

Rejoice, Pray, and Give Thanks

The upcoming holiday, *Thanksgiving*, is a time when gratitude for living a life of daily thanksgiving for all is a theme. Prayers giving thanks, special dinners, and ceremonies are shared among most religions after the fall harvest.

The Pilgrim settlers in Massachusetts held the original Thanksgiving celebration during their second winter in America in December 1621. The first winter killed 44 of the original 102 colonists. At one point, their daily food ration was down to five kernels of corn apiece. Then, an unexpected trading vessel arrived, swapping the colonist's beaver pelts for grain, which they severely needed. The next summer's crop brought hope, and Governor William Bradford decreed that December 13, 1621, be set aside as a day of feasting and prayer to show the gratitude of the colonists that they were still alive.

These [Pilgrims](#), seeking religious freedom and opportunity in America, gave thanks to God for His provision for them in helping them find 20 acres of cleared land, for the fact that there were no hostile Native Americans in that area, for their newfound religious freedom, and for God's provision of an interpreter to the Native Americans in Squanto. Along with the feasting and games involving the colonists and more than 80 Native Americans (who added to the feast by bringing wild turkeys and venison), prayers, sermons, and songs of praise were important in the celebration. Three days were spent feasting and praying.

From that time forward, Thanksgiving has been celebrated as a day to thank God for His gracious and sufficient provision. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln officially set aside the last Thursday of November "as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father." In 1941, Congress ruled that the fourth Thursday of November would be observed as Thanksgiving Day and become a legal holiday.

Scripturally, we find things related to the issue of thanksgiving nearly from cover to cover in the Bible. The book of Psalms is packed full of songs of thanksgiving, both for God's grace to the Israelite people through His mighty deeds and for His graces to each of us.

The New Testament repeatedly warns us to thank God. Thanksgiving should always be part of our prayers.

Of all of God's gifts, He has given the greatest gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus paid our sin debt so a holy and just Judge could forgive us our sins and give us eternal life as a gift. This gift is available to those who call on Christ to save them from sin in simple but sincere faith ([John 3:16](#); [Romans 3:19-26](#); [Romans 6:23](#); [Romans 10:13](#); [Ephesians 2:8-10](#)). For this gift of His Son, the gift which meets

our greatest need, the apostle Paul says, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" ([2 Corinthians 9:15](#)).

Like the Pilgrims, we have a choice. In life, there will always be those issues that we can complain about, but there will also be much to be thankful for. This author believes that as our society becomes increasingly secular, the actual "giving of thanks to God" during our annual Thanksgiving holiday is overlooked, leaving simply the feasting. The Bible heavily calls attention to humans the importance of expressing thanks to God through prayer and actions. For those who know Christ, God also works everything together for good, even events we would not necessarily consider good ([Romans 8:28-30](#)).

For example, the word "thanks" or "thanksgiving" *appears 65-75 times in the Bible, depending on which version you are reading*. The exact number of occurrences may vary depending on the specific translation. Still, in the King James Version, the word "thanks" appears 67 times, "thanksgiving" appears 31 times, "thankful" appears 5 times, and "gratitude" does not appear. Therefore, the total count is around 103 times. In the Psalms, the psalmist mentions giving thanks more than 30 times. The Bible also contains several other words translated as "thanks" or "thanksgiving."

The Bible mentions the following three key ingredients essential for living a life of thanksgiving.

1. **Rejoice** – According to most Bible dictionaries, the word "rejoice" appears around *192 times in the Bible*, depending on the translation and whether you include variations like "rejoiced" and "rejoicing". In 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18, ¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

We are spontaneously happy when our circumstances are good and warranted. When our circumstances are not good, we will be spontaneously miserable. Rejoicing, on the other hand, is not a spontaneous emotion but an intentional act of faith. Habakkuk 3:17 and 18 teach us that rejoicing is a decision we make; it is the first essential ingredient in living a life of Thanksgiving.¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord and be joyful in God my Savior.

2. **Prayer**—Living a life of Thanksgiving is manifest in a life of unceasing prayer. Paul advises the Christians in the church of Thessalonians to be persistent in praying without ceasing. In other words, we should persevere and never stop praying. Paul stresses this so much because prayer is the heavenly fuel that keeps the flame of joy burning, as mentioned earlier, even in times of trial.

As humans, we are results-oriented and often want instant gratification. Praying can be difficult when we do not see the immediate results of our prayer request. That is when we tend to look for a substitute because we think our prayer has failed. However, we must pray persistently because Daniel 10:12 teaches us that in the spiritual realm. God answers our prayers the moment we start praying, although we will not immediately see the results in our realm. Time in the spiritual realm and the physical realm are not the same.

3. **Giving Thanks** – Several women and men in the Bible prayed and thanked God verbally or literally, even when feeling hopeless. Hannah wanted a child but could not conceive. She prayed for a child and said she would return him to God. She eventually gave birth to Samuel, an influential leader in Israel. Hannah prayed for a son for many years before God gave her one. Job thanked God when everything was lost. Jesus thanked God before he fed 5,000 people in the middle of nowhere. Paul and Silas thanked and praised God from inside a prison cell in Philippi.

In closing, we must give thanks for everything. It is written in Philippians 4: 7, *7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*” Thanksgiving immunizes our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus against circumstances that nourish our faith.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as we approach Thanksgiving, we bow our heads, open our hearts, share all we are grateful for, and think about our commitment to God. May we commit to leading a life that gives thanks unto the Lord, our creator, marked by rejoicing, prayer, and giving thanks every day. May He find us to be His grateful children. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.

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