



Be the Message THANKSGIVING

based on the book *Be the Message* by Kerry and Chris Shook

The American holiday of Thanksgiving is about gratitude, of course, but it also celebrates the sharing of our plenty with others—especially others of different cultures. As we live out the message of Christ in our society, Thanksgiving will give us great opportunities.

FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Share your Thanksgiving with an unreached group in your community.

This might start with research. Are there people in your community who would never come to your church because they don't feel welcome there? Then throw a Thanksgiving bash and make sure they know they're invited. And don't make it a sales pitch for the church. Just *be the message*, sharing God's love and welcome with a new group of friends.

Thank God publicly for the trials the church has gone through.

Naturally you'll be thanking the Lord for his blessings, but consider also how the difficulties of the past year have shaped you. How have you learned to depend on God? The "message" we live out in the world isn't just one of overflowing bounty, but of healing, redemption, and trust.

Tech-connect with international missionaries and church workers.

Via Skype or other internet services, you can share a Thanksgiving service with people across the country or around the world. (Note that other countries don't observe the American Thanksgiving Day.) This might be a good way to let missionaries or international church leaders know how thankful you are for them.

Organize a Thanksgiving feast for the unattached.

Thanksgiving is a time for family get-togethers . . . but what happens when there is no family. You have single, divorced and widowed people in your orbit, as well as elderly or childless couples who might not have extended families to gather with. So, let the church family step in. Open your facilities for a casual pot-luck that spreads a message of Christian love in what could be a lonely time.



FOR SMALL GROUPS

Thank God for each person.

Go around the circle, thanking and glorifying God for what each member brings to the group. You might ask people to finish the sentence “*I see Christ in you when . . .*” The group leader can prepare some of these thoughts in advance, but allow time for other group members to chime in. Obviously this is not a competition over who’s more Christ-like, but a chance for you to “read the message of Christ” that you see in one another.

Study a psalm that progresses toward thanksgiving.

Many of the Psalms are all about praise and thanks. But a number of them take us on a journey from despair, anger, or need toward dependence on God and ultimately great gratitude. Consider Psalms 7, 13, 22, 42, 56, or 73. Don’t rush to the conclusion. Remember times when you have had the feelings described in the early verses, and explore the transformation.

Enlarge your tent with a pre-Thanksgiving sampler.

What if each person in your group invited someone else to a party? Preferably, these guests would be from outside the church, or perhaps on the fringes, not connected to any small group. The party—held a week or two before Thanksgiving—could be billed as a Thanksgiving Sampler. Get group members to try out new recipes for Thanksgiving dishes—turkey, stuffing, gravy, squash, etc. Sample these foods in party mode (not a sit-down dinner), and make the recipes available. The group leader might offer a *brief* devotional, or lead a discussion on what people are thankful for. No preaching tonight, just a sharing of Christian love and gratitude.



FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Invite someone else to your Thanksgiving dinner.

Look for a neighbor, coworker, or friend who might not have other family members around. “Adopt” them for the day.

Collect coins or cans for the needy.

You can’t do everything to fix poverty, but you can do something. This is a great lesson to teach family members of all ages. Start a project of collecting coins or cans of food to donate to the poor in this holiday season.

Rake leaves for an elderly neighbor.

Get your family to help out with some yardwork as an expression of Christ’s love.

Fast and pray.

Go without a meal (maybe a few days *after* Thanksgiving) and spend the time praying about how God wants to use you to serve others. The family could gather for dinner as usual, but sing, read Scripture and pray together instead of eating. (With younger children, you might provide some light, nutritional fare.) Emphasize the point that we’re telling God that he’s even more important to us than food.