

# Let us give thanks

Dearly beloved, let us give thanks to the people who have given us (on average at least) the longest, most secure, most comfortable, and easiest lives in history. Let us give thanks to the legions of people who work hard in jobs that are often dull or gruelling but necessary. And also give thanks to the many inventors, engineers, and scientists whose work has made those legions so much more effective and efficient than in earlier centuries.

They may not be famous. Their names may not have been recorded in history books. And they may not have won *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here*, but they have done more for us than any know-nothing TV celebrity or premiership footballer, and more than most politicians.

In every area where massive progress has been made we know more is needed to make our solutions sustainable, but work is ongoing<sup>1</sup>.

## Food

Especially at this time of year, let us be thankful for the efforts of those who farm and fish, producing the food we eat, and all those who toil from there to the food in our tummies. In food transportation, safe storage, selling, and cooking. Let us be thankful to those in our own households who do the shopping, cooking, and cleaning up.



Let us give thanks to those who first domesticated animals and plants, and who discovered how to irrigate rice and then prompt it to produce many seeds.

And let us remember also those who discovered and used the principles of artificial selective breeding to produce the plants and animals we eat today.



Thanks in part to their work, hunger is less now than it was despite the rising population of the earth. Not to forget those who developed fertilisers and farming techniques, pioneered better animal health, hygiene, and preservation methods.

<sup>1</sup> In 2017 alone, 243,500 international patent applications were filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty, though not all relate to sustainability.

([https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/ipstats/en/docs/infographic\\_pct\\_2017.pdf](https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/ipstats/en/docs/infographic_pct_2017.pdf))



Let us give thanks to those who are working so hard to find sustainable ways to feed us all, provide space for other species, and keep the countryside beautiful.

## Shelter

More largely unsung heroes work in construction and engineering. There are pioneers of construction methods, new materials, new shapes and building systems.



Today there is much effort being made to devise buildings that can last longer and require less energy to live in.



Inside our homes we enjoy the benefit of all sorts of stuff – furniture, gadgets, decorations, and so on – all of which had to be designed, manufactured, and transported to us. Today's appliances, for example, are far more efficient and capable than even a few decades before. Let

us be thankful for all those who do this important work.



And let us be thankful to the many who work to create the threads and fabrics and garments that we wear. The invention of clothing and, in particular, stitching using a needle and some kind of thread allowed humans to live in areas that were otherwise too cold. That was just the start.

Inventing a cool-looking logo is one thing. Devising new fabrics, new colouring methods, new cutting and stitching machines, and all the other wonders of modern technology requires expertise at a far higher level of sophistication. Let us give thanks to those whose deep knowledge, intense testing and experimentation, and ingenuity have made all this possible and, even now, are working on how to do all this more sustainably.



## Transport

Here is another key area of life where there are many people to thank. The drivers, pilots, captains, sailors, maintenance workers, fuel station workers, and others who keep transport systems operating. The workers who make vehicles, and tend to the robots that do much of the work. The technologists who develop and program those robots and design and test the vehicles themselves.



It is a long time since piles of horse manure by the side of every busy road made the internal combustion engine a clean and healthy alternative. Today the race is on to electrify transport, especially road vehicles, reducing dependency on imported oil and helping to clean the air and quieten the roads. We should give thanks to those working on this critical project.



These people do not need personal publicity to do what they do, so we do not know their names or faces. And yet their achievements matter more to us in practical ways than all the F1 champions there have ever been.

## Materials

Let us give thanks to those who work in mining, exploration, forestry, and all the complex technological processes that produce modern materials, from plywood to plastic, and from reinforced concrete to laminated glass.



What started with chipping flint and shaping natural materials like bone, wood, and bamboo has become one of the most important areas of technology. We look forward to future developments such as less energy intensive alternatives to concrete.

## Systems

Energy, without which our modern lives would be impossible, is captured and distributed to us thanks to the efforts of yet more huge armies of people. The technology is staggering in scale and sophistication. We may know the name Faraday, but thousands upon thousands of inventions and patents followed those earliest discoveries and they keep on coming as systems develop towards more sustainable technologies<sup>2</sup>.



Can there be people we should thank more sincerely than those who maintain our water and sewerage systems? Lives are saved daily by these vital services, carried out to (historically) astonishing levels of cleanliness and reliability today. The invention of chlorination for water supplies was just one breakthrough in this field.



