

RUN THE RACE | HOPE CHAPEL | THANKSGIVING SUNDAY

THE BACKWARD GLANCE

Thus far the Lord has helped us. - 1 Samuel 7:12

Pastor Andrew Cole | Sunday 31 May 2026 | 9AM Gawler

Big Idea: *Thanksgiving is not an emotion you wait to feel. It is a stone you throw down. It names what was hidden, reframes what was painful, and releases what is coming.*

The Ebenezer Stone

1 Samuel 7:12 *Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'*

Samuel sets this stone not at Mizpah and not at Shen - but between them. That placement is the point. Thanksgiving, properly understood, is always a between place. It stands between what God has already done and what he has not yet finished. It refuses to forget the past and it refuses to despair of the future.

The Hebrew word yada, most often translated as give thanks, literally means to throw, to cast, or to extend the hand. Thanksgiving is not an emotion you wait to feel. It is a stone you throw down. It is a hand you extend. It is something you do before you feel it - and what you do begins to shape what you feel.

Thanksgiving is like an act of theological memory. It is the soul refusing the amnesia that prosperity and pain both produce.

Today's Thanksgiving is not a thin, modern, cliché kind of gratitude - simply totalling up the pleasant things and presenting God with a polite receipt. This is a looking back over 90 days to see what God has actually done - not just the highlight reel, but the whole chapter, the whole field.

Testimony - Matt

Matt shared openly about walking through one of the hardest seasons of his life - carrying two crippling debts, facing the possibility of losing his home, not knowing how he would keep the electricity on for his three daughters. Rather than running from God in that season, he drew nearer to him. His prayer life grew. His time in the Word grew. He began changing the way he spoke about himself.

God began teaching me to stop defining myself by the voices around me and start believing what he says about me. His word says I am fearfully and wonderfully made - and identity is found in him, not in the approval of others.

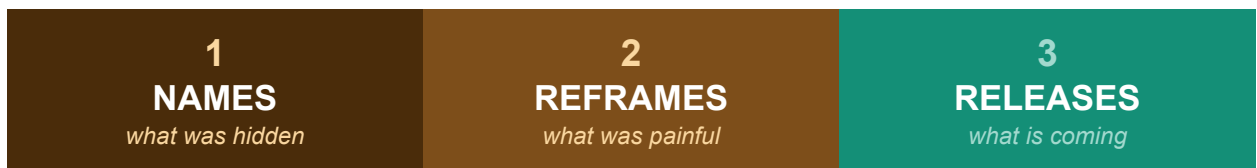
Through a series of circumstances he could only describe as God's provision, both debts were cleared completely. But Matt was clear: the most important thing he saw through it was the freedom he found in God in the middle of the storm - not only at the end of it.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

Philippians 4:19 *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

To anyone in a difficult season: God is not unaware of what you are carrying. He sees it and he is working in you even when you cannot see what he is working on. Don't give up. Don't let go. Keep trusting him - because he will come through for you.



1 | Thanksgiving Names What Was Hidden

Psalm 103:2 *Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

David doesn't say remember his benefits - he says forget not. The wording is always deliberate. It assumes we forget. The default setting of the human soul is amnesia toward grace. We are designed by the fall to remember our injuries and misplace our blessings.

Three months ago - what were you praying for? What were the fears you carried into March? The diagnosis you were dreading. The bill you didn't know how to pay. The relationship that was failing. The child you were worried about.

An answered prayer, once answered, almost immediately stops looking like a miracle. It becomes the new normal. The job becomes the job. The healing becomes the body you live in. The reconciled friendship becomes the friend you text on a Thursday. The grace is absorbed into the ordinary - and within weeks we are praying for the next thing as though nothing was ever given to us at all.

This is why Samuel had to pile up a stone. Memory needs scaffolding. The first work of thanksgiving is like an archaeological dig - we go back through 90 days and name specifically what God did. Not vaguely. The exact intervention. The exact provision that we were already starting to take for granted by the second week of April.

When you do this, you will find that God was at work in places you didn't even realise at the time. The protection you didn't know you needed. The door he closed that you were begging him to open. The delay that turned out to be deliverance.

Ephesians 1:18 *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.*

Thanksgiving is exactly that - enlightenment applied to the past.

Reflect: *Name one specific blessing in the last three months that you had already started to take for granted. Not vague - specific. Throw down the stone.*

2 | Thanksgiving Reframes What Was Painful

1 Thessalonians 5:18 *Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Read that carefully. Paul doesn't say give thanks for all circumstances. He says give thanks in all circumstances. The preposition matters more than we realise. We are not asked to be grateful that the illness came, that the business failed, that the friend betrayed us, that the season was hard. We are asked to find thanksgiving inside those realities - to locate God within them, not to pretend that they were good.

If you are honest about your last three months, not all of it was good. Some of you walked through depression. Some of you watched a child make choices that broke your heart. Some of you prayed prayers that God didn't answer in the way you asked. The honest gospel does not tell you to call those things blessings. It says something more daring - that even in those places, God has been at work.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

This verse does not say all things are good. It says God works in all things for the good of those who love him. God is doing something with the raw materials of our grief to create something that could not have been made any other way.

