

Thanksgiving 2026: October 11

Deuteronomy 8:7-18, John 14:25-29

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"Success, not failure, is the greatest danger facing any follower of God." (The Bible Jesus Knew, 89) Line by author Philip Yancey.

Maybe that is a strange thing to say, especially on Thanksgiving. We usually think of Thanksgiving as a celebration of what has gone right. Festival of success. We gather around tables that are full. We name our blessings. We talk about family, friends, health, home, food, work, and all the good things that have come our way. And there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, Scripture tells us to give thanks!

But Yancey reminds us that there is a risk hidden inside our blessings. Abundance and comfort can make it easy to forget our dependence upon God. That is exactly what Moses is warning Israel about in Deuteronomy. The Hebrew people have spent years in the wilderness. They have known their dependence on God for practically everything.

God gave them manna when they were hungry.

God gave them water when they were thirsty.

God led them with a cloud by day and fire by night.

God protected them. God provided for them.

They couldn't pretend that they had made their own way.

But now they are about to enter a land where Moses knows all that is about to change. They will have houses. They will have fields, crops and livestock. They will have cities. They will prosper.

And Moses says: "When you have all you want to eat and have built good houses to live in... and when all your other possessions have increased, be sure that you do not become proud and forget the LORD your God." Moses knew that when the Hebrew people became comfortable, it would be easy to forget where everything had come from. So he warns, when everything is going well—be careful, because success can convince us that we don't need God.

What we have can make us forget who gave it. Biblical thanksgiving is not ultimately about what is on the table. It is about who provided it. Thanksgiving lifts our eyes off of what to who.

Who gave you the ability to do these things?

Who gave you your talents?

Who gave you your intelligence?

Who gave you your strength?

Who gave you your breath?

Who placed you in the family and community in which you were raised?

Who gave you the opportunities you have had?

Who sustained you through the things you could not have survived on your own?

We are very quick to talk about difficulty as a test of character. But success is also a test of character. What do we do with abundance? Do we congratulate ourselves or do we give thanks to God? Do our blessings make us more humble or more entitled? Do they make us more generous or more protective of what we have? Do they make us more compassionate toward people who have less or do they make us look down on others?

Moses says: Remember. Because a lack of gratitude so easily turns into pride. *I earned this. I deserve this. I don't need anyone else.* And before long, pride becomes arrogance, entitlement, greed, inequality, injustice, and isolation.

And it isn't just a personal problem. The church can forget, too. Perhaps Deuteronomy could be rewritten for the church: "When your pews are full, and your preacher is captivating, when your mortgage is paid off and your programs are overflowing, be sure that you do not become proud and forget the LORD your God."

A church too can become comfortable and forget God. A church can become so focused on keeping the organization going that the people forget to make disciples. The church can become so concerned about keeping everyone happy that it forgets our calling to be shaped in the likeness and character of Jesus. A church can measure success by attendance, budgets, programs, buildings, and activity, and forget that the church belongs to Christ.

And this is where the Gospel of John takes us somewhere beautiful. Because Jesus knows that his disciples are about to face a similar danger. Jesus is preparing them for his departure. Their whole world is about to change. The disciples are anxious. They don't understand what is happening. Jesus tells them that he is leaving. And they are wondering: What will happen to us when Jesus is no longer physically here?

Jesus promises them the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will teach them and remind them of everything he has said. The disciples are going to need to remember. And Jesus does not simply say, "Try harder to remember." He promises that God will help them remember. The Holy Spirit will be present with them. The Spirit will remind them of Jesus. The Spirit will make Christ's teaching come alive again. The Spirit will accompany them into circumstances they have never experienced before.

And that promise is not only for the first disciples. It is for us. Remembering who and whose we are is rooted in Jesus, and sustained by the Holy Spirit who prompts us:

Remember what God has done.

Remember where you came from.

Remember the covenant.

Remember the exodus.

Remember the manger.

Remember the cross.

Remember the resurrection.

Remember God's faithfulness.

Jesus says, "Peace is what I leave with you. It is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid."

Notice that Jesus doesn't promise them a trouble-free life. Thanksgiving doesn't require a life free of difficulty. The peace of Christ is not simply a pleasant feeling. It is the assurance that we are not alone. It is the strength to face a future we cannot control. It is the confidence that God's love is not dependent upon our circumstances. It is the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

A group was once asked, "If you could have one wish granted right now, what would it be?" The answers were varied. But one person said: "I wish I had an even greater ability to appreciate all that I already have."

It sounded like a prayer Moses could have led. Help us to see. Help us remember.
Help me see what I have already been given.
Help me notice your good gifts.
Help me recognize the people who have blessed my life.
Help me see the opportunities I have been entrusted with.
Help me notice the person left out, the lonely person, the stranger.
Help me remember that none of this belongs to me.
Help me live as a steward of what You, God, have entrusted to my care.
Help me remember you.

When you are in the land of plenty, “Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’”¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God”

So let us give thanks not only for the food on our tables, but for the God who provides.
Not only for our homes, but for the God who shelters us.
Not only for our families and friends, but for the God who binds us together.
Not only for our successes, but for the grace that made them possible.
And when we are tempted to say, “*Look what I have done,*” may the Spirit gently remind us:
“Remember, you are not your own. You belong to God, who has blessed you, sustained you, and called you to serve in the name of Jesus Christ.” So may our thanksgiving become more than words around a table.
May it become a life of humility, generosity, and love.