

**OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES:
THE BERENSTAIN BEARS GIVE THANKS
NOVEMBER 25, 2012**

This month we've been starting out the messages by reading a children's story.

My parents read to me and later to my sister on a regular basis.

Many nights they'd read from a children's Bible story book.

There were all the standard fairy tales:

Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel.

There were, of course, a half dozen or so Dr. Seuss books in our repertoire.

The Cat in the Hat,

One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish,

True literary classics.

And every Christmas Eve they read the beloved, *T'was the Night Before Christmas.*

More important than the books was the time together.

Those are great memories.

The children's book for today is *The Berenstain Bears Give Thanks*, by Jan and Mike Berenstain.

This is a family of bears living in a world of bears.

The story opens with a visit to a farm,

where Papa Bear decides he wants the huge tom turkey on the farm for Thanksgiving dinner.

The turkey's name is Squanto,

named after the American Indian who helped the pilgrims.

Sister Bear is upset by this and wants to keep Squanto the turkey as a pet.

Papa Bear tries to explain that turkey's don't make great pets.

But Sister is not convinced.

Mama Bear later suggests she'll try to twist Papa's arm.

Before long, Squanto the turkey is forgotten, as other Thanksgiving preparations are undertaken.

READ: THE BERENSTAIN BEARS GIVE THANKS, JAN AND MIKE BERENSTAIN (SECOND HALF)

There's the overarching theme of the little girl's concern for Squanto the turkey.

But there's so much more tucked in there,

things that could lead to great discussions with children,

to help them appreciate our national heritage and the goodness of God.

For instance, the pilgrims coming to the new world for religious freedom.

The pilgrims were a Christian group that had broken from the Church of England over a variety of issues, seeking to live a more spiritually and morally pure life.

They met with persecution in England.

In 1607, the Separatists fled and settled in the Netherlands,

where there was more tolerance for different religious expressions.

But their children began speaking Dutch

and were influenced by the looser morality of the Netherlands.

Fearing they would lose their language and heritage,

the Separatists began to make plans to settle in the New World.

In September of 1620 about 120 or so people,

boarded a three-masted merchant ship, the Mayflower,

and set sail, suffering through cold weather and rough seas.

They found their way to Plymouth Harbor in present-day Massachusetts in November.

More than half the settlers died during that first winter, due to poor nutrition and housing.

In March of 1621 a Native American named Tisquantum, or Squanto,

came to them speaking English.

Years earlier he had been captured by Englishmen who planned to enslave him.

He learned English and escaped back to freedom.

Now he would offer help to the English.

In addition to interpreting between the colonial leaders and Native American chiefs,

Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to plant corn and other crops,

where to fish and hunt beaver, how to tap maple trees for sap,

and what plants were poisonous and medicinal.

The harvest by October was very successful.

They had a lot for which to give thanks to God.

So in the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims shared a harvest feast

with Squanto and 90 braves from his tribe.

For three days they feasted, played games, ran races, and celebrated.

The meal is now considered the basis for the Thanksgiving holiday.

The custom of an annually celebrated thanksgiving, held after the harvest, continued through the years.

During the American Revolution a day of national thanksgiving

was suggested by the Continental Congress.

In 1817 New York State had adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom.

By the middle of the 19th century many other states also celebrated a Thanksgiving Day.

In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a national day of thanksgiving.

And so we celebrate Thanksgiving to this day.

But Thanksgiving is not just a matter of American history.

It's a fundamental attitude of true biblical faith.

Everywhere you look in the Bible you see the words thanks, thanksgiving, and gratitude.

We used to sing a song in the contemporary worship services that repeats the line:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

You might remember the song.

Did you know it comes straight from the Bible?

In the book of 1 Chronicles,

King David has unified the people of Israel and has brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.

King David came out with a psalm of praise that started with the words,

“Give thanks to the Lord.” (1Chr.16:8)

Then David remembers

“the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.”

He recalled God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He reminded the people of how Israel wandered in the wilderness,

with no home of their own, but protected by God.

Then, he called for the people to bring offerings to God;

he called for the heavens to rejoice and the earth to be glad,

the seas and fields and forests to join in

a cosmic worship of the Creator of all things.

And in the last stanza he said,

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (16:34)

Psalm 106 starts with those words, and then recites God's wonderful deeds. (Ps.106:1)

God freed his people from slavery in Egypt,

parted the Red Sea for them to cross over,

and drowned the pursuing army beneath the waters.

He fed them as they wandered in the wilderness,

brought judgment on their sinfulness, brought them into a land of their own,

and heard their cries and brought deliverance from trouble.

Psalm 107 starts, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever,” (Ps.107:1)

and then goes on to recall how God watched over the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness,

answering their prayers, feeding them and bringing them water.

The psalm talks about times when the people of God were stubborn, rebellious, unfaithful, foolish, but God continued to care about them, watch over them, and answer their prayers.

“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for people.” (31)

Psalm 118 begins, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (Ps.118:1)

It reads as more of an individual psalm,

the psalmist remembering how God heard and answered my prayers,

how the Lord is my strength, my song, my salvation.

And then the psalm ends, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (29)

Psalm 136 begins, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods; his love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords; his love endures forever.” (Ps.136:1-3)

The psalmist reminds us that God alone does great wonders,

created all things, governs the universe,

brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt,

overcame nations to protect and provide for his people.

And then the psalm ends, “Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.” (26)

Gratitude is all over the Bible.

If we would live out our faith, an attitude of gratitude should mark each one of us.

And yet some of us are not particularly thankful.

It could be because you were raised in a negative family,

or perhaps you’ve suffered deeply and have not found your way

to emotional and spiritual recovery.

Or maybe your mind is currently being fed by negative thoughts from

the people you are around, the things you read,

what you watch on TV or hear on the radio.

Whatever the reasons for lack of gratitude, is that really the way you want to live?

I do not know of an ungrateful person who is happy with life.

I do not know of a grateful person is unhappy with life.

I know which way I want to live.

The good news is, there are some things we can do to train ourselves to feel and express gratitude.

If you tend toward the dark side,

if gratitude does not come naturally to you,

(and who among us does not struggle at some time)

these suggestions are for you to retrain your mind, your heart, your soul and spirit.

- 1) Identify those negative influences that bend your mind toward the dark side of things.

Identify them, and eliminate them from your life.

Or at least minimize them.

- 2) When you find yourself in a negative spiral, make a conscious decision to change course.

You CAN choose.

- 3) Find ways to fill your mind with positive thoughts.

I’m not suggesting a Pollyannaish naiveté.

But find ways to take note of the good things in life.

- a. Block out a time each day to make a list of every good thing you can think of.

Thank God for another day of living in his world.

Thank him for your health, whatever it may be.

Thank him for each member of your family, each of your friends.

Thank him for answered prayers.

Thank him for your food, your home, your transportation, your clothing.

Thank him for whatever job and income you have.

Thank him for making himself known in Jesus,

for being present with us in the Spirit,

for forgiving our sins,

for inviting us into his family,
for holding out the promise of heaven and the kingdom of God.

Make a written list of good things,
and give thanks, OUT LOUD, for each one.

- b. Find a mentor, someone who is grateful, someone who has a positive outlook on life.
Hang out with them.

Observe their attitude and try to imitate it.
“Fake it till you make it,” so to speak.

And for every positive thing you observe,
give thanks to God.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
His love endures forever.

I'm going to read a bit from an email forward

that might give you some ideas about what you can be thankful for.

I am thankful...

For the wife who says it's hot dogs tonight,

because she is at home with me, and not out with someone else.

For the husband who is on the sofa being a couch potato,

because he is home with me and not out at the bars.

For the teenager who is complaining about doing dishes,

because it means she is at home, not on the streets.

For the taxes I pay,

because it means I am employed.

For the mess to clean after the party,

because it means I have been surrounded by friends.

For the clothes that fit a little too snug,

because it means I have enough to eat.

For a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and gutters that need fixing,

because it means I have a home.

For all the complaining I hear about the government,

because it means we have freedom of speech.

For the lady behind me in church who sings off key,

because it means I can hear. (DON'T turn around!)

The point is, even in many things we grumble about,

there is a reason to give thanks... If you can see it.

And if nothing else works for you,

and you just can't conjure up any gratitude,

consider that you are NOT the Thanksgiving turkey.

And give thanks to God.

You'll be a happier person for it.

Scriptures cited: 1Chr.16:8, 34; Ps.106:1; 107:1, 31; 118: 1, 29; 136:1-3, 26