

# Thanksgiving Begins With Grace

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

I am always amazed at how retailers begin the Christmas season earlier and earlier every year. Some stores in the Orlando area began carrying Christmas paraphernalia right after Labor Day this year! It seems that Thanksgiving is more of a comma or a hyphen than anything significant to our culture. And I understand why.

Most holidays entail buying something like Halloween candy, Christmas gifts or Fourth of July fireworks. Thanksgiving is all about being thankful for what we have. Of course you have to have some food and we usually overdo that; but the general theme involves cultivating an attitude of gratitude. This concept is pretty foreign to our society. Marketers make their living from convincing us we need more. Retailers survive by selling us what often we don't need. Our economy is bolstered by believing that we will be happy if we have a little more.

Unfortunately, as Christians we don't do much better. The scriptures are full of stories, commands, references and songs centered on being thankful and grateful. And yet, it is too easy to succumb to our "culture of want" and the sense that we need to do more. Even our theology can encourage us to lose the meaning of thanks. Historically, as a part of the holiness movement, we have a tendency to emphasize works over grace. Because we learn from the scripture that our lives should be transformed by the power and presence of Christ, we find ourselves continuing to emphasize growing. This can result in our neglecting the principle of grace.

It is by the grace of God that we are born into the family of God. Our lives are literally transformed by this same grace. I am able to love my wife and family by the grace given to me by God. I have been called to be your State Pastor by grace. It is through grace that I find the wisdom to lead as I do. In fact, I am convinced that I am still alive today totally because of God's grace.

Thanksgiving begins in the heart of Christians, as they are able to grasp the magnitude of God's grace demonstrated in their lives. It is totally by grace that I am who I am and so, I have very much to be thankful for. This attitude of gratitude should permeate our lives throughout the year, but especially at Thanksgiving Day. Too often when people list things they are thankful for at this time of year, they list people, places or things. Let me suggest that you take some time and dwell on how God's grace has been manifested in your life through what he has done IN and THROUGH you. The more I meditate on how God's grace has been working in my life, the more thankful I become. I am grateful for His power and presence in my life. I am nothing apart from Him.

When I was younger, I would read autobiographies of godly impactful people and these men and women would always talk about having a sense of grace. Almost without

exception, they acknowledged God working in their lives in ways they didn't deserve. This didn't make sense to me, because I felt it was easy to explain their impact in the Kingdom based upon their efforts, gifts, friends, and abilities. However, the older I get, the more aware I am of God's grace in my life. I am not sure why this is so, but it is. The longer I walk with God, the more cognizant I am of God's unmerited favor simply being gracious to me. Let me challenge you to spend some intentional time this holiday doing nothing but meditating on how the grace of God has been operant in your life. Take time to reflect on who you are today because God chose to extend grace in your life.

This is where Thanksgiving begins.