "a coward."

OK, time to stop. If you recite all these turkeyisms, you'll probably be asked to leave the Thanksgiving table. And if I don't quit feeding them to you, you're likely to stop reading.

So, here's the second item for your list: Turkey trivia is over for another year.

While you could make a case that Thanksgiving is only the fourth-most-important holiday (1, Easter; 2, Christmas; 3, Independence Day; 4, Thanksgiving; 5, your birthday), its value is enormous.

### **Saying 'Thanks' is good for you**

That's because saying thanks is good for you—and for others. When we express gratitude, we free our souls by gaining at least a bit of separation from want and complaint. Thankfulness provides perspective. When we're thankful, we realize we're blessed. We recognize that life, for all its challenges, is wonderful and significant. And when we express gratitude, we place ourselves in proper relationship to another, whether that is God or people. Thankfulness helps us see the value of our dependence upon

others and reminds us we're strengthened by the care of others.

The Apostle Paul advised, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Notice he did not say we should give thanks for all circumstances, but we should be able to give thanks in every circumstance.

Meister Eckhart, a 13th-14th century German theologian, said, "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is 'Thank you,' it will be enough."

### **Help! Thanks! Wow!**

Anne Lamott, a contemporary American novelist and memoirist, insists gratitude is the crucial central component of the three essential prayers: "Help. Thanks. Wow."

Last year around this time, Lamott elaborated on thanks in an interview with National Public Radio: "Thanks is the prayer of relief that help was on the way. ... It can be (the) pettiest, dumbest thing, but it could also be that you get the phone call that the diagnosis was much, much, much better than you had been fearing. ... The full prayer, and its entirety, is: 'Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you.' But for reasons of brevity, I just refer to it as 'Thanks.' It's amazement and relief that you caught a break; that your family caught a break; that you didn't have any reason to believe that things were really going to be OK, and then they were and you just can't help but say, 'Thank you.'"

Of course, sometimes we don't feel like expressing thanks. Life is hard and unfair. Especially from Thanksgiving through Christmas and New Year's Day, the busyness and stress of the season compound with reminders of loss, and expressing thanks can become what we want to do least. To the contrary, at precisely this time, it's what we need to do most.

### **Focus on gratitude**

The only way to survive Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's with our souls intact is to focus on gratitude.

A few days ago, I intended to end this editorial with two lists—25 blessings, or things for which I'm grateful, plus five people to whom I intend to express gratitude.

Then I [listened to a sermon](#) on thanks by Michigan pastor Kent Dobson. He insisted the moment we share a list like either of these, we're polishing our images rather than truly expressing gratitude. Good point.

So, I'll write my lists. And sometime during Thanksgiving week, compile your own lists. The exercise will lift your spirits and heal your soul.