

## God and Family

### Personal Testimony

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More people will be traveling in the days leading up to and after Thanksgiving than at any other time of the year, probably even surpassing the Christmas holidays. This year 55 million Americans will be traveling 50 miles or more during Thanksgiving. Most of them will be driving, 49.1 million. About 4.7 million will take to the air and 1.55 million will be traveling by bus, train and yes, a few will be sailing on cruise ships. So get ready, especially if you plan to join this holiday human migration. Buy that plane ticket. Pack your bags. Make sure the car is gassed up and ready to go and check the weather. It's going to be hectic at the airports and on the highways. Above all else, remember this before you head out. You will not be alone.

But why all this fuss and bother? What is it about Thanksgiving that creates such an overwhelming desire to go traveling? For one thing, some people may think of themselves as following in the footsteps of the Pilgrims. After all they too did a bit of traveling. Way back in 1620, they took upon themselves a most daunting journey. Leaving from Plymouth, England, 102 passengers and 30 crew set sail across the stormy North Atlantic. Arriving at Cape Cod on November 11<sup>th</sup>, it was a tempestuous trip. Crowded below deck on a rather small ship, the *Mayflower*, it's a wonder that any of them survived. If you think your travel plans for Thanksgiving are a bit challenging, I can promise you that they will be nothing compared to what those Pilgrims experienced.

So are modern day Americans trying to emulate these stalwart souls from our nation's past when we head out of town for Thanksgiving? Probably not, but there is one thing that we have in common. The Thanksgiving holiday is a family affair. Most of those traveling to the New World on the *Mayflower* were members of one of the families on board. And most of those traveling across America during this Thanksgiving will also be seeking to be a part of a family. Of all the institutions that God has created, the family was the first one and perhaps the most important one. Before there were governments and before there were religious organizations, there were families. So this morning, let's look at what it means to be part of a family. It is the glue that holds the human race together and it is the reason why we seek to be a part of a family gathering at Thanksgiving. More than any of the other holidays we celebrate in America, Thanksgiving is a family affair.

With that in mind, here are some things to think about. Just like government and the church, God created the family. Turn in your Bible to Genesis 1:27. It reads, "So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." Furthermore, God blesses them and tells them to be fruitful and multiply and fill all the earth. Then in chapter 2 of the book of Genesis the story is repeated in a more personal way as God creates Adam and then secures a companion for him in the person of Eve. Thus the first family is formed, a husband and a wife along with their children. Moving to the New Testament, Jesus reaffirmed this relationship when dealing with the subject of marriage and God's desire for that relationship to last for a lifetime. He said, "Have you not read that the One who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Matthew 19:5). In spite of all those modern notions that a family can be composed of any number of people living together in whatever kind of relationship they want to have with each other, such as polygamy, the Bible in both the Old and New Testament clearly declares that in God's sight a family is one man and one woman and their children. That's God's definition of a family.

Here's something else to consider. Families have a unique purpose. Fathers and mothers are responsible for raising their children to become mature and responsible adults when they grow up. This involves sharing the knowledge, the wisdom and the values of one generation with those who will be coming after them. This is especially true with regards to bestowing a family's religious convictions and beliefs. Moses had this clearly in mind when he told the children of Israel, "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). In other words, everything that we are, everything that we hold near and dear, will be lost if we don't share it with our children. Do you remember what Paul said in his second letter to Timothy, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure lives in you" (2 Timothy 1:5). In modern day America parents all too often want to ask others to do for their children what they should be doing. We send them to church to learn about God. We send them to school to get an education. We involve them to a whole host of recreational teams so they can be coached by the experts. Without ever realizing what is happening, our homes can become way stations where the kids have a place to eat and sleep before they head out to their next event or activity. That's not what God intended. Years ago I preached a sermon called "Laboratory for

Learning.” I was referring to the home as a place where children learn how to live, receiving instruction, guidance and a whole lot of love and personal time and attention from their parents.

There is one final thought that deserves our attention. Families are the foundation upon which all of the other institutions that God created are built. When families crumble, everything else also crumbles. Nations collapse, societies unravel and the religious life of a people is torn asunder. We need look no further than the sad conclusion to the reign of King Solomon in the Old Testament. Under his leadership the nation reached unparalleled heights of glory and power. During his reign, the magnificent temple in Jerusalem was completed. The borders of the nation were extended all the way from Egypt in the south to the Euphrates River in the north. Israel became a world power in the ancient Middle East. Then we read this verse of Scripture from the closing years of his reign. “Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant’” (1 Kings 11:11). Why did God say this to Solomon? In the preceding verses, the answer becomes all too obvious. Solomon married a multitude of foreign wives, and they led him astray. He began worshipping and honoring a multitude of foreign deities who introduced him and all of Israel to a pagan lifestyle that was odious and harmful. Instead of marrying a godly wife and raising godly children who were morally and intellectually astute, he adopted the cultural trends and values of the nation’s surrounding him. He became a playboy monarch. Consequently, after his death the kingdom was torn from the grasp of an immature son, Rehoboam and divided into two weak, oft invaded kingdoms, Judah to the south and Israel to the north. It was a sad reflection upon this well-worn truth. As the family goes, so goes the nation.

Now for just a moment, let’s take a look at modern day America and compare it to the America that you and I grew up in. When I was a child, most families were composed of a father, a mother and their children. Single parent homes were the exception, certainly not the way it is today. Most families went to church. The church that I attended as a child built a new addition for all the children that were attending on Sundays. Morally and socially there was a code of behavior and societal expectations that reflected the teachings of the Bible, especially the New Testament. It was a wonderful time in which to grow up. Today many churches are increasingly empty, especially with regards to children and today’s culture in no way resembles the way of life that was normal when I was a child. We have followed in the footsteps of Solomon with regards to family life and the consequences are all too obvious.

So where do we go from here with regards to this third institution which God created, the family? The answer is obvious and it applies not just to those of us who are sitting in this sanctuary today or hearing the message at home online. It applies to our entire nation. It's time to return to God. It's time to turn aside from all of the modern day, anti-Christian, cultural trends that have pushed family life in America into a quagmire of confusion and strife. It's time to embrace what the Bible says about families and their relationship with the One who created them. It's time to remember and to embrace this word of wisdom from the pages of the Old Testament. Speaking of families and especially with regards to those children who are growing up in these families, Proverbs 22:6 declares, "Train up your children in the way they should go and when they are old, they will not depart from them."