

Everybody waited and watched. Nine months later, all the young wives had babies.

- In a society where pagan and immoral practices are part of initiation rites for young men, the Christians, instead of condemning initiation, offered an alternative initiation that honoured God, taught cultural values and modelled good adult behaviour. Now, many unbelievers want the Christians to initiate their children.
- In a religion where most folk already prayed to the One God, Jesus' followers continued to do so while using Jesus' name. Even unbelievers who try praying with Jesus' name find that God answers many more of their prayers. In that way, many become Jesus' followers believers.

3. Plan with co-workers the next worship time.

Read or act out the story from Exodus of how God miraculously rescued His people from Egypt's army, and how both Moses and his sister Miriam helped the people celebrate with thanksgiving.

Explain how believers should participate in harvest festivals to develop friendships, and to replace offerings to the spirits or idols with praise to the one true God.

Let believers give **testimonies** of thanksgiving for blessings that they have received from God.

Let the **children** present what they have prepared.

To introduce the **Lord's Supper** read John 6:47-51.

Form **small groups** of two or three people to pray for one another, discuss why we give thanks to God, and to plan activities of thanksgiving.

Memorize together Psalm 69:30.

Celebrate Harvest and Other Blessings

Those who teach children should read study #109 for children.

Prayer. "Lord, please help me and my flock to thank you for your many kind blessings to us."

Choose **activities** that fit local customs and time available.

"You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, that is, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year." *Exodus 34:22*

1. Prepare to help your flock express heart-felt thanks to God

Background.

- The Lord commanded the ancient Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Weeks that was later called Pentecost.
- Believers in Christ should give thanks to God daily. Many believers around the world also thank God for His blessings with a yearly celebration, normally at harvest time, similar to the Old Testament Feast of Weeks.
- Many congregations celebrate Pentecost, but not as a harvest festival. They celebrate it because on that day God poured out the Holy Spirit to give birth to the community of the New Covenant. That event was a spiritual harvest, for God gathered into a new body of believers, many Jewish people who had been dispersed among many foreign nations.
- Nearly all societies celebrate some kind of harvest festival, in which people gather to thank God for His blessings. In some cultures such celebrations are idolatrous, but believers often take part in them to help the people to shift their focus away from their false gods and to give thanks to the one true God.



Find in **Exodus 14:5** through **15:13** what God did for the Israelites, and the song that Moses sang in response to express his thankfulness and to help God's people celebrate with thanksgiving.

Find in **Exodus 15:14-21** what Miriam and the other women sang to express thanks.

2. Plan together with co-workers the activities to do during the week.

Visit any believers who complain too much or seldom thank God for His blessings. Pray with them, discuss things they should thank God for, and encourage them to pray daily to thank God for what He has done for them.

Plan and carry out a special feast or celebration of thanksgiving to God.

If the local community holds a celebration or some kind of harvest festival, then help folk to see that the one true God is the source of all good things. Do the same for national holidays. Normally believers participate in holidays in order to develop loving relationships, but they replace any sinful practices with more wholesome ones as a testimony of faith and to be a positive influence.

Teach the believers to follow these **guidelines** to make cultural events acceptable as Christian celebrations.

- Bring together some men, women, adults and youth to discuss a particular cultural event.
- Make a list of all the practices, symbols and meanings of the cultural event. (You can ask some non-believers to help you to make up the list.)
- Discuss answers to the three questions below:

Cultural Adjustment Questions

- 1) Which elements of the event could please God and most Christians?
- 2) What are some biblical stories and teachings that fit in with the event?
- 3) Which elements in the event must be replaced with biblical truth?

- Plan together how you will celebrate that event in a way that will show respect for the culture while also giving honour to the One True God.
- Invite some non-believers to join you as you do the Christian form of the cultural event. Afterwards, find out from them how they felt about it. Perhaps you will have to adjust the Christian form.

Examples:

- In a tribe that prayed to a local spirit to help young wives to become mothers, the new Christians held a special prayer meeting to ask God, using Jesus' name, to give them children.