

CELEBRATING HARVEST AND THANKSGIVING

By Jim Mathis

I love Thanksgiving Day. Not because it is a chance to gorge ourselves with good food, or take advantage of overhyped sales at the mall. I love Thanksgiving because of the tradition of celebrating our hard work, and of being grateful for a bountiful harvest.

Just about every culture and tradition has some sort of harvest celebration. The idea that all year we have worked hard in the fields of our particular endeavors, and now the harvest is in and we are ready for winter, deserves a holiday.

Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, and especially in 20th century America, most people left the farms, lured by the comfort and security of the 40-hour workweek and a regular paycheck. In the process, we collectively have lost the basic understanding of cultivating, sowing, and harvesting.

Now that the Industrial Age is coming to a close, particularly in the United States and the Western world, we need to redevelop an understanding of these principles. Farming is a great metaphor for all types of business. Not only is cultivating and sowing necessary for a harvest; but other ideas, such as working hard, being resourceful, caring for our equipment, and using all the resources we have wisely, also are necessary. This applies not just for farming, but for the workplace and our individual lives as well.

Too many businesses fail, not because they are undercapitalized or due to some other fundamental problem, but simply because they try to harvest where they have not sown.

The Industrial Age taught us to show up on time and do what we were told. The "man" – the owner or person to whom we reported – would write us a check on Friday. Good people got good pay for doing average work.

As a society we need to start thinking like farmers and ranchers again. That means working hard all day, relying on the resources we have, and trusting that God will provide as He always does – weather, time, place, opportunity, and a good helping of love and mercy.

In the meantime, work the soil, keep watch over the herds, do our best and wait for the right time to harvest. Then we can rightfully celebrate the bountiful harvest we have been given. Although we can feel thankful and express gratitude year-round, we especially can do so on the day designated Thanksgiving Day. Here are some thoughts from the Bible about how we should be thankful:

God rewards those who trust in Him. *"Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun"* (Psalm 37:3-6).

God's blessings exceed our imagination. *"Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare" (Psalm 40:4-5).*

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What are some things for which you feel grateful today?
2. When you consider the good things in your life, things many people refer to as "blessings," do you regard them as coming from God or solely as the result of your own hard work and initiative? Explain your answer.
3. How does a person feel thankful when confronted with times of great adversity, such as family problems, financial struggles or difficult workplace challenges? Are you able to feel and express gratitude at such times? Why or why not?
4. Thinking about the farming analogy in this "Monday Manna" – sowing, cultivating and harvest – what could be its applications for the 21st century workplace?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Psalm 96:1-13, 98:1-9, 105:1-7, 106:1-3, 147:1-20; Proverbs 20:4, 27:18, 28:19