

We Were Made for Thanksgiving

A Father's Gratitude for a National Holiday

Article by

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I thank God for Thanksgiving. Particularly this year, as a father of four, ages 11 to 4, I feel a fresh sense of awe, and gratitude, that my generally unbelieving nation pauses for a weekday each November formally dedicated to giving thanks.

It may seem like a trifle to most people. But for those with eyes to see, this is a dazzling ray of God's *common kindness* in our day, however much we grieve the public commendations of sin and unbelief that surround us in other ways. Our heavenly Father "is kind to the ungrateful and the evil" ([Luke 6:35](#)). "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" ([Matthew 5:45](#)). To his common kindnesses of beautiful days, human minds and bodies and words, friends and family, food and shelter — the everyday divine kindnesses we take for granted until they're threatened or gone — add this annual mercy: Thanksgiving Day. Whatever conversations it might prompt with neighbors and coworkers, the Thanksgiving holiday is also an especially rich opportunity for moms and dads. To be sure, if practicing thanksgiving happens only once a year in our homes, then our children will not be much better for it. But if this one day is a marker, a springboard, an annual emphasis and re-kindler that feeds a regular theme and habit in our families, then we have an occasion, in this one day, to highlight one of the most important realities God calls us to teach our sons and daughters.

Thanksgiving Honors God

When we ourselves give thanks to God, out loud for our children to hear, we model for them something very basic and profound about being human: we are created by God, for God.

God made us *in his image* ([Genesis 1:27](#)), and what do images do? They image. They reflect, display, make visible. They ensure the one being imaged is remembered and honored. God made us to reflect him and display him in the world around us. We image him through our visible actions and our audible (or written) words that give meaning to our actions. This fundamental purpose and calling makes *thanksgiving* essential to life.

Sin, however, mars our imaging. In [Romans 1:21](#), the apostle Paul gives us a revealing glimpse into what has gone wrong in the human race: “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or *give thanks* to him.”

We Did Not Give Thanks

At one level, our plight in this world is remarkably simple: God made us, and surrounded us with a world teeming with good, and we failed to thank him as we ought.

God showered us with warm sunny days, beautiful blue skies and green grass, stunning cloud formations to dazzle the eye and provide shade, trees bearing mouthwatering fruit, and the greatest wonder of all in the created world: each other and the marvels that are human bodies and brains. Our world, even now under the sway of sin, still abounds with God’s goodness and kindness. And we ourselves have been given life and countless blessings, even in our most trying of times and disabilities.

Our first response to God’s lavish provision, very simply, should have been to *give him thanks*. To do so *honors* the one who made us and provides for us. But we did not give thanks —

whether from indifference or contempt — and so we *dishonored* him. We rebelled against one of the most basic purposes for our existence. To give God thanks honors him, and to honor him — our very design and calling as humans — includes giving him thanks.

Ingratitude, then, is no minor vice. And thanksgiving is no insignificant act for a creature designed to image God.

Feel God's Pleasure

We were made to give God thanks. And when we do — and model it for our children, teaching them to do the same — we taste one of the great pleasures God made us to enjoy. As Olympian Eric Liddell (1902–1945) memorably said that God made him to run, and he felt God's pleasure when he ran, so we all were *made to give God thanks*, and feel God's pleasure when we do.

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regularly, spontaneously, gladly?”

Yet we find ourselves, as fathers and mothers, with a call to raise the next generation, while living in times that celebrate pride, rather than humility. Our generation's sense of entitlement is off the charts, and rising. Will thanksgiving be a trifle for our children? Will they assume grace, assume God's provision, assume blessing, assume resources, assume ability, assume community? Or will they presume little, and learn to thank much and express it?

Will our children grow up in homes that thank God daily, regularly, spontaneously, gladly — even as Thanksgiving Day adds its annual exclamation point?

Jesus Gave Thanks

In the end, despite our many failures, we want to model for our children what it would be like for God himself to live as human. And when he did come as man, he gave thanks. Even as God

himself, Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus embraced the fullness of the humanity he took at that first Christmas, all the way down to the basics of our flesh and blood — including thanksgiving.

He thanked his Father in prayer ([Matthew 11:25-26](#); [Luke 10:21](#)), not just privately but out loud for his disciples to hear. When he fed the four thousand, “he took the seven loaves and the fish, and *having given thanks* he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds” ([Matthew 15:36](#); [Mark 8:6](#)). And when he fed five thousand, he began the same way ([John 6:11](#)). So memorable, in fact, was his giving thanks that later John refers to the location where the miracle occurred as “the place where they had eaten the bread *after the Lord had given thanks*” ([John 6:23](#)).

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thanks.”**

Then, on the night before he died, Jesus took bread, *gave thanks*, broke it, and gave it to his disciples ([Luke 22:17](#); [1 Corinthians 11:24](#)). So too, after supper, he took the cup, *gave thanks*, and they all drank to the spectacularly gracious new covenant in his blood ([Matthew 26:27](#); [Mark 14:23](#); [Luke 22:19](#)). So pronounced was Jesus’s thanksgiving during that Last Supper that some traditions call the rite of remembrance “the Eucharist,” from the Greek for *thanksgiving*.

For Jesus, the God-man, giving thanks to his Father was no trifle. Jesus was the supreme human, and the supreme giver of thanks. Nor should thanksgiving be small for us, or for our children. What an honor, and pleasure, to not only taste for ourselves the joy of giving God thanks, but also share this joy with our children. Thank you, God, for Thanksgiving.