



TAKING TIME TO CONTEM'PLATE Devotion

[Please provide: two readers, Bible, one 9-inch plain white paper plate with “grooves” on the outside for each participant, black pens, seven sheets of poster board, marker]

To prepare: Before the devotion, prepare a sample plate. In all capital letters, print the word “CONTEM'PLATE” horizontally across the center of the plate. Around the inner circle of the plate starting at “2 o'clock,” print Psalm 106:1: *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!* Print the word CONTEM'PLATE and the words of Psalm 106:1 on the board and display the plate you've prepared near it. As participants arrive, have each person prepare a paper plate. On the poster board sheets, print the seven points as outlined in this devotion, one point per sheet. In the Bible, mark Luke 17:11–19.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks (Luke 17:15–16a).

Whenever the baseball season begins in late March, we focus on home plate. As the day of Thanksgiving arrives on the last Thursday of November, it is a time to focus on plates at home—literally as well as figuratively—based on the words of Luke 17:11–19. Let's listen to this Bible account now.

Bible reader shares out loud Luke 17:11–19.

As we contemplate the miraculous healing of the Ten Lepers, just think! Leprosy was an awful skin disease that was unsightly, painful, and incurable. Its victims were ostracized from their families and the rest of society. The disease was debilitating! Embarrassing! Downright depressing! Thus, their plates were piled high with misery!

As Jesus cleansed those ten lepers, He converted their sense of hopelessness into a hope-filled joy! As those lepers realized that they were healed, by all rights, all ten should have turned back immediately, acknowledging God's almighty Son as the source of their healing. But only one out of the ten men took the time to contemplate how his life had been changed for the better by Jesus and returned to give God thanks.

It has been said, “Thinking always precedes thanking!” Just think! Plagued by the leprosy of sin from the time of conception, we have been renewed and refreshed in Christ through water and the Word! Our eternal future is secure! We enjoy a new lease on life! As Thanksgiving Day approaches, let's take some time to contemplate—to think and to thank—by following a seven-point outline.

Hold up the poster board with Point 1.

POINT 1: The problem of having too much on our plates.

Do the following two expressions sound familiar? “I've got too many things to do, and not enough time to do them all!” “I can't see the forest for the trees!” In all likelihood, they do! Beyond the sheer quantity of our responsibilities, to make matters worse, many of the things piled high on our plates are not our favorite things on our “to do list”. Even as brussel sprouts,

broccoli or spinach may not be on our “to eat list” on Thanksgiving Day, there are many unappetizing activities on our plates that we are forced to “choke down.”

Hold up the poster board with Point 2.

POINT 2: The problem of having not enough on our plates.

While we may not be millionaires, we are far from poor. Unlike so many in this world who are less fortunate, we have more than enough to eat and to live. However, many people have too little on their plates. What’s more, in this leisure-oriented society, many don’t know what to do with themselves. As a result, they do nothing. And so, they get bored; and boredom can lead to trouble, for “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”

At times, we fall into the trap of seemingly having nothing to do. However, as we take a good look around, there’s plenty to do; and we have plenty of incentive to stay busy, because...

Hold up the poster board with Point 3.

POINT 3: God fills our plates daily with a well-balanced diet for body and soul.

The fact that God fully fills our material plates is clearly stated in Psalm 145:15–16, *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.* Spiritually, 2 Corinthians 8:9b says of Jesus, *Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.* Our two- part, God-given wealth is seen in...

Hold up the poster board with Point 4.

POINT 4: We have more than plenty for both body and soul on our individual plates. We can pat our bellies and say, “I’m full!” If we could pat our souls, we could say, “I’m full” as well! Psalm 23:1–3a declares, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.* The psalm goes on to say in verse 5: *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* As our physical and spiritual plates are piled high...

Hold up the poster board with Point 5.

POINT 5: We are called to triply share our abundant blessings with others.

Our overabundance of individual blessings can be summarized in the three T’s of stewardship: Time, Talents, and Treasure. On the day of national Thanksgiving, we take the time to appreciate our God-given talents that we enjoy, day in and day out. Plus, as we appreciate our God-given treasure, we can share that wealth through monetary as well as food offerings. As we do this, we think about the words “grace” and “mercy.” It has been said that “grace” is when “God does give us what we don’t deserve” and that “mercy” is when “God doesn’t give us what we do deserve.” In view of God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, let’s wind down by contemplating two final definitions: one for “thanksgiving;” the other for “thanks-living.”

Hold up the poster board with Point 6.

POINT 6: Counting our blessings as we daily contemplate and express our appreciation and praise to God = thanks‘giving’!

Along these lines, this poem hits home. An anonymous author has written:

Count your blessings instead of your crosses; Count your gains instead of your losses. Count your joys instead of your woes; Count your friends instead of your foes.

Count your smiles instead of your tears; Count your courage instead of your fears. Count your full years instead of your lean; Count your kind deeds instead of your mean. Count your health instead of your wealth; Count on God instead of yourself.

In that spirit of counting our blessings, we are ready to conclude with a focus on...

Hold up the poster board with Point 7.

POINT 7: Making our blessings count as we daily celebrate = thanks'living!

It has been said, "It's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." In that regard, our Savior and Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, declares in John 10:10b, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" We can summarize the definition for "thanks-living" in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31, *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.*

Look again at the paper plate you prepared earlier. On the ridges around the outside of the plate, write down at least five blessings for which you thank God. Display your plate on your Thanksgiving table as a reminder to *give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.*

Closing Prayer: Gracious Lord, acknowledging You as the Creator of all that is good and provider of all that is necessary, we rejoice on this day that we are not only blessed beyond belief; we are blessed with belief! Assured that we have been fully restored from the leprosy of sin so that we might have life, and have it to the full, may we daily contemplate all the ways that we have been blessed so that every day might become a day of thanksgiving and thanks'living as we give all thanks and praise to You for all that we are and have. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.