

Being Thankful

Teacher Pep Talk: Teaching our youth to be thankful is something we do with varied success! And while we often talk about things to be thankful for, we don't always talk about who we should be thankful to. From its roots in colonial days, our traditional Thanksgiving had to do with being thankful to God for what He has done for us, and for the provisions He has given to us.

In this lesson you get to help explain the traditional origins of the Thanksgiving holiday, to review some of the references in the Bible on being thankful, and to help the youth explore the important questions of “**Thankful for What?**” and “**Thankful to Whom?**”

Theme: Being Thankful

Major Points:

- God is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.
- We may be thankful to God for all He has done for us.
- As Christians, we may be thankful at all times for our salvation through Jesus Christ and for the kingdom we are receiving.

Scripture Verses: **Psalm 95:1-2** Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

Colossians 2:6-7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe...

Memory Verse: **Psalm 95:2** Let us come before him with thanksgiving...

Teacher's Note:	Attached at the end of this lesson, you will find two appendices dealing with the historical facts of the origins of America's Thanksgiving Holiday. Use these as desired with your class. It is important to remember where we got the tradition of Thanksgiving! You will notice that both the first Thanksgiving and the proclamation of a national day of Thanksgiving followed some very trying times! Amazing!!
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Theme: Being Thankful

Lesson: Our lesson today is about Being Thankful. The idea of being thankful raises two important questions: **“Thankful to whom?”** and **“Thankful for what?”**

THANKFUL TO WHOM?

To whom should we be thankful? It seems like an easy question, doesn't it? We can easily be thankful to other people, especially when they have done something nice for us. And we can always be thankful to our parents for giving us life and for raising us as best they could. But who are we forgetting? (*The LORD, God!*)

God is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.

- In Psalm 95:1-2, King David talks about coming before the LORD with thanksgiving and extolling him with music and song!
- That sounds great! But what is extolling? (*It means “to praise somebody or something with great enthusiasm and admiration”*)
- So, we are talking about coming before the LORD God with praise and thanksgiving. Now the million dollar question... WHY? What are some of the things about God that make Him worthy of praise? (*Wait for answers... write them on the board.*)
- Good answers! These are all good reasons to come before God with praise and thanksgiving!
- We are fortunate because King David also gave us some of the answers to that question “Why?” They are found in Psalm 95 in verses 3-7. Let's read them together. (*Read Psalm 95:3-7*)

Psalm 95

¹ *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*

² *Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*

³ *For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods.*

⁴ *In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.*

⁵ *The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*

⁶ *Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*

⁷ *for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

OK, so we have tackled the question of “**Thankful to Whom?**” now we will move on to the question of “**Thankful for What?**”

THANKFUL FOR WHAT?

We may be thankful to God for all He has done for us.

- God has done amazing and wonderful things for us!
- We all have things **in common** that we can thank and praise God for. What are some of those things? (*Name some of them as a class and write them on the board.*)
- AND we have things we can thank and praise Him for **individually!** You have things that are particular to you and I have things that are particular to me. (*For example, you might say... “I am thankful that my Aunt Judy did well during her surgery.” While everyone can be thankful she is alright, this is particularly important to you because she is your Aunt Judy.*)

As Christians, we may be thankful at all times for our salvation through Jesus Christ and for the kingdom we are receiving.

- As Christians we have another list of things to be thankful for!
- We can be thankful that we have received Jesus as our Lord, and that we are saved. **Colossians 2:6-7** “*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*”
- We can also be thankful for the kingdom we are receiving. **Hebrews 12:28** “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe...*”
- We can be thankful for the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! **1 Corinthians 15:57** *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- Actually we can be thankful for all things! **Ephesians 5:19-20** *Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So, maybe we have answered our questions...

Thankful to Whom? (*To God*)

Thankful for What? (*Everything He has done for us!*)

Prayer:

Dear Lord, We praise you and thank you for who you are and for all you have done for us! Help us to always be thankful to you! Amen.

ACTIVITIES: Thankful for What? – Thankful to Whom?

THANK BANK

At Thanksgiving we talk a lot about being thankful. How thankful are you? Perhaps you are more thankful than you think... or than others may think... Why not see for yourself?

TEACHER NOTE: This activity allows the youth to think about what they are thankful for and who they are thankful to, during the holidays. It can be done several different ways. The two suggested options include collecting coins that represent things for which they are thankful, or writing down what they are thankful for on slips of paper, which they collect in a plastic bag or envelope. The containers may vary, and it makes a good class project to decorate them. Pick the option you like best!

