

Celebrate Harvest and Other Blessings

Anchor command. “O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.”
1 Chronicles 16:34

Anchor story. God’s people hold a great celebration of thanksgiving to celebrate the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its walls, *Nehemiah 12:27-46*

Anchor verse. “Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.” *2 Corinthians 9:10-11*

Learning goal. Learn from examples in Scripture to give fervent thanks to the Lord.

Growth goal. Appreciate the tremendous works of the Lord that merit our fervent thankfulness.

Skill goal. Engage believers in heartfelt thanksgiving to the Lord.

Outcome goal. Believers continually express thanks to the Lord in their hearts.

Lord, please help me and my flock to thank you daily for your many kind blessings to us.

Basic Study

God’s people hold a great celebration of thanksgiving, *Nehemiah 12:27-46*.

Background: the Jews had returned from many years of captivity in Babylonia, and had rebuilt the city of Jerusalem and its massive walls.

- How did the Levites lead the people in celebrating with thanksgiving? *Verse 27*
- Where did Nehemiah have the two great choirs assemble to sing? *31*
- Who had provided the instruments of music many years before? *36*
- What things did they do to celebrate? *42-43*
- Who joined in the celebration? *43*
- What was the purpose of the music, dating back to the time of David? *46*



Levite choirs led everyone in celebration of God’s blessing upon all.

During the week visit any believers who complain too much or seldom thank God for His blessings. Pray with them, discuss things they should thank God for, and encourage them to pray daily to thank God for what He has done for them.

During worship...

- Tell how the Jews gave thanks when dedicating the walls of Jerusalem, *Nehemiah 12:27*, and ask the same questions as above. Let believers discuss the answers.
- Ask the children to present what they have prepared.
- Memorize 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Advanced Study

1. Help your flock express heart-felt thanks to God

Background:

- God gave ancient Israel several annual holy days that expressed their Thanksgiving.
- The Lord commanded the ancient Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Weeks that was later called Pentecost: "You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, that is, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year." *Exodus 34:22*
- Believers in Christ should give thanks to God daily. Many believers around the world also thank God for His blessings with a yearly celebration, normally at harvest time, similar to the Old Testament Feast of Weeks.
- Many congregations celebrate Pentecost, but not as a harvest festival. They celebrate it because on that day God poured out the Holy Spirit to give birth to the community of the New Covenant. That event was a spiritual harvest, for God gathered into a new body of believers, many Jewish people who had been dispersed among many foreign nations.
- Nearly all societies celebrate some kind of harvest festival, in which people gather to thank God for His blessings. In some cultures such celebrations are idolatrous, but believers often take part in them to help the people to shift their focus away from their false gods and to give thanks to the one true God.



Christians in every land celebrate God's goodness towards all.

2. From the time of Israel's birth as a nation, God had them celebrate with thanksgiving:

- Find in **Exodus 14:5** through **15:13** what God did for the Israelites and the song that Moses sang in response to express his thankfulness to help God's people celebrate with thanksgiving.
- Find in **Exodus 15:14-21** what Miriam and the other women sang to express thanks.

3. Plan together with co-workers additional, optional activities to do during the week.

Plan and carry out a special feast or celebration of thanksgiving to God.

- If the local community holds a celebration or some kind of harvest festival, then help folk to see that the one true God is the source of all good things. Do the same for national holidays. Normally believers participate in holidays in order to develop loving relationships, but they replace any sinful practices with more wholesome ones as a testimony of faith and to be a positive influence.
- Teach believers to follow these guidelines to make cultural events acceptable as Christian celebrations.
 - ✓ Bring together some men, women, adults and youth to discuss a particular cultural event.
 - ✓ Make a list of all the practices, symbols and meanings of the cultural event. (You can ask some non-believers to help you to make up the list.)
 - ✓ Discuss answers to these three questions about adjusting to local culture:
 - 1) Which elements of the event could please God and most Christians?
 - 2) What are some biblical stories and teachings that fit in with the event?
 - 3) Which elements in the event must be replaced with biblical truth?
 - ✓ Plan together how you will celebrate that event in a way that will show respect for the culture while also giving honor to the One True God.
 - ✓ Invite some non-believers to join you as you do the Christian form of the cultural event. Afterwards, find out from them how they felt about it. Perhaps you will have to adjust the Christian form.

Examples

- 1) In a tribe that prayed to a local spirit to help young wives to become mothers, the new Christians held a special prayer meeting to ask God, using Jesus' name, to give them children. Everybody waited and watched. Nine months later, all the young wives had babies.
- 2) In a society where pagan and immoral practices are part of initiation rites for young men, the Christians, instead of condemning initiation, offered an alternative initiation that honored God, taught cultural values and modelled good adult behavior. Now, many unbelievers want the Christians to initiate their children.
- 3) In a religion where most folk already prayed to the One God, Jesus' followers continued to do so while using Jesus' name. Even unbelievers who try praying with Jesus' name find that God answers many more of their prayers. In that way, many become Jesus' followers.

4. Plan with co-workers additional, optional activities for the next worship time.

- Read or act out the story from Exodus chapters 12 - 15 of how God miraculously rescued His people from Egypt's army, and how both Moses and his sister Miriam helped the people celebrate with thanksgiving.
- Explain how believers should participate in harvest festivals to develop friendships, and to replace offerings to the spirits or idols with praise to the one true God.
- Let believers give testimonies of thanksgiving for blessings that they have received from God.
- To introduce the Lord's Supper read John 6:47-51.
- Form small groups of two or three people to pray for one another, discuss why we give thanks to God, and a n activities of thanksgiving.
- Those who teach children should read study #109 for children.