
I am Thankful for all the Things I Do Not Need!!

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
At the Buckhead Community Thanksgiving Service
Atlanta, Georgia
For the Week of Thanksgiving**

It's that time of year. It's time to wear everybody down by asking incessantly what we are thankful for. From kindergartens to garden clubs, everyone will be pressing themselves to consider all the things we are - or should be - thankful for.

Isn't giving thanks a sweet activity? Well, not always. I pause to remember Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector (Luke 18:9-14). If "giving thanks" is all there is to happiness and righteousness, then surely the Pharisee is there. After all, he was certainly "giving thanks." His problem, however, was what he was giving thanks for!

The Pharisee was thanking God that he was not like other people. The more he reminded God of whom he was not, the more he actually separated himself from everyone else on earth, finally including his fellow-worshipper in the temple.

During this upcoming season of Thanksgiving and Christmas, then, I remind myself that what we give thanks for can also affect our spiritual lives negatively. For example, there may be a problem with giving thanks for over-abundance and over-supply. The Pharisee reminds us that merely thanking God indiscriminately may not be the best prayer after all.

Therefore, I have decided this year to thank God in another way. I propose to thank God not for all the things I have or all the things I enjoy. I want to thank God, instead, for all the things I do *not* have. I want to thank God for all the things I do *not* enjoy. In short, I want to thank God for all the things I do *not* need!

I do not know about you, but I have received about a hundred pounds of retail catalogs in the last few weeks. The same catalogs are in the doctor's offices. They are in the seat pocket of the airplane I flew a few weeks ago.

I thank God that I do not need all the products that those catalogs are offering. Have you noticed how much stuff is in those catalogs that you absolutely do not need?

Here's a few of the items I thank God that I do not need. I do not need an all-in-one breakfast machine. This machine has slots for toast and eggs and sausages. Apparently, you put everything in, wash your hands, and then out pops your own ready-to-eat breakfast. I do not need that.

In fact, I enjoy a breakfast that requires a little time to prepare. It's usually just enough time for me to wake up. Machines that claim to save me time usually cost me a great deal more anxiety.

I am also thankful that I do not need a fifteen-thousand dollar exercise machine that promises to make me lose weight if I use it only ten minutes a day. Have you seen the advertisement for this machine? It looks like something the absent-minded professor has invented, full of arms and cables and strange hooks.

I must admit that I am actually a bit overweight myself. I should exercise some more. But I think good exercise should not

cost fifteen thousand dollars. It really costs only time. I am thankful I do not need that contraption.

I am also thankful I do not need the fanciest GPS -global positioning system""in my car. Have you seen how complicated and fancy they have become? For one thing, I like to know where I am going before I start driving the car. I am thankful I like good old-fashioned maps.

For a second thing, I really don't want a strange voice telling me about every turn and every local attraction we pass. A friend of mine has one of these devices, and he took me for a ride in his fancy car. I could hardly have a conversation with him, due to that strange voice mildly droning out directions. Actually, we were up in north Georgia, and -I swear""we ended up on some God-forsaken dirt road that led us through a roller-coaster.

I am thankful that I do not need a GPS voice in my car.

Here's one. Mini-helmets. A six-inch football helmet signed by my favorite football player. I am thankful I do not need that. If I had one, it would probably be signed by Michael Vick.

Here's another item I am thankful I do not need. It's a new kind of shoe with industrial grade absorption springs in the heel. The ad says it defies gravity. Yeah, that's just what I need. I hop over a crack in the street, and I end up bouncing into a plate-glass window. I am so thankful I do not need to wear gravity-defying shoes.

How about the world's largest write-on map mural? Do I need that? Actually, I thought I did need one of these, about ten years ago. We had children at home, and -how great!""we could have a huge map on the playroom wall, so they could actually learn something while they were staring into space! So I bought one. "World's Largest" has to be correct. It was thirteen feet long and nine feet high. We didn't have a wall it would fit on. We ended up trying to install it by curving around the corner and up into the ceiling. We did not need that thing. I am thankful I don't need another one. By the way, I do not need a television screen that big either.

I am thankful that I do not need a runaway alarm clock. Have you seen it? Its cousin is an alarm clock that starts flying around the room when it goes off. The idea is that you have to get out of the bed and search for it in order to turn off the sound. That way, you are definitely awake. I am so thankful that I do not need that.

I am thankful that I do not need a "garage elevator." Apparently this device is a steel platform that you install in your garage. After you put all your garage clutter into it, you hoist it up to the ceiling, so it's out of your way. That way, I suppose, I can put more clutter on the floor and fill every cubic foot of the garage with other things I do not use. I don't need a garage elevator, and I cannot imagine how to install it anyway.

I am thankful I do not need a nose-hair trimmer. Well, I take that back. My wife would probably say I do need a nose-hair trimmer. Would I pay more attention to that area of my personal hygiene if I had paid forty dollars for a special machine? Let's give it another year before I put it on the Christmas list.

I am thankful I do not need a backpack bicycle. This little bicycle apparently folds up so you can put it in your backpack ,and add twelve pounds to what you are already carrying. I guess if it got too heavy you could unfold it and try to bicycle out on the trails, but I am not sure the six inch tires would let you do that. I am thankful that I like to backpack and I like to bicycle, but I do not have to do both of them at the same time!

I am thankful that I do not need that new language teaching series that will have me speaking Portuguese in ten easy weeks. What a great headline: Learn Portuguese today! Today?. I would have to spend a year in Portugal or Brazil before I could get by. I am thankful that I do not need a language teaching tape to prove to me how un-disciplined I am!

What else is being touted this year as "Gotta have it!" Almost anything we might see advertised on television from midnight to six in the morning. In fact, almost anything we might see advertised on television from six in the morning until midnight, too.

I actually do not need a pick up truck that has ten horsepower more than the one my neighbor has. It doesn't need to be six

inches wider either. At this rate, in a few years, we'll have pick up trucks that take up both lanes; and the road will have to be a one-way road. Maybe they will all decide to leave town together and let regular sized cars use the city streets.

I am thankful that I do not need a cellular telephone that takes pictures. I actually have a cell phone that takes pictures, but I cannot figure out to take a picture of any quality. By the time I figured out all the right buttons, the local disaster I was trying to film would be over. I am thankful that I do not need a cell phone with two hundred different ring tones either.

Think of all the things we do not need this year! I do not need to paint the kitchen another color. I do not need another sweater. I do not need another channel on my cable television menu. I do not need to spend more money.

I simply do not need all this stuff that the world tells me constantly I do need. I am thankful, so thankful, that I really don't need it! What a liberating experience it is to realize what I simply do not need.

It makes me feel free! Maybe this is what it is like to be close to the kingdom of God, where all is made new! When I realize how much I do not need, I am that much more free to acknowledge the simple wonders God has for me right now - the simple gifts like love and family, friends and community.

Maybe this is what real thanksgiving feels like. Thanksgiving is freedom from the unnecessary clutter of our lives, freedom from what we do not need, so that we can know the simple gifts God has for each of us.

AMEN.

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