

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
 Sermon: The Danger of Prosperity  
 Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:1-20, Luke 12:13-21  
 Rev. Steve Filyk  
 October 12, 2025 THANKSGIVING  
 Opener: I sing the almighty power of God 333  
 Choruses: 10,000 Reasons, Forever (Tomlin)  
 After Sermon: Psalm 23 (Townend)  
 Closer: Let all things now living 338 (Ashgrove)

Thanksgiving has a long and varied history in Canada,  
 Culminating in a 1957 proclamation of Parliament  
 Declaring the second Monday in October  
 as "a day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God  
 for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed.""  
(Thanksgiving in Canada. (2025). Retrieved October 11, 2025, from Thecanadianencyclopedia.ca website: <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/thanksgiving-day>)

The prosperity we know,  
 The material blessings we enjoy in Canada  
 Are an incredible gift.

With our basic needs met we are free  
 To spend our time pursuing more important things.

We are able to direct our skills and creativity and energy  
 To bringing good things into the world.  
 We are able to focus on relationships that matter.

But sometimes the very prosperity  
 That is intended to free us  
 Becomes a sort of trap that ensnares us  
 And prevents us from fulfilling our ultimate purpose.

In December 2002, Jack Whittaker,  
 a successful businessman from West Virginia,  
 won one of the largest Powerball jackpots in history—\$314.9 million.

Already a successful businessman,  
 Whittaker saw the win as a gift from God  
 and vowed to use the money for good.  
 He donated millions to churches,  
 built a foundation to help the needy,  
 and showered his family with gifts and financial support

But what began as a dream  
 quickly unraveled into a nightmare.  
 Whittaker's windfall made him a target  
 To those who wanted to enrich themselves.  
 And Whittaker began treating people, like objects  
 That could be bought and sold.

The most tragic consequence was the impact on his family.  
 His beloved granddaughter, Brandi,  
 whom he had spoiled with wealth,  
 fell into drug addiction and was found dead from an overdose in 2004.  
 These losses devastated Whittaker,  
 who later said he wished he had torn up the winning ticket.

[A long Washington Post expose catalogues not just the devastation  
 This windfall had on his own family but on the surrounding community]

(see Witt, A. (2018, October 24). He won Powerball's \$314 million jackpot. It ruined his life. Retrieved October 11, 2025, from The Washington Post website: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2018/10/24/jack-whittaker-powerball-lottery-winners-life-was-ruined-after-m-jackpot/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2018/10/24/jack-whittaker-powerball-lottery-winners-life-was-ruined-after-m-jackpot/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) )

Now, I can almost hear what some of you are thinking:  
*'If I won the lottery, I'd handle it better.'*"

Keep in mind that Whittaker was already a multi-millionaire.  
 He ran a large business and knew how to manage money.  
 His intention was to live modestly,  
 Spend more time with his family,  
 And accomplish some good in his community.

Prosperity is a blessing.  
 But it also comes with dangers.  
 So how can we enjoy life's blessings,

Without sacrificing the most important things?

PAUSE

This fall we have been exploring  
The first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

What we have learned so far  
Is that God created all things and declared them good.

God created humanity in God's own image  
Planted them in a lush garden  
So they could oversee God's creation  
And live in relationship with him.  
Of course this goes sideways  
When Adam and Eve seek to be their own bosses  
And ignore the one restriction they had been given.

What you will encounter next week  
(with our guest preacher)  
Is God working out plan to rescue humanity.  
God chooses one man Abram, through whom  
God will bless the entire world.

Today on this Thanksgiving Sunday  
We have fast-forwarded ahead in the story of Abram,  
Where his descendants are about to see the fulfillment  
Of the ancient promise of land, God made to Abram.

After generations of slavery in Egypt  
and years of wandering in the wilderness,  
these descendants now stood on the edge of a new land—  
a place of promise and prosperity.

But before they do this, Moses reviews their history  
And warns them about the dangers ahead.  
Moses describes the privations they faced in the desert

As a period of spiritual formation, of discipleship:  
"He humbled you, causing you to hunger  
and then feeding you with manna...  
to teach you that man does not live on bread alone  
but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

By sending them on a difficult journey  
Where resources were scarce  
God was teaching them that he was the source  
of their health and wellbeing  
And that he would reliably care for them.

[My guess is that many of us have been taken  
On a similar journey with God  
Where the challenges of life and loss  
Have thrust us into a daily dependence on God's mercy.  
We too have discovered that God is faithful.]

God disciplined them, but had no desire to  
Withhold blessings or stifle their freedom.  
God led them out of that desert into a good land  
(in the words of Moses):  
"a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs  
gushing out into the valleys and hills;  
a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees,  
pomegranates, olive oil and honey;  
a land where bread will not be scarce  
and you will lack nothing" (Deuteronomy 8:7-8).

The concern of Moses is that when they enter this land  
Where there is no longer any forced dependence,  
Is whether they will continue to recognise  
that God is the source of these gifts.

He admonishes them:  
When you have eaten and are satisfied,  
praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God,  
failing to observe his commands,  
his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.”  
(Deuteronomy 8:10-11)

God’s intention for the people is that they continue  
to live in a close relationship with him  
that they will chose to remember him  
when they are surrounded by abundance.

The temptation, which is noted in the passage,  
Is that the people will start believing a false narrative  
That they themselves have created this situation of blessing.  
They will arrogantly declare: “My power and the strength of my hands  
have produced this wealth for me” forgetting that these gifts  
flow from God’s hands (Deuteronomy 8:17).

So how can they avoid this trap, this peril of prosperity.  
How can they continue to remember  
when humanity is prone to amnesia.  
How do we enjoy the gifts without forgetting the Giver?

How do we ensure that we don’t disregard the very reason  
For which we were created:  
“to know God and enjoy him forever”.  
(Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1)

Moses says the answer is found in thanksgiving and praise.  
“When you have eaten and are satisfied,  
praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.”

This is what we are doing today  
On this Thanksgiving weekend.  
This is one of the reasons that we regularly gather here on Sundays.  
We remind each other of God’s goodness,  
So we can avoid the pitfalls of self-deception and pride  
And position ourselves to not just enjoy God’s gifts

But a relationship with the Giver.

Of course not everyone recognises this greater purpose  
Of knowing God and set their sights on the things that are secondary.  
Moses doesn’t just encourage us towards our ultimate purpose,  
But warns us about the consequences of orienting our lives to lesser things

Moses ends with a sobering reminder:  
‘If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods...  
you will surely be destroyed.’ (Deuteronomy 8:19)

These sorts of warnings about judgement  
Aren’t the sort of thing that we are comfortable hearing.  
But this isn’t just a harsh Old Testament threat.  
This is a loving warning  
from a God who longs to keep His people close.  
Jesus’ echoes this in his parable of the rich fool.

What does the rich fool do  
when he has an exceedingly abundant harvest?

Does he give thanks to God  
And consider how he can use these gifts to be a blessing?  
No he thinks about an easy future, about taking life easy,  
And sets on building even bigger granaries.

He may be successful in the eyes of his neighbors.  
They may even elect him as president of the Chamber of Commerce.  
But he is completely oblivious to God’s desire to know him  
And use him, so eternity will remember him as a fool.

Don't want to be a fool?  
Better yet, do you want to know God better  
and fulfill your ultimate purpose?  
Don't just count your blessings  
but draw closer to the One who blesses.  
May gratitude open our hearts,  
not only to God's gifts but to God Himself.

Amen.