
Our American Heritage

The Pilgrims

and America's First Thanksgiving

BOOK ONE

A Grandparents' and Parents' Guide to Teach
the Faith, Freedom, Courage, and Gratitude
of Our Pilgrim Forefathers and Mothers

Rusty Thomas

Our American Heritage: The Pilgrims and America's First Thanksgiving, Book One

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Printed in the United States of America

Published by Thomas Heritage

THOMAS HERITAGE

A Fourth-Generation Homeschool Family

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**“Oh, give thanks to the
LORD, for He is good! For
His mercy endures forever.”**

Psalm 107:1





CHAPTER ONE

England in the 1600s

The Beginning of the Pilgrims' Journey

GRANDPA'S QUESTION

If someone told you that you were not allowed to worship God the way you believed the Bible taught, what would you do?

MEMORY VERSE

Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

England Long Ago

Close your eyes for just a moment and imagine that we are stepping into a time machine. When we open the door, it is no longer the twenty-first century. It is the year 1600. There are no cars. No airplanes. No electricity. No smart phones. No computers.

People traveled on horseback, by wagon, or by sailing ships. Most roads were muddy, and nearly every home was warmed by a fireplace.

Back then, England was one of the most important kingdoms in the world that was ruled by a king. The people worked hard as farmers, craftsmen, merchants, fishermen, and laborers. Children helped their families every day, and the Bible was an important part of many homes.

But beneath the beauty of England, many faithful Christians were becoming troubled. They were asking an important question, “Are we worshiping God the way the Bible instructs?” That question would change the course of history.



★ NARRATION BREAK

What was life like in England in 1600?

The Church of England

Since the days of King Henry VIII, England had an official national church called the Church of England (also known as the Anglican Church).

Before the Pilgrims were born, England was part of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Pope in Rome was recognized as the head of the Church in England.



King Henry VIII (reigned 1509–1547) wanted his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled because she had not given him a son and he wanted a male heir to continue the Tudor dynasty. Pope Clement VII did not grant the annulment.

As the disagreement continued, Henry decided that the king—not the Pope—should have authority over the church in England.

In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, declaring that King Henry VIII was the “Supreme Head of the Church of England.” This officially separated the Church of England from the authority of the Pope. Henry the Eighth became both King and head of the Church. This began for England the unholy alliance between Church and State that our Founding Fathers in America rejected. With the understanding, of course, that there was no separation from the supreme authority of God.

★ NARRATION BREAK

How did the Church of England begin?



Although the Church of England broke away from Rome, many of its forms of worship and church practices remained similar to those of the Catholic Church for a time.

Years later, some English Christians believed the church still needed to be reformed according to the Bible.

Those who wanted to reform the Church of England from within her became known as the Puritans.

Those who believed they should separate completely and form independent churches became known as Separatists. The Pilgrims were Separatists.

Throughout redemptive history, young people, God's people have been placed in tough situations. At that point, they had to decide to stay and fight to reform or flee and start over again. The Puritans decided to stay, and the Separatists decided to flee. Later, many of the Puritans failing at reforming the Church of England followed the Separatists to the New World.



As stated, most people in England attended the Anglican Church because it was the established church of the nation. There were within this church, however, believers who truly loved the Lord, believed in the whole counsel of God contained in Scripture, and sincerely desired to honor God within the Church of England.

Yet, there were other Christians who believed that the church retained far too many practices that were not fully consistent with the teachings of the Bible. They longed for further reform so that worship, church leadership, and daily Christian living would more closely follow the Bible's teachings.

This desire for reform led to the different responses previously mentioned. Some Christians remained in the Church of England and worked for change. They became known as Puritans because they desired to “purify” the church.

Others eventually concluded that reform was no longer possible from within. Believing they should organize independent congregations governed by Scripture, they became known as Separatists. The Pilgrims belonged to this second group.

HISTORY CORNER

Puritans and Separatists

The Puritans wanted to reform the Church of England while remaining within it.

The Separatists believed they should separate and form independent churches because they were convinced that Christ alone is the Head of His Church.

