

# Get Full This Thanksgiving

## Deuteronomy 26:1-11

### INTRODUCTION

Our friends at Weight Watchers tell us the average American will gain somewhere between 5 and 10 pounds over the Thanksgiving holiday season. But they might have over-exaggerated their dire prediction.

#### Here's the good news:

A few studies over the last decade, though, have found that we're not nearly as gluttonous as we think we are.

In one of those studies, researchers at the University of Oklahoma weighed 94 graduate and undergraduate students before and after their Thanksgiving break. They found that the students, on average, gained only 1.10 pounds. Only 9% of the students gained more than 5 pounds.

When the study was completed the researchers drew the following conclusions:

1. You will probably gain some weight this Thanksgiving (and some more during the December holidays).
2. It will not be as much as you might think. Most students actually thought they gained four times more weight than they actually had.

#### Here's the bad news:

3. Although the average weight gains in this study were modest, researchers found that these gains were not reversed over the summer, so over a few years all of those Thanksgiving dinners do indeed catch up with you.

It is the rare person who doesn't enjoy gorging themselves on Thanksgiving Day. We always regret it, but we always enjoy it! And we do it year after year after year. No matter how much I tell myself

that “this year will be different” I always get up from the table full. Very full.

The word “thanksgiving” has almost become synonymous with a particular meal on a particular day, hasn’t it? But this year, I’ve been praying for a “full thanksgiving.” Not a tummy full of Thanksgiving turkey, but a heart full of thanksgiving to God. I want to make sure that my heart is fuller than my stomach.

On Thursday, I know what will fill my stomach. We will go to my in-laws house where approximately 60 members of the Bryant clan will gather around a small church-sized potluck.

- And I will fill up on my personal favorites: turkey (the white meat), mashed potatoes and homemade noodles, that broccoli salad with the raisins and sunflower seeds it in, and the peach pie.
- Gabriel only cares about the pie.

Those are the foods we will eat in order to fill our stomachs with Thanksgiving dinner.

But what will we do to fill our hearts with thanksgiving? If noodles will fill my belly, what do I need to fill my heart? Let me take you into the Deuteronomy passage for a few ideas:

### **#1: If you want a heart full of thanksgiving, then focus on the promises of God.**

Notice how the chapter begins: “When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you ...”

They weren’t there yet. These eleven verses paint a picture of a bountiful harvest that will happen some day in the future. But right now, as the children of Israel first hear these words, they are still in the wilderness.

The Promised Land is near, but they haven’t crossed the Jordan. They still have to enter the land, conquer it, settle it and plant the

crops. Right now that harvest for which they are to be thankful is still only a promise.

Can't you imagine how that felt to those words? They had wandered in that miserable desert for 40 years, waiting for the day when they would be permitted to cross over. They were sick of quail and manna. They wanted fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh mutton and gravy. And they were being reminded of God's promise.

Do you want to fill your heart with thanksgiving? Stop and recall the promises of God. The Bible is filled His promises, you know. According to one person's count, there are 3,573 different promises in the pages of our Scriptures. If you memorized one promise a day, it would take you 10 years to memorize them all!

My mom's favorite was:

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

My favorite is:

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

What is yours?

## **#2: If you want a heart full of thanksgiving, then reflect on your faith story**

When the people brought their harvest offerings into the temple, part of the liturgy they were to recite begins like this:

My father was a wandering Aramean ...

And then there was a recounting of their faith.

“My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. <sup>6</sup> But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; <sup>10</sup> and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me.”

If the promises of God are about looking forward, then recalling your faith story is about looking back.

It would be easy, wouldn't it, for these children of Israel to stand there in the wilderness and fail to remember all God had done. Remember, none of them were alive in Egypt. That generation died in the wilderness because of their disobedience. None of those people had experienced the whip of the Egyptian task masters, or had been there when the waters of the Red Sea parted, or heard the thunder at Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the 10 commandments.

But in the act of retelling their story of faith, they were each reminded of all that God had done to bring them to this point in time.

Who would have known that Beth Brink inviting my daughter Alyssa to a youth group meeting at Grace would have a direct link to my standing here tonight? There are some things you can only see by looking back.

Who could have known that my dad's faithful response to God's call on his life would lead me to Van Buren, Indiana where I would meet the girl I would one day marry?

It is important for us to take time to reflect on what God has done for us. Doing so will fill us with thanksgiving.

### **#3: If you want a heart full of thanksgiving, then resonate with the love of Jesus.**

As you do those two things, this third one will happen. Verse 11:

Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household. (Deuteronomy 26:11)

In Kansas City you will find a home for drug addicts. It is called the Healing House and it was started by a woman named Bobbie Jo. Bobbie Jo had been walking the streets for many years but then someone cared enough to share the Gospel with her. They resonated with the love of Jesus, and Bobbie Jo became a Christian. Around that same time, her mother died and left her a very nice inheritance. She knew that many of the women who were drug addicts turned to the streets to support their habits. When they were arrested, put in jail and then released, they had no place to go. So they went back to working the streets.

So with her inheritance, Bobbie Jo bought an old retirement home that was boarded up and rehabbed it. She invited the ladies to come and live there and as they did, she would share the Gospel with them. And one by one they came to faith as well. It didn't take long for that home to fill up.

Because the devil is always at work, a pimp moved into the house next door. Bobbie Jo started to pray for that house. By the grace of God she was able to gather some more resources and bought that house. It also filled up and she bought another and then an apartment complex.

At Christmas time the ladies from those houses would pool their meager resources to buy presents for people who still lived on the streets. They would tell each one "This is a Christmas gift for you to remind you that there is still hope and there's a Savior who loves you can save you."

One recent Christmas Eve, the ladies pulled into a gas station to fill up the house van and two police officers were there. One of them recognized one of the girls in the van and walked over and said to her, "What are you doing here? I thought you were dead." He recognized another and then another and said to all of them, "I thought you all were dead"! He called his partner over and showed him the women saying, "They're alive!" And then these ladies shared their faith with these two police officers.

Their lives resonated with the love of Jesus and because of that their own hearts were filled with thanksgiving.

## **APPLICATION**

Doing those three things:

- Focusing on God's promises
- Reflecting on your faith story
- Resonating the love of Jesus

should be more than enough to fill you with thanksgiving.

I pray that your thanksgiving is full. If not, get full. Start now. I am already full ... and dinner is still 48 hours away.

Amen.