Joseph stands at the end of Genesis and says to his brothers who sold him: you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. He doesn't whitewash the evil. He doesn't say it wasn't that bad. He holds two truths at once - this was evil and God was sovereign in it. That

is maturity. That is biblical thanksgiving. It refuses to lie about the pain and it refuses to despair of the goodness.

***The question for the last three months is not: did everything go well?
The question is: where was Christ in what didn't?***

Where was he in the hospital waiting room? At 3am when sleep wouldn't come? In the silence after you sent the text that was never answered? Thanksgiving in pain is not denial. It is the slow, stubborn work of finding Jesus in the wreckage - and discovering, to your astonishment, that he was there the whole time.

Reflect: *Name something painful from the last three months. Ask God to show you where Christ was inside that. You may not see it all at once - but begin to ask.*

3 | Thanksgiving Releases What Is Coming

John 11:41–42 *Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here.'*

This is one of the most extraordinary moments in the gospels and it often gets read past. Jesus is standing at the tomb of Lazarus. Lazarus has been dead for four days. The stone has not been rolled away. The miracle has not yet happened. And before a single word of command is spoken - Jesus gives thanks.

He thanks the Father for something he had not yet seen. He gives thanks at a closed tomb. This is not positive thinking. This is the Son of God so confident in the character of his Father that thanksgiving precedes the resurrection.

Most of us reverse the order. We wait until the breakthrough comes and then we give thanks. Jesus thanks the Father as the breakthrough is coming - because the thanksgiving is not really about the miracle. It is about the one who works the miracle. The gratitude is not transactional. It is the language of a son or a daughter who knows their father.

Philippians 4:6–7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Watch the order: petition is sandwiched inside thanksgiving. We do not pray well for the future from a place of ingratitude about the past. The two are connected. An ungrateful heart is an anxious heart - because it has forgotten what God has done and therefore cannot trust what he will do.

Every Ebenezer stone we set up becomes a step we can stand on when the next storm comes. The man who can honestly say 'thus far the Lord has helped us' has a foundation under his feet that anxiety cannot move.

Reflect: *Name something not yet resolved. Something you are still waiting on. Give thanks for it today - in advance, the way Jesus did at the tomb. The Father who has carried you thus far is the same Father waiting in the next 90 days.*

Your Thanksgiving Card - Take It Home

Take your card home this week and write these three things:

1. Name something hidden. A specific blessing in the last three months that you had already started to take for granted. Be specific - not vague. Throw down the stone.

2. Name something painful. Ask God to show you where Christ was inside that. You may not see it all at once - but begin to ask.

3. Name something coming. Something not yet resolved. Give thanks for it today in advance - the way Jesus did at the tomb. The Father who carried you thus far is waiting in the next 90 days.

Conclusion - The Ebenezer Hinge

***Thanksgiving is the hinge between two sentences.**
Thus far the Lord has helped us - and the same Lord goes ahead of us.*

We are not doing emotional bookkeeping when we look back. We are building the runway for the next season. The Ebenezer stone means thus far the Lord has helped us - and it becomes the foundation under our feet when the next storm comes.

Psalm 107:1-2 *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.*

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Use these on your own during the week, or with your LifeGroup.

1. Andrew said an answered prayer almost immediately stops looking like a miracle - it becomes the new normal. Can you think of something God did for you in the last three months that you have already stopped calling a miracle? Name it specifically.

2. The Hebrew word yada means to throw or cast - thanksgiving is something you do before you feel it, and what you do begins to shape what you feel. Is there something you could thank God for right now, before the feeling is there?

3. Paul says give thanks in all circumstances - not for them. What is the difference in practice? Is there a painful situation from the last three months where you can begin to ask: where was Christ in this?

4. Romans 8:28 says God works in all things for good - not that all things are good. Like a craftsman using raw materials, God is making something from your grief. Can you begin to see any shape of what he might be making?

5. Jesus gave thanks at a closed tomb - before the miracle happened. Is there something you are waiting on that you could begin to thank God for today, in advance, as an act of faith in his character?

6. Andrew said an ungrateful heart is an anxious heart - because it has forgotten what God has done and therefore cannot trust what he will do. How does your level of gratitude connect to your level of anxiety right now?

Key Scriptures This Week

- 1 Samuel 7:12 - Ebenezer: thus far the Lord has helped us
- Psalm 103:2 - Forget not all his benefits
- Ephesians 1:18 - The eyes of your heart may be enlightened
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 - Give thanks in all circumstances
- Romans 8:28 - God works in all things for the good of those who love him
- John 11:41–42 - Jesus gives thanks at the closed tomb of Lazarus
- Philippians 4:6–7 - By prayer and petition with thanksgiving
- Psalm 107:1–2 - Give thanks to the Lord; let the redeemed tell their story