Making a Thank Bank: From now until Christmas, set up a THANK BANK in your room. Your Thank Bank may be individualized to fit your personality. One easy way to make a Thank Bank is to get an empty water bottle, or other plastic container, rinse it out and let it dry, and then carefully cut a small slit near the top.

From Thanksgiving to Christmas, whenever you think of something for which you are thankful, put a small coin into the Thank Bank for that thing. If you feel really thankful you might put in a bigger coin! ☺ At Christmas time take all the coins out and show them to someone else, tell them about the things for which you felt most thankful. Then use the coins to do something really special. Buy a family member or friend a small gift, take someone out for coffee, or buy yourself a nice snack. You could... if you wanted to... put the money in the offering plate at church... or donate it to a favorite charity! If your whole class does this, then you might have quite a few coins by Christmas!

Alternatively: Use a plastic Zip-Loc bag, a large manila envelope, or small box for your Thank Bank. Decorate the outside of the bag, envelope, or box for the holidays! Cut tiny slips of colored paper on which to write the things for which you are thankful. Between now and Christmas, collect all the little slips of paper in the Thank Bank!

Near Christmas open up the Thank Bank and read all the things for which you have been thankful. You may be surprised how many different things there are!

If you decide to make a Thank Bank for someone specific in your family, write down all the things for which you are thankful about that person between now and Christmas. At Christmas time, slip the Thank Bank under the Christmas tree for that family member! Won't they be surprised on Christmas Day to get to read all the things about them for which you are thankful! *(By the way... Moms love this!)*

ACTIVITIES: Thankful for What? – Thankful to Whom?

Being Thankful Like the Pilgrims

Divide up the verses in Psalm 95:1-7 and allow students to read each one of them out loud. At Thanksgiving time, think about how the Pilgrims might have related to each of these verses. (Especially verses 1, 5, and 7). Which verses do you like the most?

Psalm 95:1-7 (NIV)

1 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

3 For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Discussion: The Pilgrims were devoted Christians who underwent very difficult trials during their voyage to America and their first year in the Plymouth Colony. Only 53 of the original 102 colonists survived the first winter. However, despite their difficulties, the Pilgrims gave praise to God for having protected them on the sea, for having brought them safely to a new land where they could worship Him freely, for having allowed them to survive once there, and for having given them a good harvest of their first crops. They had a celebration because of all these blessings and invited 90 Native Americans as guests.

Undoubtedly the Pilgrims were thankful for their salvation, that God was over the seas and the land, and that they were people of His pasture, the flock under His care.

Appendix A – The Origins of America’s Thanksgiving Holiday

Although it wasn’t called “Thanksgiving” at the time, the celebration which is considered to have been the first Thanksgiving in America was held in the fall of 1621 at Plymouth Colony.

The English colonists, who had fled Europe in search of religious freedom, had lived in what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts for almost a year. During that time nearly half of them had died due to illnesses and a harsh winter. But during the spring and summer the survivors had regained their strength, planted their crops, and improved their living quarters. They had also met local Native Americans and were living at peace with them. Now it was fall, and they had just brought in the first harvest of their crops. The governor of the colony sent out men to do some hunting and they brought back several types of fowl, including turkeys.

Massasoit, the Indian chieftain who had befriended them early on and offered them a guide and interpreter named Squanto, joined the colonists with 90 of his men for three days of feasting, during which time the Indians provided 5 deer, which they had killed.

The Pilgrims were devoted Christians and they attributed their survival of the long sea voyage and of the harsh winter, as well as their *“lack of want”* in this new land, to *“the goodness of God.”*

Over the years, there were various decrees of an annual day of Thanksgiving, usually held in the month of November. But it was left to President Abraham Lincoln to actually begin the tradition of a national Day of Thanksgiving, which he did in 1863.

It is interesting to note that President Lincoln made this proclamation in the middle of the Civil War, to thank and honor God, despite the war, because, among other great things, *“peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict”*.

Lincoln went on to say that *“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.* Lincoln said it seemed *“fit and proper”* to him that these great things should be *“solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People.”* And so America’s National Day of Thanksgiving was established.

Information summarized from www.pilgrimhall.org and www.abrahamlincolnonline.org

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Appendix B – Proclamation of a National Day of Thanksgiving – October 3, 1863

By the President of the United States of America.

A Proclamation.

The year that is drawing towards 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. In the midst of a civil war of unequaled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. 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 also those who are at sea 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, 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, tranquillity and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln

William H. Seward,
Secretary of State

Available at: www.abrahamlincolnonline.org