

PREMIUM REPORTS

# Here's What Americans Are Thankful for This Year

Family, life, and life's little blessings loom large as Americans prepare for their national day of gratitude.

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By Lawrence Wilson, Travis Gillmore, Jacob Burg, Oliver Mantyk, Stacy Robinson, Jan Jekielek

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We asked Americans what they're thankful for this year and received some surprising answers. The surprise was not in the things they listed but in how often the urge to give thanks was set against a backdrop of hardship.

Separation from loved ones, illness, grief, unemployment, and even stress from the election seemed to heighten the sense of gratitude in many Americans this year. As with the earliest Thanksgiving celebrations, this year's national day of gratitude seems to be enriched, not dampened, by the difficulties of the year gone by.

# Family

Anticipation at having the entire family together was a point of thanks for nearly all of the folks we heard from, including Joe Jerrell, 49, and his daughter, Taylor, 20, of Noblesville, Indiana.

“I’m thankful to have my daughter home from college,” Joe Jerrell said.

Taylor Jerrell, a student at Indiana University, said she is grateful for the chance to see friends from home.



Joe and Taylor Jerrell of Noblesville, Indiana, at the Hamilton Town Center in Noblesville, Ind., on Nov. 26, 2024. Lawrence Wilson/The Epoch Times

“Bringing family together, that’s really what Thanksgiving is about,” said Cambria O’Neill, 25, of San Diego. “It’s time for all family from different places to get together. That’s my favorite part about it.”



Cambria O'Neill and Dalton Holdredge of San Diego stopped in Ukiah, Calif. on their way to Grants Pass, Ore. to celebrate Thanksgiving with family. Travis Gillmore/The Epoch Times

Biff Schwart, 67, told The Epoch Times: “I’m thankful that we survived this election and that my family’s all happy and healthy.”

The Northern California man with family spread over Lake and Mendocino counties said putting up a Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving is a family tradition.

“We like to spend the holidays together, around the tree with the grandkids,” Schwart said. “That’s what’s important.”



Biff Schwarty of Northern California said Thanksgiving is all about family, on Nov. 26, 2024. Travis Gillmore/The Epoch Times

Adriana Johnson, 26, of metro Washington, D.C., is thankful for family members coming to town—more than 100 of them. Relatives from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, are descending on the city for the holiday, many of them staying at her place.



Adriana Johnson poses for a photo in Washington on Nov. 26, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times

Ryan Barnard, 44, of Muncie, Indiana, recently began a new job but is most grateful for his family and two children. Noting that his son is now 21, Barnard said, “I think I get more grateful every year.”



Ryan Barnard of Muncie, Indiana, at Love's truck stop in Pendleton, Ind., on Nov. 26. Lawrence Wilson/The Epoch Times

Gratitude for family has gained new meaning for Donald Dudley, 59, a chief security officer with the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia. Dudley recently suffered the loss of his last surviving aunt, and the loss has made him more thankful for those who remain.

“[I’m] grateful for everything I have,” Dudley said. “Being able to touch my wife and kids and grandkids.”



Donald Dudley poses for a photo in Washington on Nov. 26, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times

Carrie Speed from Spring, Texas, said “Gratitude shifts our focus from what’s missing to what’s present, increasing contentment and reducing feelings of envy or dissatisfaction.”

The happiness coach said “At its core, gratitude is about recognizing the goodness in our lives, even amid challenges.”

## Life and Health

Many Americans are grateful simply to be alive. Life and health were the next most frequently cited points of thanks among those we spoke with.

“We’re all still upright,” Jake Wilson, 44, of Greenfield, Indiana, said with a grin. Wilson’s son, Kolt, 15, said he is excited about the prospect of getting a driver’s license soon but is most thankful for his family.



Jake Wilson (L) and his son, Kolt Wilson, of Greenfield, Indiana, at the Hamilton Town Center in Noblesville, Ind., on Nov. 26, 2024.  
Lawrence Wilson/The Epoch Times

Patrick Withrow, 64, a lifelong resident of Mendocino County, said, “I’m thankful for life in general, and every day, I’m glad to be alive.”

Having a sense of the fragility of life seemed to heighten the gratitude of some folks.



Patrick Withrow of Ukiah, California, said he's grateful for the beauty and bounty of Mendocino County, Calif., on Nov. 26, 2024.  
Travis Gillmore/The Epoch Times

“I’m very thankful that my brother-in-law has received a new kidney. He was on the donor list for three years,” said Joan Kaylor, 71, of Pittsburgh.



Joan Kaylor, 71, visited Venice, Florida, from the Pittsburgh area to celebrate Thanksgiving with family, on Nov. 26, 2024. Jacob Burg/The Epoch Times

Susan Blum, 80, of Venice, Florida, is grateful for good health. “[I’m thankful] that we’re both healthy and happy,” she said, speaking of her spouse. “My husband’s going to be celebrating his 90th birthday [on] Friday, so Thanksgiving will make us think of that.

“It’s kind of not the happiest time here,” Blum said. “Makes us think more back to the pandemic year because everyone’s had a rough time down here with all the hurricanes.”

Venice was hit back-to-back by hurricanes in October, causing extensive damage along the coast.





Susan Blum, 80, who discussed her plans for Thanksgiving this year, works at an art gallery in downtown Venice, Fla., on Nov. 26, 2024. Jacob Burg/The Epoch Times

“I’m thankful for my vision so that I can see all this,” said Gloria Nelson, a Florida retiree visiting New York City. She and her husband, Richard, are grateful for life, health, and the ability to travel.



Robert and Gloria Nelson at Bryant Park in New York City on Nov. 26, 2024. Samira Bouaou/The Epoch Times

New York resident Steven Johnson said life, health, and strength top his Thanksgiving list. “I can have a million dollars, and if I don’t have

health, it means nothing to me,” he said.



