

THANKS-GIVING PRAYER

Don't feel all that thankful this Thanksgiving? God understands. That's why Scripture reminds us so many times to give thanks. Just stopping to think about what to be thankful for, will soon change your attitude, even in the midst of difficult situations. Scripture commands God's people to thank Him. Often. For all things and in all circumstances. This is not difficult because God pours out His gracious providence all day every day. At this Thanksgiving time of year, we do well to remember the history of giving thanks in America, as a heritage of the freedoms we enjoy. Which we must guard. And practice. As Colossians 4:2 says, "*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*"

1- God's Providence. Thanksgiving observances on this continent include these: In 1541 at Palo Duro Canyon, Texas, by Coronado and 1,500 of his men; In 1564 at St. Augustine, Florida, by protestant French Huguenot colonists; in 1598 at El Paso, Texas, by the expedition of Juan de Oriate; in 1607 at Cape Henry, Virginia, by the Jamestown settlers; and in 1619 at Berkely Plantation in Virginia. But our American tradition of Thanksgiving traces back to the Pilgrims in New England in 1621. The Pilgrims had escaped worldly pressures and religious persecution in Europe. Their ship was blown off course in 1620. But God had provided what some scholars see as the only available land on the entire eastern seaboard, and neighboring Indians that were not aggressively hostile. "Having undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith" they immediately thanked God. William Bradford wrote, "being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven. What could sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace?"

2- God's Portion. The Pilgrims lost half their population that first difficult winter. They were especially helped by an English-speaking Indian named Squanto, providentially returned to his native land by God. So the Pilgrims survived and harvested their first crop. Edward Winslow wrote, "God be praised, we had a good increase of corn; by the goodness of God, we are far from want." They celebrated by inviting the natives to a Thanksgiving feast. Perhaps you could invite someone to share what God has blessed you with this season. Or help stock or staff a food pantry. Many churches take special offerings to help meet the needs in our local communities. How can you share? Colossians 3:17, "*and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*"

3- God's Provision. The new world presented numerous challenges, including severe drought in 1623, limiting the people to five kernels of corn per person. Governor Bradford "set apart a solemn day of humiliation to seek ye Lord by humble and fervent prayer in this great distress." After a day of repentance and prayer, God sent gentle soaking rains for two weeks, reviving the crops, which was "wonderful to see, and made ye Indians astonished to behold." After the harvest, 120 invited Indians plus their women and children joined the Pilgrim's celebration of Thanksgiving. As a reminder of God's goodness, they placed five kernels of corn on each plate. How might you remind yourself of God's providence today? Ephesians 5:29, "*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

4- God's Preservation. In England, King James did not take kindly to the separatist faith of the Pilgrims, and confiscated their property and imprisoned many. They found temporary solace in Holland, but then sought to escape its worldly pressures, as well as religious persecution. They finally found passage to the New World. God had miraculously preserved them through perilous times, and blessed them with the freedom to practice their religion according to their conscience and understanding of the Bible. We are living in a day similar to the tribulations of the Pilgrims. Worldly pressures abound and governmental penalties seem aimed at evangelical Christianity. The regressive policies of so-called progressive politics aim to severely limit or erase the religious freedoms guaranteed under the United States Constitution.

5- Your Petitions. This is no time for passivity. And the first line of offense for Christians is prayer. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2, "*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*"

As you celebrate Thanksgiving, take time to remember God's providence, God's portion, God's provision, God's preservation. "*Abounding in thanksgiving*" (Colossians 2:7) "*in all circumstances*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18) "*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*" (Philippians 4:6). As you make your petitions, thank God for all that He is, all that He has done, and all that He does, to further His plan of salvation in the world. His blessings are both material and spiritual. And He blesses His people so that we can pass them along to others. Be faithful in your praises and your prayers, so that your petitions ask God to glorify His name, as you trust and obey in all things, by His power within, doing all things in Jesus' name. Amen! ☐