Although they disagreed about the best path forward, both groups shared a deep desire to honor God and follow His Word.

★ NARRATION BREAK

How were Puritans and Separatists different?



A new King comes to the throne

In 1603, King James I became king of England.

Many Christians hoped the new king would allow greater religious freedom. Instead, King James insisted that the people worship according to the rules of the established church. Those who refused could face fines, imprisonment, or other penalties. For many Separatists, following Christ became increasingly costly.



WHAT GOVERNOR BRADFORD REMEMBERED

William Bradford later remembered the difficult days that faithful believers experienced: the churches of God would reform themselves according to His Word, notwithstanding all the reproach and contempt that was cast upon them.

WHAT BRADFORD MEANT

The Pilgrims were not trying to start trouble. They simply wanted to obey God's Word, even when others criticized or opposed. The highest authority to them was not public opinion or even the king. It was the Bible. Our nation today has forgotten that truth and we need you young people to rise up and help your generation remember it.

Why was this so important?

Imagine if civil government told your family, “You may read only certain parts of the Bible.” Or, “You must worship only the way the government tells you.” Or, “You must be a part of a certain denomination.”

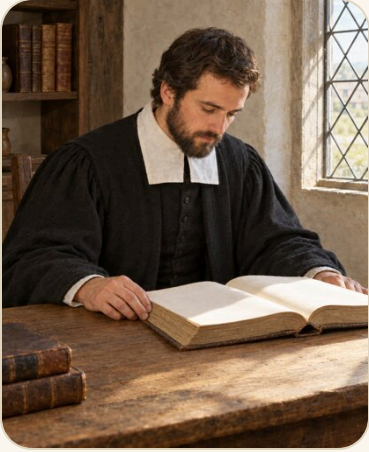
The Pilgrims believed that every Christian should be free to worship God according to the teachings of Scripture. This conviction became one of the great turning points in their story that changed the course of history.



★ NARRATION BREAK

Why did the Pilgrims obey God rather than men?





John Robinson, The Faithful Pastor

John Robinson became the beloved pastor of the Pilgrims. He encouraged them to love God's Word, seek truth with humility, and trust God's providence in every circumstance. One of his best-known encouragements was to keep learning from Scripture and to be willing to follow God's truth wherever it led. His leadership helped prepare the Pilgrims for the difficult journey that lay ahead.

Later in the story, before the Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower, John Robinson, their beloved pastor, gathered with them in prayer and offered words of encouragement that they would never forget. He reminded them that following Jesus was a lifelong journey of learning and growing.

JOHN ROBINSON

Robinson said, "The Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word."

In other words, young people, Robinson was telling the Pilgrims, "Never stop studying the Bible. God still has more to teach His people. Keep your heart humble, and always be willing to follow wherever His Word leads."

Robinson also urged them not to accept a teaching simply because a respected leader believed it. Instead, he encouraged them to compare everything with the Scriptures and faithfully follow God's truth. That advice became one of the Pilgrims' greatest treasures.

BIBLE CONNECTION

Acts 17:11, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

Like the believers in Berea, the Pilgrims wanted to test every teaching by God’s Word. They believed the Bible—not any king, church leader, or human tradition—was the final authority for faith and life.

PROVIDENCE CORNER

Have you noticed something? God often begins His greatest works with ordinary people who simply choose to obey Him. The Pilgrims did not know they would one day help shape history. They simply wanted to be faithful. Can you think of a time when doing the right thing was difficult? Sometimes God uses our faithfulness in ways we cannot yet see.



★ NARRATION BREAK

What did Pastor John Robinson teach?



Virtues to Remember

Faithfulness

Choosing to obey
God every day.

Courage

Standing for what is
right, even when it is
difficult.

Conviction

Holding firmly to
biblical truth with
humility and love.

Words to Know

Anglican Church

Another name for the Church of England.

Puritan

A Christian who wanted to reform the Church of England from within.

Separatist

A Christian who believed independent churches should be formed because they were convinced Scripture required it.

Persecution

Suffering because of one's beliefs or faith.

