

By Jim Langham

As I look back and reflect on past Thanksgivings, it really strikes me that none of those reflections that I cherish the most had anything to do with money or wealth.

So often, when we are asked to produce reasons why we are thankful, it is easy to respond with answers such as, "food, shelter, warmth, cars" and other items that have price tags on them. While we are certainly encouraged to thank God for the everyday "care things" that he provides, the real special gifts moments are not ornaments.

These days, I think of the Thanksgiving we spent with my Grandma Langham in Woodburn, when Aunt Alice played the old pump organ and we sang such songs as, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," "Now Thank We All Our God," and "Come, Ye Thankful People Come."

I loved the Thanksgiving we spent on Uncle Elmer's farm. It was cold, brisk and snow showers occurred throughout the day. His cows came up to the water tank and huddled together while I stood by them and stroked their warm hides.

Of course, within we had the traditional meal of ham and turkey, mashed potatoes, corn, rolls, pumpkin pie and Aunt Frances's hot mince meat pie with ice cream on it.

There was the Thanksgiving when we lived in Michigan and Grandma and Grandpa Langham visited us at our Branch County home. Heavy snow had fallen in the morning and we and the kids spent time making a snowman beside the driveway waving to my parents when they pulled into the driveway. What great photo opportunities there were that day, Julie, Sandi and Jason around the snowman with various family members.

One of my favorite Thanksgiving memories as a child was the one I refer to as, "the Uncle Jake

Thanksgiving," in my mind. My mother's father's brother, Uncle Jake Cook, lived in a rundown house by himself along the railroad track in Berne, Ind. He lived in the shadow of the grain mill where he earned a living loading feed sacks and unloading grain.

I remember the Thanksgiving when my mom said to my dad, "Why don't you go get Uncle Jake and bring him out here for Thanksgiving (he didn't drive a car)." I was elated because to me that meant, "checkers."

Uncle Jake loved to go to an old country store not far from his house and play checkers with the town retirees around an old pot belly stove. The checker board sat on an old barrel; the guys would eat Swiss Cheese, drink coffee and play checkers by the hour.

Of course, any hope I had of taking on Uncle Jake's challenge was quickly diminished early when he allowed me to set him up to where he could quickly jump all of my checkers, followed by his traditional hardy laugh.

Unquestionably, the most meaningful memories of Thanksgivings were the family prayers, my father's prayers, our prayers with the children, and now the children, as we gather around our own Thanksgiving tables. This year, God willing, it will happen around the table of our daughter, Sandi, in Chicago.

All of this leads to our most meaningful source of Thanksgiving strength, the Bible, and Psalm 30 in particular where we read, "O Lord my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever."