



Family Action Ideas

Shrink the 3 “F’s” of Thanksgiving

What do you think of when Thanksgiving rolls around? Do you think of a big turkey dinner with family? Do you look forward to watching parades on TV or going to watch one in person? Do you anticipate an afternoon and evening full of football? Thanksgiving Day evokes many different emotions in us, but have you ever stopped to think about why this holiday exists? We have become so accustomed to the “three F’s” of Thanksgiving day – Food, Family, and Football – that we forget to actually give thanks to God on the day set aside especially for that purpose. I suggest that we look at Thanksgiving in an entirely different light.

Great challenges birthed the holiday

In 1863, our nation was in the middle of a civil war. Battles were being fought, both sides were certain that theirs was the honorable, just, and true cause, and in many instances, families were divided. It was in the midst of this turmoil that Thanksgiving Day was born. Abraham Lincoln, who was president at the time, wrote these words in his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation:

“The year that is drawing toward 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....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.”

We would do well to take heed to these words today, both as a nation and as families who are seeking to follow King Jesus.

Carving a new emphasis

“But how?” you may ask. How do we recapture the depth and hallowedness of a holiday that is merely seen as time off from work for most of our culture?

Go to the word of God and allow it to be the sharp sword (Heb. 4:12), capable of not only trimming away waste, but revealing the depth and health of truly giving thanks. Here are some verses for you and family members to consider.

I Thess. 5: 16-18

Eph. 5:19-20

Psalms 106:1-3

Romans 7:21-25

Psalms 69:30-33

Romans 1:21-22

What do these verses say about giving thanks? What can be a result of failing to give thanks? What are the things the verses focus on as being thankworthy? What other verses can you think of that may apply to giving thanks?

2. Make Banners of Thanks for your family. What has God done in and through your family? A few weeks before Thanksgiving, get some construction paper, play-doh and popsicle sticks. Make flags which show great things God has done and use the play-doh as a base to hold the flags up (you may have a better idea for this). Make the flags bigger for

how important God's action was. For instance, if God answered prayer and healed your mother

from breast cancer, that might be a bigger flag than the one you made for your daily food. Place these around the house. Whenever you gather to eat, include thanks for some of the things you have listed on the flags. On Thanksgiving day, have family members choose two of their favorite flags and use them to decorate the table in front of where they sit to eat. These are things each of you will pray for before Thanksgiving is served.

3. **Stop and Awe.** During the week of thanksgiving, set aside time each day to go to a quiet place by yourself and come into the presence of God in prayer. During this prayer time, focus entirely on thanking and praising God. Listen to Him. He will bring to your mind things for which to praise and thank Him (You might want to use Psalm 103 to focus you and prepare your heart). Concentrate on His greatness, His mercy, His grace. Allow the presence of the Almighty to place you in awe of His great love and sacrifice for you. Keep the time open ended. You may find yourself getting lost in His presence.

4. **Make thankfulness tangible.** Our thanksgiving should translate into **thanksgiving**. In the Old Testament (Lev. 7:12) thankfulness was tangibly expressed through sacrificial offerings. You may want to scale down the menu for the day and use the money that would have been spent in helping those who are hungry and in need. Begin to consciously make efforts to show gratitude to God and to help others throughout the year. Generosity is thankfulness' offspring.

Cement the changes

For one week after Thanksgiving, continue some of the practices. Keep your devotion time focused on standing in awe of God's faithfulness and mercy. Keep the banners made by your children on the table for meals and continue to use them to focus prayers of thankfulness.

Reflect over the time you have sought to place thankfulness in its rightful place in your life these last weeks. Have you seen any changes in yourself or your children? What things you have done to emphasize thanksgiving have seemed to capture the imagination of you and your children? What ideas have you come up with for next year? Has anything you did this year strike you as worthy of becoming a family tradition?

You must be intentional

For change to take place you must be intentional. It takes work, time and energy. How successful will it be? Only God knows. Remember, you are not looking to these changes to produce earth shaking results. These changes for Thanksgiving represent only a fraction of you and your family's life. But, it along with countless other ways you seek to bring God and His Kingdom into the center of your family life over the year will have profound impact. Lots of little changes equal big change.

Finally, many churches hold special services the morning of Thanksgiving day. Attend one! Remember, God has not called us to be a bunch of Lone Rangers following Him. He has called us to be a people of God. Community is essential.

God be with you and yours this Thanksgiving.

For the Kingdom,

Mission As Life staff at Mustard Seeds and Mountains.