Reformation

A movement seeking to bring beliefs and practices into closer agreement with the Bible.

Fun Facts

- ◆ England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I until 1603, when King James I became king.
- ◆ King James authorized the translation of the King James Bible, first published in 1611, a Bible that would influence much of the English-speaking world for centuries.
- ◆ The Pilgrims likely carried and treasured the Geneva Bible, which had been widely used by English Protestants before the King James Version was published.
- ◆ The journey to America had not even entered the Pilgrims' minds yet. First, they had to decide whether they would obey God, whatever the cost.

MEMORY VERSE

Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."





You finished Chapter One!

England in the 1600s, where the Pilgrims' journey begins.

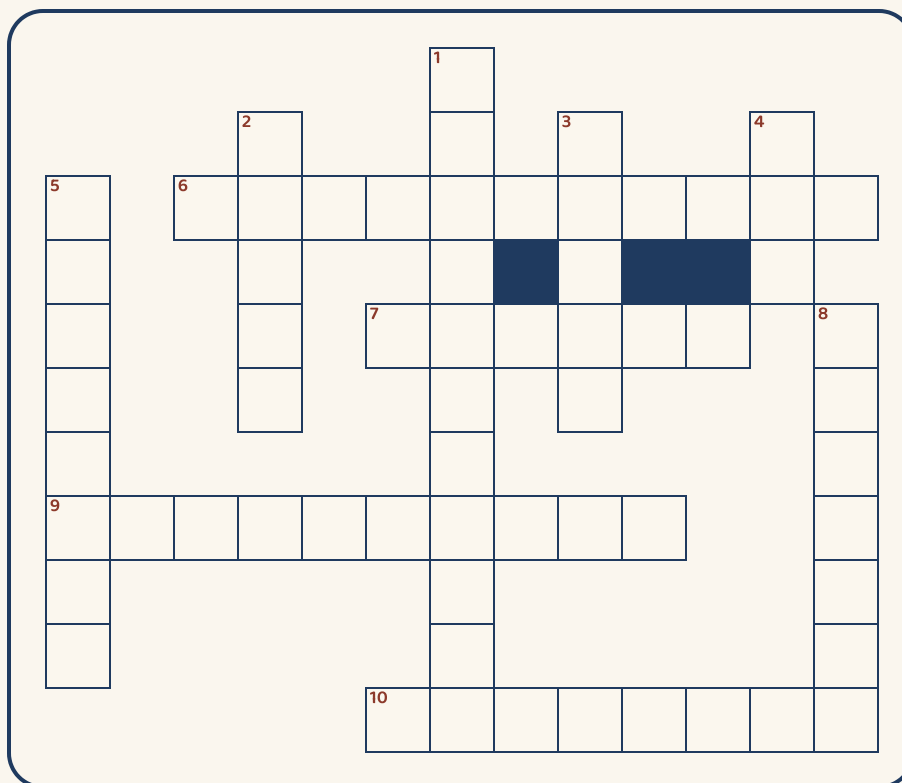
- 1 Another name for the Church of England is the _____ Church.
- 2 In 1534, Parliament declared that King _____ VIII was the "Supreme Head of the Church of England."
- 3 A Christian who wanted to reform the Church of England from within was called a _____.
- 4 Those who believed they should separate completely and form independent churches became known as _____.
- 5 Suffering because of one's beliefs or faith is called _____.
- 6 In 1603, King _____ I became king of England.
- 7 John _____ became the beloved pastor of the Pilgrims.

LOOK BACK

- 1 Trusting God even when the future cannot be seen is called _____.
- 2 The Pilgrims teach us what kind of people can remain _____.
- 3 Their journey would take them finally to a little village called _____.

Chapter One Crossword

Every answer comes from this chapter. Write one letter in each square.



ACROSS

- 6 A movement seeking to bring beliefs and practices into closer agreement with the Bible.
- 7 The Bible the Pilgrims likely carried and treasured.
- 9 A Christian who believed independent churches should be formed.
- 10 Another name for the Church of England.

