



The Joy of Thanksgiving

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving... (Psalm 95:1-3, NIV)

*Now is no time to think of what you do not have. Think of what you can do with what there is.—Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea**

An amazing thing happens when we offer thanksgiving to God. When we give God enjoyment, our own hearts are filled with joy.—William Law

I can still remember several unmistakable signs that Thanksgiving Day would soon be upon us. I remember a cold so bracing I thought I caught the scent of ice in the air with each deep breath. I recall the smokey smell of neighboring fireplaces, lit with all manner of hardwoods cut from the dense woods around our house. I can still see the damp grayness to the tree bark, with virtually no leaves left on a forest full of outstretched branches. The first real snowfall of the season. Pumpkins piled in careful clusters around the front door of our home. And Mom, busy in the kitchen baking baskets of warm crescent rolls and colorful tins of brown-sugared apple crumble.

These unmistakable signs of Thanksgiving Day served as precious memories; memories which usually preceded more precious memories to come.

Mom, with her fresh baked goods, along with Dad and the five of us kids, would pack the car with youthful exuberance and far too

many over-stuffed over-night bags for the long weekend ahead of us.

We were off to the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, to visit our aunt, uncle and two cousins closest in age. We were off to celebrate our favorite annual tradition.

Thanksgiving Day had come once again, and with it, the aroma of oven-roasted turkey and cornbread dressing, a hotly contested football

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game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Washington Redskins (as they were called at that time) and the calm gray waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Together with family again, these precious memories filled our hearts with joy.

As a child, I remember the feeling of joy, as a strong emotion, first, just before I felt thankful. In a way, it was as if the feelings of thanksgiving or thankfulness were fueled by an overwhelming sense of joy in my heart, joy in my spirit, joy from the inside out.

As I felt that joy, I remember a flood of people, special places and treasured possessions for which I was deeply thankful. That joy helped me to see my life clearly and to be thankful for all that I had been given.

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As a child, feeling joy and feeling thankful seemed almost inseparable. The joy of being alive. Being thankful for my family and close friends. Feeling joy for the gift of good health. Being thankful for the special Thanksgiving Day at hand and the blessings of a warm home and plenty of delicious food to share.

Now, nearly fifty years later, I still see joy and thankfulness as almost inseparable. The feeling of joy still proceeds a flood of people, special places and treasured possessions for which I am deeply thankful. I am thankful for the memories from my childhood.

I am joyful for the many blessings in my life, including the fact that I've had fifty-four Thanksgiving Days to celebrate and appreciate.

As Christ-followers, we share the joy of Thanksgiving in our LORD. We share in his joy. Whether we sing or shout aloud or experience that joy quietly within, in our hearts and spirit, we all give thanks for our lives in him and his life in us.

We remember Jesus at Thanksgiving. We use the joy of Thanksgiving not to think of what we do not have, but to think of how we can share all we've been given.

As we give our joy and thanksgiving to Jesus, he gives his joy and thanksgiving right back to us. And for that, we can be joyful and thankful each day of the year. □

—Ed Dunn