

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 92:1
“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High.”

The underlined portion of the verse indicates what the younger children should memorize. See “**Involvement Helps for Younger Children**” for helps in teaching the verse to the younger children.)

MAIN THRUST: You should thank God for what He has done for you.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BEGINNING STATEMENTS

Can you think of someone who has done something special for you? Perhaps it was your mother who bought just what you wanted for your birthday. Maybe your father took you to a very special place. What do you think you should say to a person who does something special for you? (Thank you.)

We who live in America have so much to be thankful for. We even have one day a year set aside to remind us to say “thank you” to God, to our family, and to our friends for the many things they have done for us.

B. TRANSITION

In order to help us understand why we have Thanksgiving Day and why we should be grateful, I want to tell you a true story that happened many years ago.

II. PROGRESSION OF EVENTS

A. FT 1 – A Stormy Voyage

A long time ago in the early 1600's, King James I of England did not permit the people of England to worship God freely. They did not have religious freedom. Therefore, a group of Christians, called Separatists or Pilgrims, left England and went to Holland where they could freely worship the Lord. After some time in Holland, they decided to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, as America was called at that time.



III Have children pack a bag for the journey. Name some of the things to pack.

Because it cost lots of money to sail to America, these Christians had to borrow money to pay for their passage. They sailed from England to the New World on a ship called the *Mayflower* on September 6. This meant they would be on the open seas during the season of very fierce storms.

In mid-ocean, the storms finally overtook them. All the passengers crowded down into the lowest part of the ship as the storms tossed the ship to and fro. The strong winds and huge waves continued day after day to batter their ship! Many became very seasick. There were other hardships on the *Mayflower* besides the storm: the only food they had to eat was boiled beans, dried peas, salt pork, and hardtack (a very hard bread). The children and adults were all cooped up in the hold of the ship; it was too dangerous for them to go up on deck. One man who went up on deck was swept overboard by a huge wave!

During these hard times, they must have wondered if God loved them.

G Perhaps you have wondered that too. Well, I want to tell you that God does love you. He loves you in the hard times, as well as the good times. The Bible tells us that God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to pay for our sin. That would take a lot of love. We certainly don't deserve that kind of love, but God loves us much more than we can ever imagine.

Because the passengers on the boat were going through such hard times, they must have wondered if God loved them.

It took seven long weeks for them to complete their journey across the Atlantic Ocean.

IH Have children count to 7 with you.

Finally, on the distant horizon, they could see the New World. The Pilgrims were grateful that their long, difficult journey was almost over. They knelt down on the deck of the ship and thanked God for bringing them safely to the New World of America.

MT If Jesus is your Saviour, you should thank God for what He has done for you.

The Pilgrims were grateful for what God had done for them, and they knelt down and prayed, thanking God for bringing them safely to the New World of America.



B. FT 2 – Arrival in the New World

The *Mayflower* sailed along the coast of an area that was later named Massachusetts. Though the Pilgrims had arrived at the New World, they could not go ashore immediately, for the water was too shallow for their ship. Sixteen men rowed ashore in a smaller boat to bring the needed food and fresh water for those on the *Mayflower*. They returned with fresh water and food. Later, they left the *Mayflower* to look for a place to build houses and set up camp. They decided to make their settlement at a place they called *Plymouth*.



The women and children stayed on the *Mayflower* until the men built shelters for them on shore. The weather that November was very cold in Massachusetts.

C. FT 3 – Much Work to Do

The men and older boys worked hard and long hours building shelters for the families. For four long months, the women and children waited on the *Mayflower* while the men cut down trees and sawed them into lumber to build very rough, primitive houses.



IH Have children cut trees, saw boards, and help put up a wall for the house.

They had to keep on the lookout for Indians, who were the only people living in America at that time; that's the reason Indians are also called Native Americans. The Pilgrims wondered if the Indians would be hostile (dangerous), or if they would be friendly. The Pilgrims knew it could be very dangerous for everyone.

