

Joke: Reaching the end of a job interview, the human resources officer asked a young engineer fresh out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, “and what starting salary are you looking for?”

The engineer replies, “In the region of \$200,000 a year, depending on the benefits package.”

The interviewer goes on to say, “Well, what would you say to a package of five weeks vacation, fourteen paid holidays, full medical and dental, company matching retirement fund to 50% of salary, and a company car leased every two years? I’m thinking, a red Corvette?”

The engineer sits up straight and says, “Wow!! Are you kidding?”
The interviewer replies, “Yeah, but you started it.”

A Day for Remembering (Thanksgiving)

Thanksgiving a time of remembering, a looking back in gratitude for where we have been, what we’ve been through, and more importantly how God has been incredibly faithful to us and sustained us.

And as we look back, we need to take the time to celebrate and rejoice in all that God has graciously provided in our lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NIV): Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

How many of you know it's not always easy to give thanks in all circumstances, to rejoice always, and pray continually.

Yet we are told to do that very thing.

I love what the great Bible commentator, Matthew Henry wrote in his diary after he was mugged on the streets of London. The entry in his diary for that day recorded the following thoughts:

“I was mugged today. But Lord, you have taught us to be thankful in all circumstances. So, I want to thank you for several things:

1. I thank you this was the first time I was ever mugged.
2. I thank you they took my money, but not my life.
3. I thank you that even though they took all my money, it wasn't much money.
4. I thank you that I was the one mugged, not the one doing the mugging.”

That's a great perspective. Amen.

It's been a little over 400 years since the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth, Massachusetts. And the actual date for the celebration has shifted around over the years until President Abraham Lincoln issued the executive order that settled it on its current date. On October 20, 1864, President Lincoln wrote:

“Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday in November next as a day which I desire to be observed by all my fellow-citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the Universe.”

But it turns out that the practice of setting aside a day every year for giving thanks to God did not originate with President Lincoln, or even the pilgrims of Plymouth, Massachusetts.

In Deuteronomy it records Moses’ instructions to the people of Israel just before they entered the Promised Land.

Thanksgiving a day for remembering and Moses said this. . .

Deuteronomy 8:10–11 (NIV): When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

“Be careful that you do not forget...”

But what is it we should remember? Let me give you three today.

1) Remember God’s amazing grace.

The Exodus story is the foundational story of the Bible. For the people of Israel, it marked the birth of their nation, and their identity as the people of God. It was the story they were to remember throughout all generations, commemorated in the Passover Celebration.

Then centuries later, Jesus chose Passover week as the climactic setting for the events that would usher in the New Covenant—his death and resurrection.

In our text it was the exodus out of physical slavery in Egypt, but for us today it's an exodus out of spiritual slavery of sin and death.

And the good news is that Jesus has accomplished it not just for the descendants of Abraham, but for you and I as well.

Ephesians 2:4–9 (NIV): But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

We didn't choose God, God chose us! While we were still rebels Christ died for us.

Even before I chose Christ, the Holy Spirit was at work in my life, leading me to make that choice. It is a miracle of grace that God would allow us to receive this free gift. So, this Thanksgiving, remember God's amazing grace.

2) Remember God's gracious provision for you

Deuteronomy 8:15–16 (NIV): He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

I dare say all of us have been through the wilderness at one time or another. Maybe you've had to go through. . .

- Spiritual deserts
- Financial deserts
- Deserts of physical illness or suffering.
- Deserts of grief and sadness
- Deserts of confusion and indecision

But the truth is every wilderness experience you have gone through God was there still leading, helping, guiding, and loving you through it. You may not have been aware of it at the time. You may not have been even acknowledging God at the time. But He brought you this far.

Exodus 16:32–33 (NIV): Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat

in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.’ ” 33 So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come.”

The jar of manna was placed in the Ark of the Covenant along with the tablets of the Law. It was to be a reminder for generations to come that God provided for them in the wilderness.

The pilgrims on that terrible first winter, often there was only enough food for each person to have 5 grains of corn for a meal. There were more crosses on the hill than there were people in the village. But the next year the bountiful harvest came. And they invited their Native American neighbors and had a feast. Tradition has it that Governor Bradford began the meal by placing 5 grains of corn on each plate, as a reminder; *“We’ve been through the wilderness, but God led us and provided for us.”*

So, this Thanksgiving let us remember God’s provision.

The third thing I want you to remember is. . .

3) Remember that God is your Source, even in times of plenty

Deuteronomy 8:17–18 (NIV): You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”
18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

You've been through the desert, and God led you and provided for you. But now things are going much better. Be careful that you do not forget. . . God is the one who has provided.

Philippians 4:11–12 (NIV): I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Share a personal story, perhaps about the struggles of early marriage and your total dependence on God's provision.

Let me leave you with some suggestions for Thanksgiving Day:

The passage we read from Deuteronomy 16 is instructions for the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a harvest festival in the fall of the year. Of all the Jewish feasts, it most closely parallels our Thanksgiving Day. Moses gives two reminders that still apply today.

The first reminder was to Be joyful. That may seem an unnecessary reminder, but apparently it wasn't for the people of Israel. Moses felt the need to remind them. So let me do the same.

Don't let Thanksgiving become just routine. Celebrate!

Too often, we don't really "celebrate" holidays; we "observe" them, much like watching a parade. It's time we get off the sidelines and join the party!

We need celebrations to bring joy to life. Joy gives us strength. Joy is the motor that keeps us going in life; it gives us energy. The carefree spirit of joyous festivity is largely absent in modern society. It seems to me that boredom and apathy dominate our world today.

Remember joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit.

Proverbs tells us that a joyful heart is good medicine.

Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV): Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

And then we read this in Philippians. . .

Philippians 4:4–7 (NIV): Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Second reminder: Fill out the guest list. Apparently it was Moses' intention that everyone in the land be included in this feast. So he lists them:

- a. Sons and daughters (relatives)
- b. Menservants and maidservants (employees)
- c. Levites (ministers, hint, hint)
- d. Aliens (out-of-towners; travelers; college students, who are sort of like actual aliens)
- e. Fatherless and widows (memories of times our family has invited a widow or single adult to our Thanksgiving table)

The point is don't let anyone be left out of the feast.

God has invited us to His table make sure you invite and celebrate with others at yours.

And let me finish with a little recap from today. . .

Let this Thanksgiving be a day for remembering. And as you remember, give thanks...

- For God's amazing grace that is drawing you to himself.
- That God has graciously provided for you even during your wilderness times.
- And don't ever forget that God is your source especially in times of plenty, when it is easy to think otherwise.