



# Thankful in All Things

1 Thessalonians 5:18



The dictionary defines the word **pilgrim** as "a traveler or wanderer in a foreign place; or an original settler in a region." The pilgrims who left their homeland to come to America were certainly wandering in a foreign place. They risked everything they had - wealth, safety, and even their very lives - to find a place to worship God freely.

## Day #1: Conviction

Back in the early 1600's, everyone in England was forced to go to the same kind of church. This church was not doing a very good job of teaching the Bible or connecting people to God. This church taught rules that are not even found in the Bible. And the church was mixed with the government because the King of England was also the head of the church. There was a group of people in the town of Scrooby, England, who wanted to have church in a different way. They wanted to do things the way the Bible taught. These people were called "Separatists," because they wanted to be separate from the English church.

The government in England did not want people worshipping God outside of the English church, so they passed laws to force people to attend their church, and to outlaw worshipping God anywhere else. "[The Scrooby Church members] were hunted and persecuted on every side," according to William Bradford, one of their members. Their homes were watched day and night. They had to pay fines, and some even went to prison. The people of the Scrooby church were mostly poor, uneducated farmers, but they would not give in to the government. They decided they needed to go to a new country to worship God the way they knew was right.

The Separatists moved to Holland. They were allowed to worship God as they wanted there. This was very good at first, but it was hard for them to find work. Also, the people in Holland did not have strong Biblical values, and the Separatists did not want their children to learn ungodly ways. They soon heard about the New World, and after several years in Holland, they decided to make a fresh start in America.

The Separatists had strong **convictions** about the way they should worship God. A conviction is a very strong, unchanging belief. Our convictions should be based on the Bible, because it is the very Word of God (2 Samuel 7:28b).



*If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.* - Isaiah 7:9b (NIV)

Some things involved in our worship of God are **preferences** - the way we prefer, or like, things to be. These may change from person to person. Or they may even change at different times in your own life. But a conviction does not change. For example, a **preference** might be the *style* of music you listen to, but a **conviction** would be that the Bible is always preached. Discuss the convictions you have about how you and your family worship God.

## Day #2: Hardship

What was the last trip you went on? Did you drive in a car, or fly in an airplane? Were you excited or at all nervous? The Pilgrims were about to take a long trip on a sailing ship. Sailing was very difficult back then. Try to imagine how they felt as they left everything that was familiar to them to go to an untamed land. What do you think their fears may have been?

The Scrooby church members joined with some other Separatists and hired a sailing company to sail them across the Atlantic Ocean to America. These people had very little money, so they entered an agreement with an English Company. The company paid for the trip, and the travelers agreed to pay off the cost of their voyage over the next seven years. They began the historic trip aboard the Mayflower on September 16, 1620. There were 102 passengers aboard (32 of which were children), plus 30 crew members. It took three long months to cross the ocean. They faced terrible storms and feared the ship might not hold for the whole journey. Sadly, two people died on the trip. This was just a small taste of what was to come during the grueling months ahead.

On December 21st, the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth. Winter was just beginning. The first thing the Pilgrims did was build a building where they could worship together. Then they began to build homes. Most of the Pilgrims lived on the Mayflower while the homes were being built. But with the bitter cold came illness. There were no hospitals to go to. Men caught terrible coughs and colds from exploring the wilderness and drudging back and forth through the ice-cold water. The women and children suffered when the food began to run out. Those who were not sick worked tirelessly, day and night, to take care of those who were ill. They washed the clothes, prepared the meals, took care of the children whose parents were sick, and continued to build a new settlement. People began to die. Throughout the months of December, January, February, and March, 44 people died. Later that year, six more people died. Sadly, in their first year in America, half of the Pilgrims died from sickness and starvation.

What hardship these brave settlers faced! Yet, "They committed themselves to the will of God," wrote William Bradford. They knew it was worth the suffering to live in a land where they could worship in freedom.



*God is our place of safety. He gives us strength. He is always there to help us in times of trouble.* - Psalm 46:1

When you face hardship because of a choice you have made based on your Biblical convictions, do not lose hope! Remember that God is in control. He works all things together for good (Romans 8:28). Remember that the sufferings of the Pilgrims were the foundation for the religious freedom we enjoy today!

## Day #3: God's Provision

Another great fear the Pilgrims faced was the Indians. The Pilgrims had seen the Indians use their bows and arrows and believed they would not be friendly. The Pilgrims watched out for the Indians and even waited until dark to venture out to bury those who had died, so the Indians would not attack them.

One day, an Indian named Samoset walked right into the settlement and announced, "Welcome, Englishmen!" The Pilgrims were stunned to hear him speak English! He told the Pilgrims he was from an island north of Plymouth and he had learned English from fishermen

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and traders who visited his island. The Pilgrims treated him well, and he returned to visit several times. Samoset brought another Indian, Squanto, to the settlement. He also spoke English. Years before, Squanto had been kidnapped by earlier explorers and taken to Spain to be sold as a slave. He escaped to England where he learned to speak almost perfect English. A kind Englishman had paid for his voyage to return to America.