Winter was coming on, and food would be very scarce since crops could not be planted until the next spring. To them, America was a beautiful country with great big forests and lots of wilderness country. America had no roads, no cities, no towns, and no stores. There was no place to buy food. Though life would be hard for the Pilgrims, to them it was worth the hardships in order to worship God freely.

O Today, you and I have freedom to learn about God here in America, but there are boys and girls who grow up not knowing about God and His Son, Jesus. I want every man, woman, boy, and girl around the world to know about **God and His only Son, Jesus, who never sinned.** We have freedom in America to learn about God and Jesus, but in many countries around the world they do not have this freedom.

The Pilgrims knew it would be worth all of the hardships in this new country if they could freely worship God.

Finally, the families were able to move from the *Mayflower* into their homes on shore. Several families lived in the same house since there were not enough houses for each family to have a separate one. The Pilgrims were so glad to be off the *Mayflower* that they did not mind being crowded into small houses. They were just glad to be on shore and have a roof over their heads. During that difficult, cold winter, with not much food, nearly half of the people became sick and died.

D. FT – 4 Squanto’s Help and Friendship

One day, two Indians came to visit the Pilgrims. One of them was an Indian chief named *Samoset*. He could speak a little English which he learned from English sailors. The other Indian, named *Squanto*, could speak English very well. The Pilgrims were glad Squanto could speak to them in English. As a young man, Squanto was kidnaped by a wicked Englishman who took him to Africa and sold him as a slave. Later, Squanto escaped to England where he worked for a wealthy merchant and learned to speak English. Finally, he was able to return to the Indians in America.



Squanto and Chief Samoset told the Pilgrims that the great Chief Massasoit [mas-ə • soit] was coming with 60 of his warriors. Almost immediately, the Pilgrims looked up and saw the Indian warriors coming over the hill. What could the Pilgrims do? They must quickly make friends with the Indians and let them know that they had not come to cheat and harm the Indians as other white men had done. They knew that they must explain this right away, or the Indians might kill them.

S, PAU	Is it right to kill someone? No, of course, not. Neither is it right to cheat or harm someone. God calls these things sin. Anything we think, say, or do that does not please God is sin.
IH	As you say, “ <i>Sin is anything that you <u>think</u>, <u>say</u>, or <u>do</u> that makes God sad,</i> ” point to <u>head</u> , <u>mouth</u> , and <u>extend hands, palms up</u> .
Psalms 51:5	Every person in the world has sinned many times. <u>I have sinned and you have sinned.</u> (Share at least three examples of sin.) The Bible says, “ <i>Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.</i> ” This means that each of us were born into this world with sinful hearts; therefore, we do sinful things. It is our sin that separates us from God and keeps us from going to Heaven where God lives. Sin is never right.

It would not be right for the Indians to kill the Pilgrims or for the Pilgrims to hurt the Indians. The Pilgrims wanted the Indians to know that they had not come to cheat or harm them.

One of the Pilgrims, Edward Winslow, said, “I will go and tell them that we want to make peace. Squanto, you come with me to interpret what I say.”

“But you must take gifts,” said one of the Pilgrims. Quickly, the Pilgrims gathered knives, jewelry, biscuits, and butter to offer as gifts to Chief Massasoit.

Everyone watched anxiously as Edward Winslow and Squanto approached the Indians. Squanto translated Winslow's words into the Indian language, explaining that the white men wished to make peace with the Indians and to be their friends. Edward Winslow presented the gifts to Chief Massasoit, who then laid down his bow and arrows and ordered his warriors to do the same.

Chief Massasoit agreed to come with some of his warriors to talk with the Pilgrim leaders; this pleased everyone. But meanwhile, Edward Winslow was kept with the other Indians as a hostage.