DOWN

- 1 Suffering because of one's beliefs or faith.
- 2 King _____ VIII became "Supreme Head of the Church of England."
- 3 In 1603, King _____ I became king of England.
- 4 "We ought to obey _____ rather than men."
- 5 John _____, the beloved pastor of the Pilgrims.
- 8 A Christian who wanted to reform the Church of England from within.

★ NARRATION BREAK

What did you learn about England in the 1600s?

Family Discussion

Talk these through together before you write. There is no hurry.

1 • Why did some Christians believe the Church of England needed further reform?

.....

.....

2 • What is the difference between the Puritans and the Separatists?

.....

.....

3 • Why was obeying God more important to the Pilgrims than avoiding hardship?

.....

.....

4 • What does Acts 5:29 teach us about our loyalty to God?

.....

.....

5 • How can our family remain faithful to God with strength of heart and courage?

.....

.....

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

Question three is the heart of the chapter. Before answering it, read Acts 5:29 aloud together, then ask the child to name something the Pilgrims gave up.

Build a Timeline

Draw a timeline beginning with 1600. Add these events:

- 1603 — King James I becomes king.
- 1611 — The King James Bible is published.

1600

Leave plenty of room, because in the next chapter, you'll add more important events as the Pilgrims' story unfolds. In one of Grandpa's rooms that we used to homeschool your parents, we had a timeline that started with Creation and ended with pictures of your parents to show them how we connected with the past, the present, and the future. It is good to know these things, grandchildren.

PSALMS 71:17, 18

"O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come."

This is David's understanding of what is called the continuum. The things he learned in history of his nation that he treasured, his obligation to make it known in the present, and his obligation to secure it for future generations yet to be born.

Copywork

Copy the memory verse in your best handwriting. Take your time.

Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Handwriting practice lines consisting of multiple sets of three horizontal lines (top solid, middle dashed, bottom solid) for copying the verse.

Grandpa's Thoughts

My dearest grandchildren,

Every great adventure begins with a decision. The Pilgrims' adventure did not begin on the Mayflower. It began in their hearts.

Long before they crossed an ocean, they decided that God's Word would be their highest authority. That choice would cost them comfort, friends, homes, and eventually their homeland. But it also led them to something they treasured even more—the freedom to worship God according to the Bible and to raise their children in the fear and admonishment of the Lord.

In our Constitution workbook, we learned that a Constitutional Republic depends on citizens of virtue. Now, we are discovering where such virtues began in America.

It began with people like the Pilgrims who loved God more than comfort, truth more than popularity, and obedience more than ease.

The Pilgrims remind us that history is often changed by ordinary people who quietly decide, "We will follow God wherever He leads." And that, my dear grandchildren, is where our story truly begins.



CHAPTER TWO

Becoming Separatists

Following Christ, No Matter the Cost

GRANDPA'S QUESTION

Have you ever had to choose between doing what is easy and doing what is right?

MEMORY VERSE

Luke 14:27, "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

A Difficult Decision

Sometimes in life, young people, we are forced to make difficult decisions. In our last chapter, we learned that England in the early 1600s was a nation where the government and the church were too closely connected.

Many Christians loved God and wanted to honor Him. However, some believers became convinced that certain practices of the Church of England were not fully consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

They had an important decision to make:
Should they remain quiet to avoid trouble, or
should they follow what they believed God
was teaching them through His Word?



For a group of believers in a small English village called Scrooby, this was not just a disagreement. It was a matter of conscience. They believed that Christ—not a king, government, or church official—was the true Head of the Church. Because of this conviction, they became known as Separatists.

What does the word “Separatist” mean?

A Separatist was a person who believed that separation from the established Church of England was necessary in order to worship God according to Scripture.

The Pilgrims did not separate because they disliked people. They did not separate because they wanted rebellion. They separated because they believed they needed to obey God faithfully.

Their question was, “How can we best honor Christ and follow His Word?” They were convinced according to Scripture, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1, 2).



★ NARRATION BREAK

What did the word Separatist mean?

Why did they separate?

The Separatists believed several biblical principles were important:

1 Christ Is the Head of the Church

They believed no earthly king or religious figure like a pope had the authority to replace Christ as the ultimate leader of God's people.

