

# Sermon Outlines

**PLEASE**

**SORRY**

**THANKS**

A 3-week sermon series  
for use by pastors and chaplains





## PLEASE SORRY THANKS

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A 3-week sermon series for use by pastors and chaplains.

Based on the book *Please, Sorry, Thanks* by Mark Batterson

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## Introduction

Pastor, the “*Please, Sorry, Thanks* Sermon Outlines” are a skeleton you can flesh out to create a three-week sermon series for your congregation. Get ready for a series that will do more than just introduce some interesting ideas for consideration. It will bring huge life change!

The three words *please*, *sorry*, and *thanks* are the foundation of all healthy relationships. Those three words are the only ceiling on spiritual, mental, and emotional health. Those three words will determine how happy we are and even how holy we are.

How do we cultivate intimate relationships?

How do we make amends for the mistakes we’ve made?

How do we overcome trauma?

How do we find true happiness?

How do we shift the atmosphere at home?

How do we change the culture at work?

How do we win friends and influence people?

We get really good at *please*, *sorry*, and *thanks*!

Of course, we can’t just parrot those words. We have to walk the talk. Those three words have to become a way of life, a rule of life. And that’s what the “Please, Sorry, Thanks” sermon series, and its coordinated discussion guide, can do for your congregation.

You and your people can change the world. How? With your words. Words create worlds!



Mark Batterson



## Tips on How to Make the Most of This Sermon Series

- Well in advance of preaching the sermons, read the book *Please, Sorry, Thanks*. Underline favorite passages and mark it up with thoughts it inspires. Let it impact you, personally, influencing your own habits.
- Make copies of the book available for church members or tell them how to order it.
- Find a three-week block to put this sermon series in your preaching schedule. Also, arrange for small groups in your congregation to use the “*Please, Sorry, Thanks* Discussion Guide” concurrently with your sermons.
- Read the scripture passages in context, research what your favorite commentator has to say about those passages, and pray for the Holy Spirit to help you faithfully convey the truth packed in these verses.
- Adapt, expand, and personalize the sermon outlines with biblical insights of your own, relevant stories you have heard, or illustrations from current events.
- Think about your listeners and how you can best help them apply the sermon topics in their own lives.





# SERMON 1

## PLEASE

**Primary scripture:** Philippians 2:5–8

**Big idea:** *Please* is called the “magic word” because it’s so much nicer than demanding something, and it gets results!

For more material about saying please, see Part 1 of *Please, Sorry, Thanks* by Mark Batterson.

### Introduction

Has there ever been a time when people were more uncivil? It doesn’t seem like it. Every day, people are ridiculing each other, tearing each other down, and just plain not listening to one another.

For the love of Emily Post, we need a revival of politeness! In this three-part sermon series, we’ll be looking at three words that can make all the difference: *please*, *sorry*, and *thanks*. Today the subject is *please*.

Nothing primes the pump like *please*. How does it work? It changes a command into a request. And news flash: No one wants to be told what to do!

The word *please* demonstrates a posture of humility, and for a role model in humility, we need look no further than Jesus. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 2,

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:


Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Theologians call this kenosis, Christ’s emptying of Himself for others. And we are called to do the same. It’s giving yourself away. It’s looking out for the interests of others. The locus of focus is others.

*Please* is setting aside your preferences.

*Please* is relinquishing your rights.

*Please* is giving others the upper hand.



*Please* is putting the ball in someone else's court.

*Please* is honoring others above yourself.

Using *please* isn't rocket science. It's as simple as the Golden Rule: "Treat people the same way you want them to treat you."

There are three keys to an effective *please* and having only two out of three won't get you where you want to go. You need all three.

## 1. YOUR PLEASE HAS TO BE PRECISE

You can't say please expecting carte blanche. Generally speaking, people don't write blank checks! Your *please* has to be well defined. The more nuanced it is, the more meaningful it is.

In her book *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*, Marilyn McEntyre shared an assignment she gave a group of students where she asked them to write down their definitions of five words: *liberal*, *conservative*, *patriotic*, *terrorist*, and *Christian*. "The results were sobering," she said, "in their range and banality." Why? If we can't agree on definitions, how do we dialogue?