After talking with the Pilgrims, Chief Massasoit and his men understood that the white men wanted to be friends. They made a peace treaty with the Pilgrims and promised not to harm them. From a distance, the Pilgrims watched and finally breathed great sighs of relief. They were thankful that God was protecting them.

IH Have the children smile and say, "Thank You, God!"

MT If Jesus is your Saviour, you should thank God for what He has done for you.

You should thank God for what He has done for you.



The pilgrims were thankful to God for protecting them.

Squanto did not leave when the other Indians left. He stayed with the Pilgrims a long time to help them. He taught them how to plant corn, using fish as fertilizer. He told them they must guard the plants and crops at night from the wolves, for the wolves knew how to dig up the fish. Squanto guided them on hunting and fishing trips. He taught them how to build traps to catch a certain kind of fish called *herring*.

The Pilgrims knew that God had sent Squanto to help them, for they would not have survived in this new land called America without the help of Squanto.

P, E This reminds me of God. God sent His only Son to help us. Without Jesus, you and I could not go to Heaven when our life here on earth is over. This is why **Jesus gave His precious blood to pay for our sins when He died in our place on the cross.** The Bible says, ". . . *Christ died for the ungodly.*" You and I are the ungodly or sinners. Jesus paid for our sins when He died on the cross, but **He didn't stay dead. Although Jesus' body was buried, God raised Him from the dead three days later, never to die again.** If Jesus had not risen from the dead, He would be just like everyone else, and He could not help us.

The Pilgrims were thankful God had sent Squanto to help them. They were grateful to God for His care for them.

E. FT5 – Preparing for the Feast

Less than a year after they arrived, they now had 11 buildings in their settlement. They stored their corn for the winter, which grew from tiny seeds they got from the Indians. They dried the fish (cod and bass) that they caught; it would be good to eat during the cold winter months ahead. They also dried duck, wild turkey, and deer meat. They were very thankful to have so much food to store up for the long winter months.



Governor Bradford, the governor over this small group of English people, announced that they were going to celebrate their first year in America by holding a feast to thank God for His goodness to them. The men went out to shoot birds and turkeys to have meat for the feast. The women baked corn and wheat bread in outdoor ovens. They prepared all kinds of foods with the many vegetables and nuts they gathered.

Governor Bradford invited Chief Massasoit to join them in their feast of Thanksgiving.

IH Have children motion to come, and say, “*Come, join us.*”

F. FT 6 – First Thanksgiving

When Chief Massasoit arrived, to everyone’s surprise, he was accompanied by 90 Indian warriors! The Pilgrim women gasped in dismay. Would they have enough food for so many people? Chief Massasoit solved this problem by sending out his warriors to kill five deer, so there would be plenty of meat for all. Finally, the food was ready; they all found their places as one of the leading



Pilgrims stood up to thank God for His many blessings to them that year. He thanked God that their crops had grown so well that they had plenty of food. He thanked God for the kind help and friendship of the Indians. He thanked God for their good help and for the safety and protection that He had given to them that year.

MT. PAS
Psalm 92:1

If Jesus is your Saviour, **you should thank God for what He has done for you.** ¹When you talk to God in prayer, you should tell God that you are thankful to live in America where you have freedom to go to church and Good News Club or Released Time Class and learn about the true and living God. ²You should thank God for sending Jesus to pay for your sins and for giving you eternal life because you have received Jesus as your Saviour. ³It is easy to forget that God is the One who gives you air to breathe and energy to run and play, but you should tell Him often that you are grateful for these things. ⁴Can you think of other things you should thank God for? The Bible says, ***“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High.”*** You and I can thank God in our prayers for the many things He has done for us, and we can also thank God by singing songs of praise which tell of His love and goodness to us.



The Pilgrims thanked God for the many ways He showed His goodness to them that year.

The Pilgrim’s dessert that first Thanksgiving in the New Land was cornmeal pudding, sweetened with dried berries! The Indians amazed the Pilgrims by popping corn over a fire. They made popcorn balls and sweetened them with maple syrup, which was a treat for the children!