And of course let us also give thanks to all those who created and are maintaining and improving the computer and communication systems we rely on so heavily and use so often. Not only do they bring us useful information and enable us to communicate efficiently, but they also help to manage physical assets and systems for greater efficiency and reliability.

<sup>2</sup> The Rocky Mountain Institute website is a good source for more information: <https://www.rmi.org/>



## Security

Let us be thankful for all those who provide the security we enjoy. The police, the military services, the providers of locks, CCTV systems, and other tools of security, and the firefighters.



And those who analyse the threats and develop strategies to deal with them.



## Health and care

And of course we must thank those who provide medical care, and all those who have developed effective medical treatments. Immunisation, diagnostic tests, scanning, antibiotics, antivirals, surgery, physiotherapy, and many more technologies and the scientific discoveries that

made many of them possible have revolutionised our lives. There is more to come.



Let us also be thankful to the efforts of all carers, teachers, parents, and guardians.

## People doing their bit

Last, but not least, let us give thanks to all those who live considerate lives, not wasting resources and not creating unnecessary work or nuisance for others. Let us give thanks to those who are honest, kind, and safe to be with. Those who work hard when they can; who try to be rational and fair; who help to raise children to be good citizens.

Those who approach problems objectively, with an eye for detail and the unexpected, calmly and resolutely, and those who discuss problems with others truthfully and respectfully, seeking solutions.

Those who never drop litter, who tidy up after themselves, who treat all property (not just their own) with care so that objects will not need premature replacement or maintenance. Let us give thanks to those who turn the tap off when they can, switch off lights they don't need, buy only the clothes they will wear and only the food they will eat, avoid intoxication, mostly drive within the speed limit, queue quietly, keep quiet when others need to sleep, mow the lawn, choose a box hedge instead of leylandii, wash their hands, brush their teeth, volunteer when they retire, and walk instead of driving when they can.



Those who park considerably, always return their trolley to the line, clear their table at the self-service canteen, keep active and avoid sugary temptations, take the trouble to understand exactly how to take medication, take reusable bags for shopping, buy from charity shops, keep off the grass when asked, leave wild animals alone, report crime and suspicious behaviours to the police, pay taxes due, give up their seat for someone who needs it much more, help people who ask for directions, and so on and on.



These are the many simple acts of care and consideration that reduce the burden for others and make it possible for us all to live better, easier, more attractive lives. If most people did not do these things most of the time our modern world would be far more dangerous, dirtier, less interesting, and less secure than it is.

## Progress

Thanks to all these efforts we continue to progress towards sustainable lifestyles and greater equality of opportunity.



Without the industrial revolution it is unlikely that slavery would have been abolished in law. Without modern conveniences in the home it is unlikely that men and women would now have unprecedented choice about their careers and roles. Without innovations it is unlikely that so many disabilities would be recognised and accommodated to the extent that they are.



There are certainly many people and many efforts to be thankful for. Yet most of those people are not paid highly and are rarely recognised. A rubbish collector is paid less than a professional footballer and receives far less adulation. That makes little sense.

Many of our most valuable contributors have children who barely know what their parents do. Many of these contributors prefer not to talk about what they do in case it seems boring. "So what do you do?" is answered with "I work in industry" rather than "I maintain machines that make nuts and bolts<sup>3</sup>."



<sup>3</sup> Vital components now made more accurately, out of higher performance alloys, and more efficiently than at any previous time in history.

Many roles are tiny in themselves.

'I'm the girl that makes the thing  
that drills the hole that holds the ring  
that drives the rod that turns the knob  
that works the thing-ummy bob<sup>4</sup>

So it is hard to think that what you do is important, but it is. Without that thing that drills the hole that holds the ring... the whole thing would not work. It's a team effort and everyone matters.

Many of these vital roles and disciplines are mentioned in the media only when something goes wrong, or is not yet perfect, or someone thinks they don't have sufficient diversity. That's not the thanks that is deserved.

So let's give thanks in our minds and out loud. Let's write. Let's tell those people, in public, that they are valued and important.

**Amen**



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<sup>4</sup> This is the chorus of 'The Thing-Uummy Bob', a song from 1942 about WWII weapons manufacturing written by Gordon Thompson and David Heneker.