Steven Johnson poses for a photo in Washington on Nov. 25, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times

## Small Blessings

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Gratitude is “the intentional act of recognizing and appreciating the good in your life, no matter how big or small,” Atlanta-based psychologist Kiki Ramsey told The Epoch Times.

For some Americans, giving thanks for little things is top of mind this year.

“My three-year-old son, Auggie, is great at thankfulness,” said Jeremy Lott, 46, of Lynden, Washington. “He'll thank others not only for the

little things he receives but also when, say, I get his mother something that brightens her day.”

Lott lamented that his son will miss an extended family gathering due to an illness but is determined they will all enjoy the holiday regardless. “Some of us will go,” he said. “And if we all catch [the illness], then we’ll hunker down together.”



Jeremy Lott and his son, Auggie, at their home in Lynden, Wash., in this file photo. Courtesy Angie Lott

O’Neill expressed gratitude for recent changes in her life, including landing a new job, and her relationship with her partner, Dalton Holdredge, 26.

“I’ve just been very fortunate in my life, and I don’t ever want to take that for granted,” O’Neill said.

Kaylor, who had traveled to Venice, Florida, with her husband to spend the holiday with his siblings, is thankful that her psychotherapy clients allowed her to counsel them via video so she can work remotely while away from home.

Jaskirat Singh, 26, of Ontario, Canada, celebrated Canadian Thanksgiving on Oct. 14 but continues to be grateful for his job as a truck driver. “We’re making good money, Singh said. “I’m able to fulfill my wishes and able to help others who are in need.”

Singh practices the Sikh religion, which emphasizes charity. “We always try to donate 10 percent of our income to charity,” Singh said, adding that his job enables him to do so.



Jaskirat Singh of Ontario, Canada, stops at Love’s truck stop in Pendleton, Ind., on Nov. 26, 2024. Lawrence Wilson/The Epoch Times

## The Help of God, Family, and Friends

It’s important to practice gratitude even during challenging times, according to Miami-based psychologist Carolina Estevez.

“Gratitude shifts our focus from what we’re lacking to what we already have, helping us find meaning and connection in everyday moments,” Estevez told The Epoch Times.

That involves a journey for some, like Ann Uchida, 60, of Noblesville, Indiana, who lost her husband of 29 years to cancer nearly seven years ago.

“I am most thankful for the love and grace of God, for without it, my present blessings of family, friends, provision, church community, and abundant life would not be possible,” Uchida said. “I think I’m starting now to see some of the fruit that God has brought into my life as a widow.

“I wasn’t willing to look for a long time.”



Ann Uchida at her home in Noblesville, Ind., in this file photo.  
Courtesy Ann Uchida

The same was true for Crystal Scott, 51, of Noblesville, Indiana, who said she’s most thankful for the wisdom gained from hardship.

“As a young kid, I may have said I am thankful for the new toy or something that one can materialize,” Scott said.

“I am thankful that as I grow older, I have become more aware of the gratitude I have for experiences with loved ones, memories made, and knowing God has had my path mapped out all along.”

Scott said it took years to reach this point of gratitude. That journey involved the death of a spouse, which ultimately led to a turning point

in life, a new business, and a second marriage.



Crystal Scott at her home in Noblesville, Ind., in this file photo.  
Courtesy Crystal Scott

Others expressed thankfulness for the support of family and friends, which enabled them to overcome hardship.

“I’m deeply thankful for the blessings of friends, family, and my work, which have truly shown me the power of community,” said Suzan Brandt, 52, of Birmingham, Alabama.



Suzan Brandt of Birmingham, Ala., appears on the stage of a TEDx Youth event, in this file photo. Courtesy Suzan Brandt

Natalie Pennycuff, 45, a single mom from Fishers, Indiana, is thankful for her family’s support during recent financial difficulties.

“I’ve been through some things this year. My family has come through for me after the loss of a job,” she said. “They helped me out with groceries and rent.” Pennycuff shared her thoughts while on her way to work at a new job.



Natalie Pennycuff of Fishers, Ind., at the Hamilton Town Center in Noblesville, Ind., on Nov. 26, 2024. Lawrence Wilson/The Epoch Times

“I am thankful for my parents, who raised me to develop my strength and believe in myself,” said Anne Harrington, 62, of Noblesville, Indiana. She added that this early foundation in life has enabled her to support her children after the death of their father this year.

Nov. 28 marks the 235th national day of Thanksgiving, which was first proclaimed by George Washington in 1789. Americans established the practice well over a century earlier. The first known observance of a day of Thanksgiving took place near Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. The more familiar celebration at Plymouth, Massachusetts, was held in 1621.

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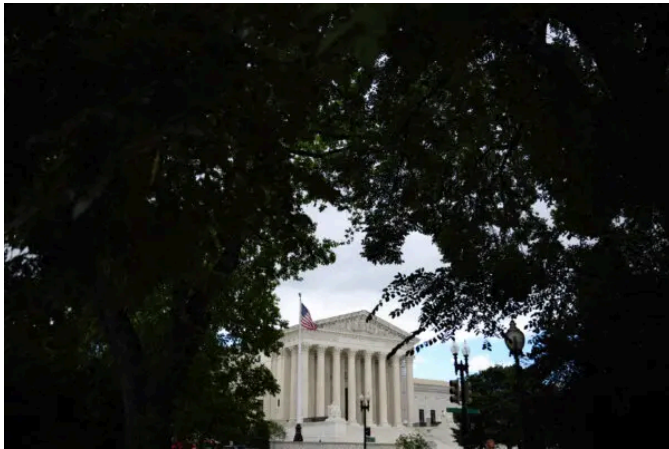


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