Imprecise words cause a great deal of polarization in the public sphere. Of course, the opposite is true as well. "If your verbs are precise," said McEntyre, "your writing will improve."

The same could be said for *please*: If your please is precise, your results will improve!

Remember the encounter Jesus had with a blind man named Bartimaeus? Jesus said, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51). That seems unnecessary, doesn't it? The answer is obvious—he wanted his sight restored. So why did Jesus ask?

For starters, most of us don't know what we want. If Jesus asked us this question point-blank, many of us would draw a blank! Until you can precisely explain what you want and why you want it, you aren't ready for it.

There is another lesson in this encounter. Quit putting words in other peoples' mouths! Even Jesus didn't do that.

When we say what we want in our own words, we own it. We have a better memory for things we've said out loud, things we've written down.

So, before you make an ask, figure out how to put into words what it is you really want—precisely.

## 2. YOUR PLEASE HAS TO BE TIMELY.

"It is wonderful," said the writer of Proverbs, "to say the right thing at the right time!" (Proverbs 15:23, New Living Translation). If your timing is off, it doesn't matter what you say! "If one blesses his neighbor with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be counted to him as a curse" (Proverbs



27:14, Berean Standard Bible).

What is the difference between a word of encouragement and a word of prophecy? A word of prophecy is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it's often delivered at the moment when someone needs it most.

Similarly, when we're going to say please, we should pick a time when it hopefully will make the most impact.

When Sidney Poitier was a teenager, he auditioned for an acting role at the prestigious American Negro Theatre in Harlem. He didn't get the part because he couldn't read the script. So, Poitier started working as a dishwasher.

One day an elderly Jewish waiter saw Poitier with a newspaper and asked him, "What's new in the paper?"

Poitier said, "I can't tell you what's in the paper, because I can't read very well."

The waiter asked Poitier if he would like some lessons in reading.

Poitier said he would. Please.

After many weeks of this man's patient mentoring, Poitier learned to read well enough to land an apprentice role at the American Negro Theatre.

Half a century later, when Poitier received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Film Institute, he said, "I must also pay thanks to an elderly Jewish waiter who took time to help a young Black dishwasher learn to read. A little bit of him is in everything I do."

What a pivotal moment for saying please, and then what a prominent moment to say thanks for the response to that please!


Right now, your heart is telling you that you need to politely ask for something. Is that not right? Then what might be the best strategic and psychological moment to do it?

### **3. YOUR PLEASE HAS TO BE PERSONAL**

Your please is only as powerful as it is personal. What I mean is, you have to infuse it with your personality. You have to make your please a unique expression of who you are.

Jarvis Glanzer pastors a church in the great state of Minnesota. Mark Batterson—the author of the book that inspires our "Please Sorry Thanks" sermon series—was born in Minneapolis, and his family vacationed at Lake Ida near Alexandria, Minnesota, when he was growing up. It was there, at nineteen years of age, that Mark felt called to ministry. He was taking a prayer walk through a cow pasture when he heard the inaudible yet unmistakable voice of God.





Jarvis knew how important that moment was to Mark. So, he commissioned a piece of art. It's a map of Lake Ida etched into wood with the latitude and longitude of where Mark felt called to ministry. To Mark, that is one of the most meaningful gifts he's ever received, because it's so personal.

When you say please, give it your unique signature by making it personal. Will you accompany it with a thoughtful gift? Will you use words that recall a fateful moment? Will you choose a setting that reflects your relationship with this other person?

Personalize your please.

## CONCLUSION

When it's precise, timely, and personal, a *please* is like a ray of sunlight. It's far more effective than trying to get your way through brute force. Not only does it win friends; it also wins enemies and turns them into friends.

Persuasion is like the art of inception. You politely plant a seed in people's minds. How? Instead of issuing decrees, you ask questions. Instead of making demands, you make requests.

