

## A Thanksgiving Message

I've done extensive research on the genealogy of my family, tracing it as far back as the French Huguenots. My family later migrated to England where they were forced to practice a religion they didn't believe in, so they got in leaky boats and traveled across the Atlantic to a foreign land. Even after arriving and finding adversity and hardship, they didn't give up. They continued on, remaining true to what they believed.

On Thanksgiving Day I give thanks and praise to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His many blessings he bestows on us daily.

There are so many things to be grateful for. The first thing that comes to mind is freedom. We live in a free land where we are free to worship without restraints - without someone putting guns to our faces and saying we can't.

Fathers and mothers have the freedom to choose where they work and can come home to their families without military guards standing in front of them and saying they can't.

We can travel between our states without asking permission from our government. We can visit our relatives and friends and not worry about anyone saying we can't.

With all the turmoil in the land we still have this blessed freedom that comes from above. How much we truly take for granted.

I've learned in history books how rare this kind of freedom truly is. Think about countries in Europe during World Wars I and II, where families were literally yanked from their homes and torn apart. How demoralizing – dehumanizing -- to be forced to work for nothing and be ordered to do things they didn't believe. All wars end, but many of these families were never reunited.

Just living in this country is reason to give thanks. We may not be perfect but we are a country who believes in the fundamentals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

We should always remember and be thankful for our forefathers and how they lived and died for us to have these freedoms. Let us also not forget those who are, at this very minute, defending our country. We offer prayer this Thanksgiving for them. Let's pray for these brave men and women in all the places around the world who stand ready and willing to continue to keep that flame of freedom burning.

The history of Thanksgiving is marked by the joyous tradition begun by brave Pilgrims during their first year in the New World. In the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims and their Indian friends offered grateful voices of praise to God for their first, bountiful harvest as they gathered together in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Thanksgiving history bears note of the enduring gratitude of the little band of English settlers who lost half their colony to death even before they made their event into the book of records on that bright day in autumn. As Christians remember the event, the undaunted heroes of national and Christian heritage have been a continuing example of faith for extreme times and that is celebrated even today throughout North America.

The events span several centuries and have reflected a special courage and Christian quality of thankfulness that is woven throughout the Scriptures. Exemplified through the history of Thanksgiving is Philippians 4:6 and 7 which exhorts to Christians: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Clinging tightly to their convictions in spite of loss, loneliness and pain, the early Pilgrims transcended all trials through faith in an Almighty God in whom they could trust.

God is delighted in all thankfulness to Him, especially in the hard times. This is what motivated the early settlers of the New World to make Thanksgiving history by setting aside a day filled with gratitude for their fall bounty. The history of Thanksgiving is special to believers today because it is an encouragement to be grateful to an awesome, loving God Who sees our need before we even know it. The meaning may be lost on the world at times, but the example remains unchangeable. The historical event is abundant with stories of real people who lost everything, yet could praise Him through it all.

An authentic perspective of what the event truly represents is more than just a harvest party among a bunch of stuffy, prudish Pilgrims and undomesticated natives. The history of Thanksgiving is born from people who obviously knew more hardship than ease. Those Pilgrims still saw God's abundant blessings and actively praised Him which has made Thanksgiving history worthy of remembrance. I'll end this with another verse from Scripture. Ephesians 5:20 states to "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

