

## “Remembering to be Thankful”

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A blog post by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(11/9/21)

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In just a little over two weeks, it will be Thanksgiving Day—a day that we have set aside as a nation to thank the Lord for all His goodness and blessings which He has so richly given to us.

It is well-known that the first Thanksgiving Day was celebrated by our pilgrim fathers and mothers in 1621 to give thanks for their first winter in the New World.

Two years later William Bradford, the governor of Plymouth Colony, issued this proclamation—

*“To All Ye Pilgrims: Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us...(and) has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; now, I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and little ones, do gather at the meeting house, on the hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three, and third year since ye Pilgrims landed on Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to your pastor, and render thanksgiving to Almighty God for all His blessings.”*

In 1789, President George Washington issued the first national Thanksgiving Day Proclamation:

*“Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; Whereas, both the houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me ‘to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness!’*

*Now therefore, I do recommend next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country.”*

Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States eventually discontinued this national celebration by calling Thanksgiving, “a kingly practice.”

After that, Thanksgiving was observed by some individual states—on whatever date suited their liking.

Then in 1828, Mrs. Sarah Hale, the editor of the magazine *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and author of the poem “*Mary Had a Little Lamb*,” began campaigning for the restoration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday.

She wrote letters and sought appointments with national leaders from the President down—but time after time she was politely rebuffed, sometimes being told it was “*impossible*” and “*impractical*”—and sometimes being dismissed with a “*this-is-none-of-your-business*” scolding.

But she was persistent and finally in 1863 President Lincoln listened seriously to her plea that North and South lay aside enmities and strife and celebrate a National Day of Thanksgiving.

And so, on October 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a formal proclamation, passed by an Act of Congress, initiating the first annual National Day of Thanksgiving and praise:

*“The year that is drawing to its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful Providence of Almighty God...*

*No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.*

*It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people.*

*I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.*

*And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged (the Civil War) and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.”*

The point folks is to remind us as Americans that thanksgiving to God used to be the *hallmark* of our country—however, today it seems to be sorely lacking from our national conscience.

The admonition for God’s people to remember to be thankful to Him for all of His blessings towards us permeates the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation—and is the inevitable outflow of a heart that has been touched and filled by God.

**Psalm 92:1-2 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup>...*It is good to give thanks to the Lord, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; <sup>2</sup>To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night*

**Psalm 105:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup>Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples!

**Psalm 106:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord! Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever.

**Psalm 69:30-31 (NKJV)**

<sup>30</sup> I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with thanksgiving. <sup>31</sup> *This* also shall please the Lord better than an ox *or* bull...

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Those are just a few of the hundreds of verses we could quote from Scripture proclaiming thanksgiving to the Lord for His goodness while admonishing the rest of us, who are His children, not to take His blessings for granted but to constantly be thankful for everything He has given to us and done for us.

Thanksgiving to God used to be a hallmark of this nation, but over the last 40 or 50 years—we seem less grateful to God and more *self-congratulatory*.

The problem is when we lose a heart of thanksgiving toward God—when we stop appreciating what He has done for us—we begin to take for granted His blessings. When that happens, God begins to slide from our national conscience—or maybe I should say is “*pushed*”.

As we begin to push God out of our national conscience—we then start taking credit for what He has done. Where there was once thanksgiving and dependence upon God—pride and self-reliance take their place—this then leads to the downward spiral of national decline.

God warned Israel of this very thing before leading them into the Promised Land, a land of great blessings and bounty—much like America.

**Deuteronomy 8:10-14 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup>When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. <sup>11</sup>"Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, <sup>12</sup>lest--*when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them*; <sup>13</sup>and *when* your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; <sup>14</sup>when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage...

*(He went onto to list the consequences for the nation if they forgot and turned against Him—the very thing Israel eventually did)*

**Jeremiah 2:5, 7 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord: "What injustice have your fathers found in Me, That they have gone far from Me, Have followed idols, And have become idolaters... <sup>7</sup>I brought you into a bountiful country, To eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.

An attitude of *ingratitude* and *selfishness* seems to be the inevitable consequence for those who take the blessings of God for granted and begin to feel they are *entitled* to happiness in the form of all kinds of material blessings.

In fact, the Bible warns in 2Tim. 3:2 that this attitude would characterize the last days:

**2 Timothy 3:2 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup>For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, **unthankful...**

The inevitable outflow of an unthankful heart will be *complaining* and *feelings of entitlement*—just as the inevitable outflow of a heart that has been touched and filled with God will be *thanksgiving* and *praise*.

You may not realize this but—a heart of unthankfulness leads to all kinds of social and psychological problems.

The famous stress researcher Hans Seyle claims that two attitudes more than any other influence the quality of everyday life, and on these two emotions—

*“Depend our peace of mind, our feelings of security or insecurity, of fulfillment or frustration—in short, the extent to which we can make a success of life.”*

Seyle went on to say, the most destructive emotion is *revenge*—but in contrast, *“among all the emotions, there is one which more than any other, accounts for the absence of stress in human relations: that is the **feeling of gratitude.**”*

So, a heart of thanksgiving is actually healthy—we could say, *“A thankful heart does a body good!”*

Being thankful to God is not only right *biblically* and *morally*—it is good for us *physically* and *emotionally* as well.

And so, we agree with the psalmist—*“It is good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to His name. To declare His lovingkindness in the morning and His faithfulness every night!” (Ps. 92:2)*

Have a blessed Thanksgiving with family and friends this year—and don’t forget to thank the One Who made it all possible!