BIBLE CONNECTION

Colossians 1:18, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

2 Scripture Is the Final Authority

The Separatists believed the Bible should guide faith and worship. They wanted churches to follow the teachings of Scripture rather than simply follow traditions.

BIBLE CONNECTION

Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Believers Should Worship Together as a Covenant Community

The Pilgrims believed the church was not just a building or a government organization. It was a community of believers committed to following, worshipping, and serving Christ together.

★ NARRATION BREAK

What did the Separatists believe about the church?



The Scrooby Congregation

Many of the future Pilgrims belonged to a congregation that met secretly in Scrooby, England. They were under constant watch. During their worship services, they had trusted men of the congregation who would serve as watchmen.

While families worshiped inside, these men would keep watch outside. Their responsibility was to:

- ◆ Look for anyone approaching who might interrupt the meeting.
- ◆ Warn the congregation if authorities were nearby.
- ◆ Help protect the families who had gathered to worship.

Imagine that today, grandchildren. Inside were parents teaching their children about God. Outside were men acting as a security team to stand guard so those families could worship peacefully. These watchmen were not protecting a building. They were protecting a gathering of believers who wanted to know, love, and serve Jesus.



Some of its important leaders included: John Robinson, a wise pastor who taught humility, biblical study, and faithfulness. William Brewster, a respected church elder who helped lead the congregation. William Bradford, a young man who would later become governor of Plymouth Colony and record their story in *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

These men were not seeking power or wealth. They were seeking to be faithful to our Lord and His teachings.

★ NARRATION BREAK

Why did the Scrooby church need watchmen?



The Cost of Conviction

Throughout church history and even in some parts of the world today, God's people face danger, persecution, and even death to follow Jesus. Choosing to become Separatists put them in harm's way.

The government expected people to attend the Church of England. Those who refused could face:

- ◆ Fines
- ◆ Imprisonment
- ◆ Loss of property
- ◆ Public criticism
- ◆ Being watched by authorities



The Pilgrims discovered that following God sometimes requires courage.

BIBLE CONNECTION

Revelation 12:11, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” To overcome the Evil One, courage is a much needed and necessary virtue.

C. S. Lewis speaking of courage stated, “Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.” The testing point for the Pilgrims is would they obey God or man? Would they please God or man?

FROM GOVERNOR BRADFORD'S JOURNAL

William Bradford later described their decision, “They shook off this yoke and made choice of a better way.”

WHAT BRADFORD MEANT

The Separatists believed they were leaving behind human rules that troubled their consciences so they could pursue a simpler, more biblical way of worship. They were not leaving because the journey would be easy. They knew it would be difficult. They simply believed obedience to God was worth the sacrifice.



★ NARRATION BREAK

What did Separatists lose for their faith?





William Brewster, A Faithful Shepherd

William Brewster was one of the oldest and most respected members of the Pilgrim congregation. He served as an elder and helped encourage the believers during some of their most difficult days.

He had been involved in government service, but he chose to leave a comfortable position because he believed following Christ was more important than personal success. Brewster carried his faith with him through every hardship. When the Pilgrims finally arrived in America, he became one of the spiritual leaders of Plymouth Colony.



HISTORY CORNER

They were not looking for a new country, at least not yet. At first, the Pilgrims were not trying to create a new nation. They were not planning to overthrow England. They were simply looking for a place where they could worship God faithfully. Their journey began with a spiritual desire. God would later use that desire to help shape history.

PROVIDENCE CORNER

Sometimes God begins a great work with a small step of faith. The Separatists did not know:

- ◆ They would cross the Atlantic Ocean.
- ◆ They would establish Plymouth Colony.
- ◆ Their story would inspire future generations.
- ◆ Their ideas would influence America's understanding of liberty.



They only knew one thing. They wanted to follow God. Think about it, young people. What small act of faithfulness today might God use in your life for something much bigger in the future?

Virtues to Remember

Conviction

Knowing what is right and standing firm.

Humility

Being willing to learn and follow God's truth no matter where it leads.

