

“For every creature (creation) of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4). Thanking and praising God for His creation is found throughout the Bible! It is one of the many wonderful things we can be thankful for on this Thanksgiving Holiday!

As the saying goes, “Stop and smell the roses”. Gaze and marvel at a sunrise or sunset. Feel the breeze and listen to the rustling of the leaves. Bite into and taste that freshly-picked fruit or vegetable. And **thank the Lord!**

Thanksgiving, the fourth Thursday of November, is a truly special holiday, reflecting our nation’s unique spiritual heritage. The Bible tells us, “**In every thing** give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). And in America, we have set aside a national holiday for the purpose of thanksgiving.

In that first winter after the Pilgrims landed in what is now Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on November 11, 1620, they had seen 60% of the 102 original colony members die of scurvy and malnutrition. And yet no one deserted back to England that spring! And by October 1621, after a good harvest, they held the famous first Thanksgiving Feast attended by 53 colonists and 90 Wampanoag Indians who had helped them through that first year. In spite of the incredible hardship, there were many blessings, small and large, that those good and faithful Pilgrims were able to focus on. There was still so much to be thankful for!



There is a power in learning to be thankful – a power that promotes “the peace that passes all understanding”. “Be careful (anxious) for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). The Pilgrims were empowered to a great peace in the midst of what would otherwise be overwhelming hardship.

As the name they gave themselves declares, they remembered that like the early Hebrews passing as nomads through a sinful world, we are “sojourners” on our way to “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:9-10).

We too are “pilgrims” on our way to the promised land. And the purpose of life is not comfort, safety, and compromise, but freedom under God to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit and of our Lord and Maker in the great adventure of the Christian life!

The Pilgrims were onto a great truth. There is a much greater good realized in leaving behind the pursuit of comfort, ease, and safety, “the things that were gain to me” as the apostle says, in order to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:7,14). The courage they displayed was an evidence of “the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20). And the Bible says that the Holy Spirit brings us the power to live the Christian life (Acts 1:8) and to “be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”. The practice of the Pilgrims was to sing the Psalms set to music. They were psalm-singers. They specifically used the metrical version of the Psalms published by Henry Ainsworth in 1612 in Amsterdam, the Ainsworth Psalter. At the first Thanksgiving, they likely sang what was affectionately known as the “Old Hundredth”, Psalm 100.

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing.

...

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise;
Be thankful unto Him and bless His name.
For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting;
And His truth endureth to all generations.” - Psalm 100:1-2,3-5

This bit of history also points to the Holy Spirit empowering the lives of Christians. For the Bible says “...be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; **giving thanks for all things** unto God...” (Ephesians 5:18-20). Singing to the Lord and giving thanks work to give us strength, producing peace and courage through the Spirit of God and the power that is in Him!

The prophet Jonah was running from God. Instead of going to Ninevah, he was heading by boat in the opposite direction. But a storm arose, the sailors on the boat threw him into the sea, and a “great fish” swallowed him before he could drown. Finally, after 3 days and nights, Jonah prayed to God from “the fish’s belly,” ending his prayer with: “But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).



He finally saw things from God’s perspective and was thankful that the Lord had spared his life – even though he was in the acidic stench and darkness of the belly of the great fish! And Jonah saw that **giving thanks to God can bring forth tremendous spiritual power**. For in the very next verse, we read: “And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (Jonah 2:10). “In everything” give thanks. Peace and courage and the power of the Holy Spirit well up within us through a thankful heart!

The hardships, the death and decay, and frustrations of this world are actually part of our reminder of the perfection for which our great Creator has called us, and has made possible through Jesus Christ! In the midst of all the fear, hatred, and the hiding of truth, we have our mission to make known the light of our great Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ! – “for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith”, as the Pilgrims put it in the *Mayflower Compact*.

The Thanksgiving and Christmas season is upon us! We can resolve anew to rejoice in the light of the truth of God in Christ, who not only is “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) but who is also “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (i.e. his Creator)” who “hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof (the title deed to the whole earth)” (Revelation 5:5)! He is Savior and King!