The First Thanksgiving

A Special Thanksgiving Blessing: Thanking God for the Pilgrims and Their Sacrifice

For children in grades 1–2 | A special addition to our First Thanksgiving Bible lesson

"Children, did you know that one of the greatest blessings we have in America is the **freedom to worship God?**

We can go to church, read our Bibles, sing songs about Jesus, pray together, and tell others about God's love.

But did you know that long ago, some people didn't have the same freedom to worship God the way they believed the Bible taught?

The Pilgrims were among those people.

They loved God and wanted to worship Him according to their beliefs, without being told exactly how they had to worship.

They had already left England and moved to Holland, where they had greater religious freedom. But they wanted to build a new community where they could raise their families and practice their faith.

So they made a very brave decision.

They would leave behind almost everything they knew and sail across a great big ocean to a new land!

Imagine saying goodbye to your home, your friends, and people you loved.

Imagine climbing aboard a small wooden ship, knowing you might never see your old home again.

There were no airplanes to fly you back. No telephones to call your grandparents. No hospitals waiting when you arrived.

The Pilgrims knew the journey would be dangerous, but their faith was important enough to them that they were willing to make great sacrifices.

And those sacrifices were enormous!

They endured a long, frightening ocean voyage. They faced freezing weather, hunger, sickness, and terrible sadness.

Many did not survive that first winter.

But the survivors continued building their new community, and their faith remained an important part of their lives.

And children, here's something I want you to remember this Thanksgiving.

Today, we live in a country where we have the precious freedom to worship God.

We can carry our Bibles to church!

We can gather together to learn about Jesus!

We can pray with our families!

We can sing praises to God!

The Pilgrims were part of the early American story of people seeking religious freedom.

And we should never take that blessing for granted.

We can be thankful for the Pilgrims' courage and sacrifices, for the Native peoples who helped them survive, and for the many people throughout American history who helped make religious liberty possible.

Most of all, we can thank God that we have the freedom to worship Him today!"

A Bible Verse to Remember

Psalm 100:4 (KJV)

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name."

Ask the Children

"Imagine if someone told you that you couldn't come to Bible Club anymore, couldn't bring your Bible to church, or couldn't sing your favorite songs about Jesus.

How would that make you feel?"

"Now, can you think of something the Pilgrims gave up because their faith was so important to them?"

"And how can we show God that we're thankful for our freedom to worship Him?"

Our Thanksgiving Prayer

"Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the brave Pilgrims who were willing to leave their homes and make great sacrifices because their faith was so important to them.

Thank You for the people who helped them when they were hungry and struggling.

Thank You for our beautiful country and the freedom we have to worship You, read our Bibles, pray, and tell others about Jesus.

Help us never to take these blessings for granted.

And help us remember that many people around the world still do not enjoy the same freedoms we have.

Most of all, thank You for Jesus, who made the greatest sacrifice of all because He loves us.

In Jesus' name, Amen."

A closing thought for the children:

"Children, this Thanksgiving, when you sit down with your family to enjoy a wonderful meal, remember that Thanksgiving is about more than turkey and pumpkin pie.

It's about having a grateful heart.

And one of the most precious things we can thank God for is **the freedom to know Him, love Him, and worship Him!**"

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Lesson Theme: Giving Thanks to God in Every Circumstance
A Children's Bible Lesson | Ages 6–12 | 30–40 minutes

Bible Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (KJV)

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Big Idea: Thanksgiving isn't just about turkey, food, and family. It's about recognizing God's blessings and having a grateful heart—even when life is difficult.

1. OPENING: WHAT IS THANKSGIVING REALLY ABOUT? (5 MINUTES)

Ask the children:

- "Who loves Thanksgiving? What's your favorite part? The turkey? The pumpkin pie? Getting together with family?"
- "Did you know that almost 400 years ago, a group of people called the Pilgrims celebrated a harvest feast after one of the hardest years of their lives?"
- "But here's something amazing: They had experienced hunger, sickness, and sadness. So why would they celebrate and give thanks?"
- "Let's find out!"