The Thanksgiving feast lasted for three days, during which the Pilgrim men and boys played games and held shooting contests with the Indians. The women and girls had fun watching and preparing food for the large, happy crowd.

How thankful the Pilgrims were that they made peace with their Indian neighbors. They were grateful for the way God had blessed them. They were happy to be in a land where they could worship God freely. They thanked Him from their hearts.

We are told that the New England Pilgrims continued to celebrate the Thanksgiving feast each year. And each year, they placed five grains of corn on each plate to remind them of the terrible days when the first Pilgrims had to limit each person’s daily food to five grains of corn. For some of them, five grains of corn stood for five reasons to be thankful.

G. FT 7 – Making Thanksgiving a National Holiday

In the early American colonies, Thanksgiving was celebrated for many years on different days. Sarah Hale, who lived in the 1800's, believed Thanksgiving should be celebrated by all the states on the **same** day, as a *national* holiday. So Mrs. Hale wrote hundreds of letters to Mayors, Governors, Congressmen, and even Presidents, urging them to adopt a national Thanksgiving Day.



IH Have children pretend to write a letter.

After 17 years, her efforts were finally rewarded.

III. CLIMAX

President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as “*A day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father.*”

IV. CONCLUSION

A. CLOSING STATEMENTS

All the Presidents since that time have agreed with Sarah Hale that everybody should celebrate Thanksgiving on the same day. A national Thanksgiving Day (the last Thursday in November) is now a wonderful tradition in our country.

Each year at Thanksgiving, most Americans gather with friends and family to feast on turkey and other delicious food and to thank God for His bountiful blessings to them and to America. But some Americans forget that every good thing they have comes from God, and they do not thank God even on Thanksgiving Day. But let us not be like that and forget God, especially during the Thanksgiving season.

B. BRIDGE

Let us remember to thank God, like the Pilgrims did that first Thanksgiving when they thanked Him for His provision and care for them.

C. CHALLENGE

MT
Psalm 92:1

If Jesus is your Saviour, **you should thank God for what He has done for you.** Let’s review some of the things that I mentioned before that you could thank God for. ¹When you talk to God in prayer, you should tell God that you are thankful to live in America where you have freedom to go to church and Good News Club or Released Time Class and learn about the true and living God. ²You should thank God for sending Jesus to pay for your sins and for giving you eternal life because you have received Jesus as your Saviour. ³It is easy to forget that God is the One who gives you air to breathe and energy to run and play, but you should tell Him often that you are grateful for these things. ⁴Perhaps you can think of other things you should thank God for. Remember, the Bible says, ***“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High.”*** You and I can thank God in our prayers for the many things He has done for us, and we can also thank God by singing songs of praise which tell of His love and goodness to us. Will you just take a minute, right now, to tell God some of the things you are thankful for? Ask Him to help you say “thank you” more often.

**You should thank
God for
what He
has done
for you.**



D. INVITATION

L
John 3:36

Perhaps you have not yet trusted Jesus to be your Saviour. Let me explain to you what it means. The Bible says, “***He that believeth on the Son*** (if you believe in your heart that no one except Jesus can take away your sin and you ask Him to forgive you and to be your Saviour from sin) ***hath everlasting life*** (God will give you life to live forever with Him in Heaven)” God loves you so much that He provided the way so you can have your sins forgiven. Perhaps you never knew that before. But now you do. If you want Jesus to be your Saviour, you must tell Him that you know you have sinned and you want to be forgiven. Also, you must believe in your heart that Jesus died and rose again for you. Then you can ask Him to forgive you and come to live in your heart. Are you ready to ask Jesus to be your Saviour? (*Have them bow their heads and close their eyes. Ask them to show you by raising their hand if they are ready to make this decision. Then tell them to come after class so you can show them from the Bible what it means to have Jesus as their Saviour.*)