

FROM THE PASTOR

If someone is addicted to eating Thanksgiving leftovers, can they quit cold turkey?

Former Nightline host Ted Koppel emigrated to the U.S. from England in his early teen years. The Koppels were originally from Germany, but moved to England at the start of World War II. They had lived through food rationing, and had known the scarcity and desperation that accompanies war. So a few years later, when young Ted heard a jingle on the radio about an antacid that could heal the pain of overeating, he began to cry. He couldn't imagine that he now lived in a country, the U.S., where people had problems with eating and drinking too much. He knew that in his native country, there were still people scrambling to get enough food to feed their families.

We have so much. Newcomers to this country are more conscious of our blessings than many of us are who take them for granted.

Now, of course, I have nothing against turkey (in my case it seems like you are what you eat) --and all the good stuff that goes along with it--but that's not our central focus on Thanksgiving Day.

And contrary to all the sales flyers that will be stuffed into your mailboxes, Thanksgiving isn't about shopping either. Over the next few weeks, advertisers will spend billions of dollars trying to convince us that our holidays won't be complete unless we buy their product, be it applesauce, power tools, or pantyhose. It is amazing to contemplate how much money, resources, and effort will be invested into making us feel discontented with our lives.

We can easily become cynical about the holidays if we focus too much on the commercial aspects. It reminds me of an old story about a newsboy standing on the corner with a stack of papers, yelling, "Read all about it. Fifty people swindled! Fifty people swindled!"

A stranger to our culture could fall victim to some absurd ideas about the meaning of our holidays. Thanksgiving is about far more than eating turkey, watching football or getting a head start on your Christmas shopping.

St. Paul knew about Thanksgiving even though he did not live in a culture that celebrated it. Paul was continually giving thanks. He had a gratitude attitude. But St. Paul did not believe that gratitude was a solitary attribute for the believer. Gratitude is to be linked to caring for others. If God has blessed us, then we should seek to be a blessing to others. In our lesson from the Epistle, he is writing to the believers in the church at Corinth, asking them to take up a collection to give to their poorer brothers and sisters in Macedonia. He knows that the Corinthians want to hang on to their money just as much as we do today. So in order to "sell" his plan, he reminds them of the blessings God has poured out on them.

As Eugene Peterson wrote in his rather free-flowing interpretation of the Bible entitled *The Message*, Second Corinthians 9: 6-15 goes like this, "*Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.*"

“God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you’re ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, ‘He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out.’

“This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

Carrying out this social relief work involves far more than helping meet the bare needs of poor Christians. It also produces abundant and bountiful thanksgivings to God. This relief offering is a prod to live at your very best, showing your gratitude to God by being openly obedient to the plain meaning of the Message of Christ.

You show your gratitude through your generous offerings to your needy brothers and sisters, and really toward everyone. Meanwhile, moved by the extravagance of God in your lives, they’ll respond by praying for you in passionate intercession for whatever you need. Thank God for this gift, his gift. No language can praise it enough!”

Thanksgiving is a constantly renewable resource. Thanksgiving produces generosity. Generosity brings a sense of abundance into our lives which increases our gratitude.

God set up this remarkable system of joy and blessings, gratitude and generosity, giving and receiving and then God backs it up with a lifetime guarantee.

Gratitude and generosity feed on one another. Give out of gratitude and your sense of gratitude will continue to grow. It’s an important and time-tested principle of Christian living. No wonder Paul wrote, “Thank God for this gift, **his** gift. No language can praise it enough!”

See ALL of you in church!

Pastor Fogle