2. THE STORY OF THE FIRST THANKSGIVING (10–12 MINUTES)

The Pilgrims' Big Adventure

- Over 400 years ago, in 1620, a group of people sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on a ship called the *Mayflower*.
- Some of these people were Pilgrims who wanted to worship God according to their beliefs. Others traveled to America hoping for new opportunities.
- There were 102 passengers, including children!
- Imagine being on a small, crowded ship for more than two months. There were no televisions, refrigerators, or comfortable beds. The ocean could be rough, and sometimes the ship rocked back and forth.
- Finally, they reached the shores of what is now Massachusetts.
- But their troubles weren't over.

A Very Difficult Winter

- The Pilgrims arrived when the weather was getting cold. They needed homes, food, and warm clothing.
- That first winter was terrible.
- Many became sick, and food was scarce. About half of the Mayflower passengers died during their first winter.
- Imagine how sad and frightened the children must have felt.
- But the survivors kept working, hoping, and praying.

Help From Their Native American Neighbors

When spring arrived, the Pilgrims received help from Native Americans who already lived in the region.

A man named Tisquantum, often called Squanto, spoke English and helped the Pilgrims learn how to grow corn and find food.

The Wampanoag people knew the land well. They had lived in the region for thousands of years.

Their leader, Ousamequin, also known as Massasoit, made an agreement with the Plymouth colonists to maintain peace and provide mutual protection.

The Pilgrims planted crops and worked hard throughout the spring and summer.

And then something wonderful happened!

The Harvest Celebration of 1621

That fall, the Pilgrims gathered a successful harvest.

After everything they had been through, they finally had food to eat!

They held a harvest celebration that lasted about three days. Around 90 Wampanoag men joined the approximately 50 surviving colonists.

They shared food, including venison and wild birds, and enjoyed time together.

It wasn't exactly like our Thanksgiving today. There probably wasn't pumpkin pie, cranberry sauce, or mashed potatoes!

The Pilgrims had a strong tradition of thanking God for His provision, and their successful harvest gave them much to be grateful for.

3. Bible Lesson: Thankful Even When Life Is Hard (7 minutes)

The Pilgrims' story reminds us of an important truth from the Bible.

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:18** aloud.

"Does this verse say to give thanks only when everything is going great?"

No!

It says to give thanks *in everything*.

That doesn't mean we have to be happy about sickness, sadness, or difficult things.

It means that even when life is hard, we can remember God's goodness and trust Him.

Three things we can learn:

1. Thank God for what you have.

Instead of always wanting more, notice the blessings you already have—food, friends, family, and people who care for you.

2. Thank God for people who help you.

Just as the Pilgrims received help from their Wampanoag neighbors, God can use people to show kindness and care for others.

3. Be thankful even during difficult times.

We don't always understand why hard things happen, but we can pray, ask God for help, and remember that He loves us.

Another wonderful Scripture:

Psalm 107:1 (KJV)

"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

4. Discussion Questions (5 minutes)

Why did some Pilgrims leave England and travel to America?

5. Activity: Our Thankful Harvest (10 minutes)

Materials: Construction paper, crayons, scissors, glue, and a large paper corn stalk or basket.

Give every child three paper corn kernels or autumn leaves.

Ask them to write or draw:

1. Something God has given me.

2. Someone I am thankful for.

3. Something I can thank God for even when life is hard.

Have each child add their pieces to a large classroom display titled:

"Our Harvest of Thanksgiving — Every Good Gift Comes From God!"

Read James 1:17 together.

6. Closing Object Lesson: A Grateful Heart

Hold up a piece of bread.

"Imagine you were very hungry and had almost nothing to eat. How wonderful would this bread look?"

"Sometimes we forget to be thankful for ordinary things because we're so used to having them."

"Every meal, every friend, every beautiful day is an opportunity to say, 'Thank You, God!'"

Challenge for the week: Every night before bed, think of three things you're thankful for and tell God about them.

7. Closing Prayer

"Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us and caring for us. Thank You for our families, friends, food, homes, and all the blessings You give us. Help us remember to be thankful, even when things are difficult. Teach us to be kind, generous, and helpful to others. Most of all, thank You for sending Jesus, the greatest gift of all. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Optional Memory Verse Game

Write the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18 on separate paper leaves. Have the children arrange them in the correct order, then remove one leaf at a time until they can say the entire verse from memory.