

Thanksgiving

Thursday, Nov. 24, was celebrated as “Thanksgiving Day,” a day which is now annually celebrated as a National Holiday. On that day schools were closed, most businesses were closed, including all but the most essential Federal, State, and local governmental offices.

In our nation, the observance of a special day of Thanksgiving goes as far back as 1621 when the Pilgrims and Native Americans reportedly held a three-day feast in celebration of a good harvest. It was then a gathering of people with thankful hearts; it had not been declared a “holiday.” In 1789 George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of thanksgiving. And in 1941 Thanksgiving was sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, one which would be observed on the fourth Thursday in November.

It is one thing to observe a legal holiday called “Thanksgiving;” it is quite another to actually **be** thankful. In fact, long before the founding of our nation, God, in His word (the Bible) repeatedly stressed the importance of being thankful, and the importance of actually **giving** thanks. To illustrate this point, we shall now cite a few passages from both the Old and New Testaments which stress the importance; yea, even the necessity of giving thanks.

Old Testament Passages:

*“Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples,” I Chron. 16:8. “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever,” I Chron. 16:34. “I will wash my hands in innocence; So I will go about your altar, O Lord, That I may proclaim with the voice of **thanksgiving**, and tell of all your wondrous works,” Ps 26:6-7. “Offer to God **thanksgiving**, and pay your vows to the Most High,” Ps. 50:14. “I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with **thanksgiving**,” Ps. 69:30. “We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near,” Ps. 75:1. “Enter into His gates with **thanksgiving**, and into His courts with praise; Be thankful to Him, and bless His name,” Ps. 100:4. “Praise the Lord! Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever,” Ps. 106:1. “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever,” Ps. 136:1-3.*

New Testament Passages:

*“Now **thanks** be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place,” 2 Cor. 2:14. “**Thanks** be to God for His indescribable gift!” 2 Cor. 9:15. “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather **giving of thanks**,” Eph. 5:3-4. “**Giving thanks** always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Eph. 5:20. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, making request for you with all joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,” Phil. 1:3-5. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with **thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God,” Phil. 4:6. “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with **thanksgiving**,” Col. 2:6-7. “And let the peace of God rule in your*

hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful,” Col. 3:15. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him,” Col. 3:17. “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving,” Col. 4:2. “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” I Thess. 5:18. “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,” 2 Thess. 1:3. “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name,” Heb. 13:15.

Many more passages stressing the need for thankfulness could be cited from both the Old and the New Testaments, but the ones listed should surely be sufficient for Bible believers to understand that God expects all His people to continually possess the attitude of gratitude. And I am totally convinced that one main reason for much of the envy, discontent, dissatisfaction, and even bitterness that exists in today’s world is caused by people failing to be thankful for the abundance of blessings they receive on a daily, even minute-by-minute basis. Why is it that multitudes are miserable, even though they have everything it takes to be happy? In most instances, it is because they haven’t paused to count their “many blessings,” and are focused instead upon their “problems,” both real and imagined. On the other hand, why is it that many people are continually cheerful, even in the midst of misfortune, ill health, and material need? In most instances, it is because they have learned to count the many blessings they do have, and they thank God for them.

Regardless of skin color, race, gender, and country of origin, one thing which we all have in common is a desire to be happy. Yet for some reason we so often fail to realize that the greatest barrier to true happiness is ingratitude, or a failure to actually be thankful. Someone has observed that: “Gratitude allows celebration of the present.” “Gratitude blocks toxic emotions (envy, resentment, regret, depression).” “Grateful people are more stress resistant,” and that “gratitude strengthens social ties and self-worth.”

Sadly, in our society, in the midst of our affluence, gadgets, and material blessings beyond our ability to comprehend, multitudes never pause to reflect upon their blessings, let alone take time to thank God for them, even though “*every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...,*” James 1:17.

Contrary to the possible thinking of some, I am not quite as old as Methuselah. But I do remember growing up in an environment in which there was no faucet to turn to get water; we had to draw it from the ground. I remember when there was no electricity, no in-door plumbing, and no central heating (or cooling) systems. I remember when the toilet paper came from the Sears Roebuck catalog. I remember growing up on a farm in which everything had to be done by hand. And I remember having neighbors who were experiencing a similar situation. But as I reflect upon people now and people then, I fully believe that people then were every bit as happy (and often times more so) than most people are today! Why is this? The answer is simple: “Things” (regardless of how abundant they may be) are not what it takes to be happy. Someone has well observed, saying, “It isn’t what you have in your pocket that makes you thankful, but what you have in your **heart**.” To be happy, we must cultivate the attitude of gratitude. Biblically speaking, “*be thankful*” is not an option; it is a command! Yet too many are mentally magnifying their problems, while failing to count their blessings. I fully concur with the following words by Melody Beattie: “*Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.*”

Yet multitudes, instead of being thankful for what they have, are resentful because of what they don't have. Consequently they are sad when they have reason to be happy, and they find themselves complaining when they ought to be giving thanks. Friend, if you want to be happy within, and a blessing from without, try counting your many blessings and thanking God for them. Yes, in the words of I Thess. 5:18: "*In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" Instead of simply remembering "thanksgiving day," **make every day** a day of thanksgiving! —Bobby Witherington