The Indians were very good at planting crops, fishing, and hunting. They had valuable things to trade, such as animal skins and beads. Squanto taught the Pilgrims many things. He taught them to put a dead fish in the ground when they planted corn, pumpkins, and beans, which helped the crops to grow much better. He taught them how to hunt for deer, bears, and turkeys. He even taught the children where to find nuts and berries. William Bradford wrote, "Squanto became a special instrument **sent of God** for [our] good...and never left [us] 'til he died."

Samoset and Squanto assured the other Indians that the Pilgrims were peaceful, and a peace treaty was signed between the Pilgrims and the Indians. Peace remained for the next 50 years.

The Pilgrims truly wanted to share God's truth with the native people. William Bradford wrote that the Pilgrims had a great hope to spread "the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ in the remote parts of the world." And another Pilgrim wrote that they "prayed daily" for the native Indians to follow God. Years later, when Squanto lie dying of a fever, he asked Bradford to pray for him, "That he might go to the Englishmen's God in heaven."

We see an abundant **provision from God to the Pilgrims** - the Indians, themselves. They knew the land in every way, and they were excellent hunters and gatherers. The Indian's help was key to the Pilgrim's survival. This was certainly an unexpected provision from God! And while the Indians taught the Pilgrims how to hunt and grow food, the Pilgrims sought to give them spiritual food in return. This was **God's provision for the Indians** to know His truth.

*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. - Deuteronomy 8:3b (NIV)*

Notice the amazing twist of God's plan: God used the Indians to help the Pilgrims physically, while using the Pilgrims to help the Indians spiritually! Will you ask God to use you in such a way?

## Day #4: Give Thanks & Praise

Looking back over their incredibly difficult year, William Bradford wrote, "What could now sustain [the Pilgrims] but the spirit of God and His grace?" That means, after losing so many of the people they loved, nothing could give the Pilgrims hope except the grace of God and His Holy Spirit. Bradford continued, saying they longed for their children to say, "Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice, and looked on their adversity... Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good, and His mercies endure forever."

With the help of the Indians, in the fall, the Pilgrims had their first good crop. They held a feast to give thanks to God for everything He had given them. They knew it was by the goodness of God that they had a new home and a new way of life - one in which they could worship God freely. They celebrated by eating the vegetables they had harvested, and several men had hunted for "fowl" - ducks and geese, and maybe wild turkey. Remember, there were around fifty Pilgrims at that time. Ninety Indians came to join the feast. They brought five deer to share with the Pilgrims. The celebration went on for three days.

Today, in America, we still celebrate Thanksgiving. It is a time to thank God for the freedom and abundance we enjoy in our

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country. Listen to the words of President Abraham Lincoln, as he established Thanksgiving as the first national holiday. "They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God...I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States...to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

When we give thanks to God, **we confess that He is the One who provides for us**. Also, **we make Him known to those around us**.

*Let them **give thanks to the LORD** for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. - Psalm 107:8, 9 (NIV)*

***Give thanks to the LORD**, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done. - 1 Chronicles 16:8 (NIV)*

The Pilgrims certainly had plenty of hardship. Yet they chose to praise God and thank Him for His goodness and mercies to them. We, too, have a choice to make. We can focus on our hardships, or we can thank God for His goodness. Discuss some of the things that you are thankful for today.

## Day #5: 5 Kernels of Corn

When was the last time you really needed help? Who did you turn to? When you need help with Math, you may ask your teacher, or maybe your older brother. When you need help getting to your friend's house, you probably ask your parents. We all need help sometimes. The Pilgrims once again found themselves in desperate need of help. They cried out to the only One who was able to help them.

The Pilgrims' second winter was incredibly harsh and difficult. In November, 35 more settlers arrived with no food, no warm clothes, and no other supplies. The Pilgrims would have to share what little they had. At one point, each person was only allowed to eat 5 kernels of corn per day! Can you imagine having less than one spoonful of corn each day?

The following summer, there was a 12-week drought. With no rain in sight, the crops were dying. The Pilgrims desperately needed God's help. The Pilgrims fell to their knees and prayed for 8 hours.

*God, I call out to you because you will answer me. Listen to me. Hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6*

God always hears our prayers! (Psalm 6:9) And God's answer was incredible. It started to rain, and it didn't stop for 14 days! The harvest was saved. To celebrate, the Pilgrims held a second feast to give thanks to the Lord. Again, the Indians were invited to the feast. This time, 120 Indians came to celebrate with their Pilgrim friends. Again, they prepared deer and turkey, fruits and vegetables.

"Only this time one dish was different. The first course, served on an empty plate in front of each person, consisted of 5 kernels of corn, a gentle reminder of God's faithful provision for them." (Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*)

This helped the Pilgrims remember that it was only by God's grace that they had the bountiful harvest. No amount of hard work or skill could have produced a good crop without rain. Only God could bring the rain that they needed!

Start off your next Thanksgiving feast (or any meal) with just 5 kernels of corn on each plate. Go around the table and have each person tell of a blessing that only God could provide.