*Please* gives people margin to own the idea, alter the idea, implement the idea. If they own the idea, it will own them. If they don't own it, you'll be doing a lot more managing than you want.

Jesus emptied Himself of pride and entitlement, becoming humble. Let's humble ourselves, likewise, and become people who don't demand things of others but instead ask them politely. Let's become people who say please.



## SERMON 2

### SORRY

**Primary scripture:** Matthew 5:21–24

**Big idea:** Apologizing for what you’ve done wrong opens the door to setting a relationship right.

For more material about saying sorry, see Part 2 of *Please Sorry Thanks* by Mark Batterson.

#### Introduction

One day while fighting in the Spanish Civil War, George Orwell had an unexpected encounter with an enemy soldier. The famed English author had gone to fight fascism, but when this enemy soldier ran across the battlefield holding his pants up in the air, Orwell refused to shoot. Why?

“I did not shoot partly because of that detail about the trousers,” Orwell later reflected. “I had come here to shoot at ‘Fascists’; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn’t a ‘Fascist,’ he is visibly a fellow creature, similar to yourself, and you don’t feel like shooting at him.”

In his book *Humanity*, Jonathan Glover referred to moments like these as breakthroughs of sympathy. Even in the context of war, there are acts of compassion that transcend the conflict. Most of those breakthroughs are triggered by eye-to-eye contact, which defuses hand-to-hand combat by restoring heart-to-heart connection.

Without empathy, our apologies are empty. Saying sorry without feeling sorry sends mixed signals. Are you or aren’t you sorry? You have to own the apology!


In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus equated the angry belittlement of another person with murder. It’s not just an unfortunate outburst. It’s like killing the other. Character assassination is akin to real assassination.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “Raca,” is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:21–24)

Why should you reconcile *before* offering a gift? Because God won’t accept a sacrifice, or sign of devotion, unless you’ve reconciled. If you’ve truly done something hurtful to another person, God wants you to make it right, the sooner the better.





Each of us is a complex combination of adaptive strategies. Most of us tend toward one of two strategies: aggression or regression. We either attack or retreat. But there is a better way, the Jesus way. And it starts with *sorry*.

*Sorry* may sound like waving a white flag, but it's quite the opposite. It's getting out of your trench and walking into the line of fire. Few things take more courage than saying *sorry*!

*Sorry* is a *we* word. It mends broken fences. It builds bridges across relational divides. And it levels the playing field. But it has to pass a twofold litmus test: It has to be specific, and it has to be sincere.

## 1. IT HAS TO BE SPECIFIC

Have you ever tried to end an argument by saying *sorry* even though you had no idea what you were *sorry* for? Probably we've all been there.

Let's be real, though: That's an empty apology. Why? If you don't know what you're *sorry* for, you'll do it all over again. It doesn't pass the specificity test. And don't be surprised if a nebulous confession leads to a nebulous sense of forgiveness.

Martin Luther would spend up to six hours at a time in confession. How many of us spend more than six minutes? Not that we should fixate on every mistake we make, but we could probably afford to do a little more searching and ransacking and probing!

Just as a nebulous confession will result in a nebulous sense of forgiveness, a nuanced confession will result in a nuanced sense of forgiveness. If you don't get to the root issue, you'll be confessing the same symptoms over and over again.

The writer of Lamentations said that God's mercies are "new every morning" (3:23). The Hebrew word for "new" is *hadas*. It doesn't just mean "new" as in "again and again," which would be amazing in and of itself. It means "new" as in "different." It means "never experienced before."


Today's mercy is different from yesterday's mercy! Like snowflakes, God's mercy never crystallizes the same way twice. Every act of mercy is unique.

Mercy is tailored to your sin, your circumstances. It fits like a glove! But you have to be willing to share your measurements with the Tailor. Specifically.

## 2. IT HAS TO BE SINCERE

Along with the specificity test, every *sorry* has to pass the sincerity test. If you do the right thing for the wrong reasons, it doesn't count in the kingdom of God. Ultimately, God judges the motives of our hearts.

An apology will be effective only if you genuinely mean it. You have to check your motives. Are you trying to get something off your chest? Or do you have the other person's best interests at heart?