Courage

Courage is not an absence of fear, but doing what is right in spite of our fears.

Faithfulness

Remaining committed to God through hardship.

Words to Know

Separatist

A Christian who believed it was necessary to separate from the Church of England to worship according to Scripture.

Conscience

The inner sense that helps a person recognize right and wrong.

Covenant

A serious agreement or promise made before God.

Authority

The right or power to give direction or make decisions.

Elder

A spiritual leader in a Christian congregation.

Fun Facts

- ◆ The Separatists were sometimes called “Saints” because they viewed themselves as a community committed to holy living.
- ◆ The Pilgrim congregation originally met secretly because their gatherings could bring punishment.
- ◆ William Bradford was only a young man when he joined the Separatist movement, but he would later become one of America’s most important early historians.
- ◆ The Pilgrims’ desire for religious liberty would later influence discussions about freedom of religion in America.

MEMORY VERSE

Philippians 1:29, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”





You finished Chapter Two!

Becoming Separatists: following Christ, no matter the cost.

- 1 Many of the future Pilgrims belonged to a congregation that met secretly in _____, England.
- 2 During their worship services, trusted men of the congregation would serve as _____.
- 3 William _____ was one of the oldest and most respected members of the Pilgrim congregation.
- 4 A Christian who believed it was necessary to separate from the Church of England to worship according to Scripture was a _____.
- 5 The inner sense that helps a person recognize right and wrong is called _____.
- 6 A serious agreement or promise made before God is a _____.
- 7 The right or power to give direction or make decisions is called _____.
- 8 A spiritual leader in a Christian congregation is an _____.
- 9 William Bradford would later become one of America's most important early _____.
- 10 Our memory verse says, "And whoever does not bear his _____ and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

You Be the Judge

Decide together, then write your reason in your own words.

- 1** At a restaurant, some people at the next table laugh when your family bows to pray before eating. Your family keeps praying anyway.

Which virtue? Is it right? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

- 2** A boy decides to stop going to church because his friends tease him about it.

Which virtue? Is it right? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

- 3** Your older sister shows you a verse that proves you were wrong about something. You listen and change your mind.

Which virtue? Is it right? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

LOOK BACK

- 1** In 1603, King James I became king of
- 2** Those who wanted to reform the Church of England from within her became known as the
- 3** Thanking God in both joyful and difficult seasons is called

★ NARRATION BREAK

Why did the Separatists choose a harder way?

Family Discussion

Talk these through together before you write. There is no hurry.

1 • Why did the Separatists believe following God's Word was worth hardship?

.....

.....

2 • What is the difference between disagreeing with someone and disrespecting someone?

.....

.....

3 • Why did the Pilgrims believe Jesus was the true Head of the Church?

.....

.....

4 • Have you ever had to choose between what was easy and what was right?

.....

.....

5 • How can our family practice courage and faithfulness today?

.....

.....

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

Question two matters most. Help the child find words for disagreeing with someone kindly.

The Courage Test

Create a family discussion using examples:

☐

A friend wants you to cheat on a test.

.....

☐

Someone is being treated unfairly.

.....

☐

You are afraid to admit a mistake.

.....

☐

You know the right thing but others disagree.

.....

Ask: "What would faithfulness look like in this situation?"

Copywork

Copy the memory verse in your best handwriting. Take your time.

Luke 14:27, "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Grandpa's Thoughts

My dear grandchildren,

The Pilgrims teach us that courage does not mean you are never afraid. Courage means something is more important than your fear.

For the Pilgrims, obedience to God was more important than comfort. They lost homes. They lost security. They faced persecution. But they gained something they valued even more—the freedom to worship God according to their conscience and the Bible.

Remember this important lesson: Convictions are revealed when they cost us something. The Pilgrims' journey to the New World began long before they stepped onto the Mayflower. Like Daniel in the Lion's Den, before he faced that trial, he committed to consecrate his life to God in a pagan captivity.

For them both, it all began when they made a decision in their hearts: "We will follow God wherever He leads." And those decisions changed the course of history forever.

