

Let Gratitude Motivate You to Serve Today

Despite 2020 feeling like one of the longest years we've ever endured, Thanksgiving has arrived.

For every new challenge we've faced this year, there's been a new solution: virtual wedding guests, transparent plastic barriers between customers and clerks, mobile learning centers, fanless football games, drive-in church services and more. Whether they were simple solutions or highly debated ones, they were all born out of a desire to help us restore our lives in one way or another.

Due to the recent announcement by the California governor that requires 90% of the state to adhere to strict curfew guidelines, we are going back into a higher level of relief services here at the Los Angeles Dream Center. Because businesses will be forced to limit their hours again, or will have to completely shut down, more people will be out of work, unfortunately. Our drive-thru food line will likely see an increase in demand, more school children will require our remote learning center and there will likely be another spike in homelessness.

We've rallied through sudden changes, and this Thanksgiving will be no different. While we might not be able to see as many family members and friends or take part in the same traditions this year, the meaning and spirit of Thanksgiving is perhaps more important than ever.

Our gratitude for the ways we've overcome hurdles this year should motivate us to serve others who still have hurdles to jump.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I knew that this year would be our toughest year yet at the Dream Center and

maybe even our last. I was preparing to say goodbye to the home we've built over 26 years in Los Angeles. As many businesses and nonprofits met with significant financial losses and were forced to close, one thought was top of mind: If we go down, then we go down serving.

When our city's lockdown took effect, our first response was to open a drive-thru for the hundreds of thousands of students and their families in the Los Angeles Unified School District who would no longer have access to free meals. We planned to give all our food and drinks away. I assumed that after a month our supplies would dwindle and then completely run out.

But slowly, people in our community heard about what we were doing and wanted to be a part of it. Restaurants and business owners near us donated meals and boxes of food nearly every day of the week. Our longtime friends were so generous that they paid for other restaurants to deliver food, and by doing so, helped those businesses as well. Within three months, we had served more than 800,000 meals—a testament to the power of combined generosity.

In Proverbs 11:24-25 we're told, "There is one who scatters, yet increases; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will be watered also himself." We scattered all we had, and in return witnessed an abundance of provision. I was reminded of the stories of Jesus feeding thousands of people with a couple of fish and some loaves of bread—we simply offered Him what we had, and in His mercy, He multiplied it.

Despite what this year may have taken from us, we still have so much to be grateful for. And I believe the greatest way to express gratitude is to give to others. Jesus himself said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8b). Generosity is a way of thinking, a way of seeing and a way of living.

This Thanksgiving, I encourage you to keep a generous heart—whether that may be raking leaves for your elderly neighbors, buying groceries for someone recently unemployed, putting your culinary skills to good use for first responders working long hours or donating to a cause that's close to your heart. Those are just some of the myriad ways you can express gratitude.

Give more than you receive and serve the people around you because even in the simplest of ways you can be the biggest blessing to them. Don't be discouraged by the seemingly endless challenges and obstacles of this year. Instead, focus on serving, one small step at a time. {eoa}

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