An insincere apology compounds the fracture. You have to say what you mean and mean what you say. That said, a sincere *sorry* can move mountains of pain, shame, and regret.

How do you know if your apology is sincere? Maybe one way is that your sense of regret and remorse over what you did is so real that you cry over it, or at least feel like crying.

In the early 1900s, Kate and Mary Jackson tried to establish a Salvation Army in the city of Leeds, England, but nothing seemed to work. Disappointed and discouraged by their lack of progress, they wrote a letter to William Booth, the Salvation Army founder, asking to be relocated.

Booth responded with a two-word telegram: TRY TEARS.

The Jackson sisters started to travail with tears, and the Salvation Army in Leeds became one of the largest and most effective.

Nothing says sorry like tears.

Nothing reconciles relationships like tears.

Nothing moves the heart of God like tears.

Try tears!

## CONCLUSION

Today, everybody is blaming everybody else for almost everything. Don't believe me? All you have to do is toggle between news stations! It's time to interrupt the pattern and try a different tactic.

There is no magic bullet, but there is a magic word. *Sorry* is a good place to start. *Sorry* is the solution to a thousand problems.





## SERMON 3

### THANKS

**Primary scripture:** Luke 17:11–19

**Big idea:** The key to a life of flourishing is cultivating an attitude of gratitude.

For more material about saying thanks, see Part 3 of *Please Sorry Thanks* by Mark Batterson.

#### Introduction

In 1942, an Austrian psychiatrist named Viktor Frankl was arrested by the Nazis. He would spend three years in four different concentration camps, including Auschwitz. Frankl was stripped of his possessions, his clothes, even his name. He was reduced to a number—prisoner 119,104. His mother and father, as well as his wife, would die in those concentration camps.

The year after his liberation, Viktor Frankl wrote a book titled *Man's Search for Meaning*. In that book, Frankl shared the secret to his survival. He said, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

In psychology, mental health is measured on a spectrum from depression to flourishing. Flourishing is evidenced by optimism, empathy, and authenticity. It’s inner joy. It’s self-esteem. It’s a strong sense of purpose. On the other side of the spectrum is depression. It’s evidenced by hopelessness and helplessness. It’s feeling like the best is behind you.

Between depression and flourishing, there is languishing. It’s not mental illness, but it’s not mental wholeness. It’s apathy instead of empathy. It’s no-man’s-land. It’s feeling blah. It’s a lack of focus, lack of motivation, lack of vision.

Are you languishing?


Or are you flourishing?

The tipping point, the turning point, is *thanks!*

Sadly, most of us don’t say thanks enough, even when we have very good reasons for being grateful. Jesus Himself encountered this problem.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.



One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11–19)

All ten of the lepers were healed of their physical ailment, but only one of them was healed of something much worse—ingratitude. It was that one leper who doubled back to Jesus, fell at His feet, and said thanks!

If you want to move from languishing to flourishing, there are no easy answers. And there are no quick fixes. But this I know for sure: You won't get there without gratitude.

You can't control your circumstances, but you can control your response. Gratitude is the difference between bitter and better.

Gratitude begins with praise and thanks for God. Flowing out of that comes gratitude toward others.

## THANK GOD FOR EVERYTHING ALL THE TIME

J. I. Packer wrote more than fifty books, including the all-time classic *Knowing God*. He also taught theology at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, for almost four decades.

“The purpose of theology,” said J. I. Packer, “is doxology.” Full stop.

Packer started every class by singing the doxology. Theology is the study of God, but the goal isn't knowledge. The goal is worship!

Theology that doesn't lead to doxology is spiritual constipation. Most of us are educated way beyond the level of our obedience already. We don't need to know more; we need to do more with what we know! Or maybe I should say, we need to worship more with what we know!


In his brilliantly titled book, *Mozart's Brain and the Fighter Pilot*, Richard Restak shared a profound truism: *Learn more, see more*. “The richer my knowledge of the flora and fauna of the woods,” wrote Restak, “the more I'll be able to see.”

He went on to say, “Our perceptions take on richness and depth as a result of all the things that we learn. . . . What the eye sees is determined by what the brain has learned.”

When astronomers look into the night sky, they have a greater appreciation for the constellations. They see more because they know more.

When musicians listen to a symphony, they have a greater appreciation for the chords. They hear





more because they know more.

When sommeliers sample wine, they have a greater appreciation for the texture. They taste more because they know more.

Every atom in the universe sings. According to Arnold Sommerfeld, a German physicist and pianist, a single hydrogen atom emits more frequencies than a grand piano. With its eighty-eight keys, a grand piano can produce eighty-eight frequencies. A hydrogen atom emits one hundred frequencies.

The biblical writer John, after receiving a glimpse of the future, reported,

I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be praise and honor and glory and power,

for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13)

As A. W. Tozer said, “Eternity will not be long enough to learn all He is, or to praise Him for all He has done.” If Tozer is right, what are we waiting for? Just as delayed obedience is disobedience, so delayed gratitude is ingratitude. God deserves our praise every second of every minute of every hour of every day!

## 2. THANK ALL THOSE WHO HELP YOU ALONG THE WAY


A. J. Jacobs, in his book titled *Thanks a Thousand*, tells how he decided to thank every person who made his morning cup of coffee possible. And no, he didn’t just mean the barista who pulls shots or makes French press coffee. There is quite a supply chain behind every cup of coffee, which starts with coffee farmers but also includes truck drivers, warehouse supervisors, forklift operators, and coffee roasters. Jacobs ended up thanking at least 964 people!

Every *thanks* has a genealogy, and when you understand the backstory of the blessing, saying thanks becomes even more enjoyable. Your *thanks* takes on new dimensions, new authenticity.

Gratitude is the gift that keeps on giving! Like fine wine, good memories get better with age. Sometimes a single *thank you* isn’t sufficient.

What if we made it our mission to thank every person who has directly or indirectly affected our lives in a positive way? I know—it would take the rest of our lives to do so! And some people might be hard to track down, like the doctor and nurses who welcomed you into the world. But why not pick a few people and say thanks?

In his Hall of Fame speech, former NFL quarterback Brett Favre spoke for a record thirty-six min-



utes. And in that speech he said thanks no fewer than thirty-five times! He thanked his family. He thanked his coaches and teammates. He thanked the fans. He thanked the coach who recruited him in college. He even thanked the best man in his wedding!

Who has left their fingerprints on your soul? Who believed in you when nobody else did? Who was there through thick and thin? Make a list. Track them down, if you can. And say thanks!

## CONCLUSION

Saying thanks to others isn't just good for them; it's good for you, too. There's no guarantee that gratitude will cure whatever ails you, but it's a good place to start.

It turns out, gratitude can reduce stress, resolve conflict, and reverse aging. According to Dr. Bill Malarkey, professor emeritus of endocrinology at Ohio State University, "Stress is the single greatest determinant of aging. The antidote to stress is gratefulness."

Maybe Ponce de León was looking in the wrong place! The fountain of youth isn't a place. It's the attitude of gratitude.

Today, what are you moved to praise God for?

What person in your life do you owe a debt of thanks to?

What are you waiting for? Be like the tenth leper, and say thanks.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Batterson serves as lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C., one church with multiple locations. NCC also owns and operates Ebenezers Coffeehouse, The Miracle Theatre, the DC Dream Center, and Capital Turnaround as gathering places for the community and funding for Kingdom causes. Mark serves as lead visionary for The Dream Collective, which equips and supports dreamers who long for revival in the church, reformation in the kingdom, and renaissance in culture.

Mark holds a doctor of ministry degree from Regent University and is the author of twenty-three books, including the *New York Times* bestselling *The Circle Maker* as well as *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*, *Wild Goose Chase*, *Double Blessing*, *Whisper*, and, most recently, *Win the Day* and *Do It for a Day*. Mark is married to Lora and they live on Capitol Hill. They have three children: Parker, Summer (married to Austin), and Josiah.