



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The True Meaning of Thanksgiving

**Guest(s):** Todd Akin

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and from our family to yours, happy Thanksgiving Eve. This is a busy time for a lot of people. You may be getting ready for church services later this evening. You might be doing a lot of preparation in the kitchen, getting ready for all the cooking that needs to be done. I have to admit, Thanksgiving is kind of a tough holiday in the Marsh household because my wife loves the idea of cooking but does all the cooking herself. So sometimes it can be a very tenuous and strenuous event. But from our family to yours, I pray that you have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday. Now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're going to dig into the archives and hear a classic conversation that Dr. Dobson recorded several years ago with Todd Akin.

Now Congressman Todd Akin served Missouri's second district from 2001 through 2013, a great man of faith, a graduate of Worcester Poly Technic Institute, and also earned his master's in divinity from Covenant Theological Seminary. He was a member of the Missouri Army National Guard and a powerful advocate for the sanctity of human life. As a matter of fact, this is a guy who during the 1980s was arrested for trespassing at least eight different times between 1985 and 1988, demonstrating against abortion in front of abortion clinics in Illinois and Missouri. Well, Todd Akin was a very great man of faith and also a classic American historian and on the program we're about to hear, we'll hear a conversation he and Dr. Dobson had about the true meaning of Thanksgiving. Todd Akin was married to his wife Lulli since 1975, they were the parents of six children and Todd Akin went home to be with the Lord in October 2021 after a brief battle with an aggressive form of prostate cancer. But now without further ado, let's hear Dr. James Dobson and his good friend Congressman Todd Akin, talking about the true meaning of Thanksgiving right here on this special edition of Dr. James Dobson's family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Congressman, thank you for joining us.

Todd Akin: Well, Jim, it's just really a treat to be able to join you and it's about my favorite topic is to talk about Thanksgiving, and the Pilgrims particularly.

Dr. James Dobson: You are passionate about our nation's history, aren't you?

Todd Akin: Well, I certainly am, and I think there's a good reason for all Americans to be passionate about our history. If you don't think of it as history, if you think about it as a great adventure and you think about the character of the people that came here and what they established, we have so much to be thankful for.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you heard my introduction there as you were on the phone, and my concern about the way Thanksgiving is explained, or not explained, in many public schools, add to that.

Todd Akin: Well, I had a similar experience. I had heard that the schools are starting to teach that the Pilgrims gave thanks to the Indians, which is not historically correct. And so I went into a school, I had 140 fourth graders in a room on a Wednesday before a Thanksgiving break, and I got them excited and said, "Hey, you're going to go on vacation tomorrow". "Oh yes." And I said, "And what's a vacation?" "Oh, Thanksgiving." "And who had the first Thanksgiving?" They said, "Oh, the Pilgrims did." And I said, "Well, who'd they give thanks to?" And everybody in the room said they gave thanks to the Indians and I had been almost expecting that, so I put on the most shocked expression, I looked at the eight teachers in the back of the room then I looked at the class and I said, "Oh, no." And a little girl in the front row, Jim, put her hand up partly and asked as a question, "Did they give thanks to God?" And this is one of those moments that teachers wait for. I pulled a little chocolate bar out of my pocket, tossed it to that little girl, and I said, "You're right. They gave thanks to God." And we did about an hour on Thanksgiving at that point, perhaps to the discomfort of the teachers.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I imagine the color drained from their faces.

Todd Akin: Well I have in front of me, the governor Bradford's Thanksgiving proclamation from the second Thanksgiving that the Pilgrims celebrated the year was 1623, and it is pretty hard to read this, is that they're giving thanks... It's not that they weren't thankful to the Indians, particularly Tisquanto, they were thankful but the purpose of Thanksgiving was to celebrate to God. And his specific words "Render Thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all his blessings" governor Bradford.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's a vitally important part of our American heritage which I'm afraid is being lost or distorted because it's not being taught in most public schools.

Todd Akin: The tragedy of the thing is it's not even taught in our Christian colleges many times. And the fact of the matter is that these people really did believe that the Bible is a blueprint, they really believed it guided us in things to do with how to

set up a government or economics or things like that. And so you see immediately, right off the bat, these people hadn't been here hardly a month and you have two major contributions to our thinking in terms of American government. The first is the important idea of separating civil government from church government. That was a very big idea because remember all through European history there was this sort of unholy alliance between the king and the religious authority, and both corrupted each other and they had all kinds of conflicts. Well, in this country they started out, at least the Pilgrims did, with this idea that it was a biblical model to separate those two and it's a whole formula for America, the whole written constitution model, very, very much earlier than most people realize. And we can thank the Pilgrims for that as well as for Thanksgiving.

Dr. James Dobson: And now that basic idea of separating church and state has gone on to be interpreted as the church having absolutely no influence and no input whatsoever to the moral principles on which the government is based.

Todd Akin: Well, you're right, Jim. The Supreme Court just in, I guess, about the 1947s or so started trying to find in the First Amendment the idea that instead of separating civil government from church government, they came up with the idea of trying to separate God from everything in civil government and everything public, trying to get rid of God. That was certainly not the intent of our founders. I think particularly to that point, you have George Washington in one of the early national proclamations of Thanksgiving, and this is how it starts. This is George Washington's National Day of Prayer for thanking God for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. These are his first words, "Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God", obviously he didn't seem to understand what the Supreme Court has tried to read into the First Amendment.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I have in front of me George Washington's Thanksgiving Day proclamation from 1789 calling for that day of gratitude and appreciation to God and reading it here. We don't have time to read it all but God is mentioned over and over in several contexts. But it is just amazing given today's political climate because you can't read this from our greatest and our first president without recognizing this great sense of gratitude to God for all that He did in the formation of this great nation. This is what George Washington said. "Now, therefore, I do recommend an assigned Thursday, the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the people of these states to the service of that great and glorious BEING", being is capitalized, "who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks for his kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of his providence."

It's formal language, but you can hear his heart. It was not the Indians that he was talking about. As kind as they were, and as much as appreciation had to have been expressed to them, it was to Almighty God that they were thankful.

Todd, it would almost be unconstitutional now, according to the Supreme Court, to even teach that history even though it is undeniably a part of our Founding Fathers orientation and the works and deeds that they did.

Todd Akin: Well, that's true, and I think that we as Christians have let things slip a little bit. If you went to most churches and you were to say in the church, do you believe the Bible should be a blueprint for us for the way we live our lives, for how we run our families, and how we set up the civilization around us? I think most head would nod up and down and say, yeah, we think the Bible should be our blueprint. But do we really believe that? If you say, oh, well you do, and you've been a Christian for a while, why don't you just tell me in a few sentences what's the Bible have to say about the subject of education? What's the Bible have to say about economics? Could you show me as Governor Bradford understood when they pitched socialism out of their little colony, he made reference to the fact that as though men were wiser than God, he understood that socialism was unbiblical. I don't think we think of the Bible really as a source of answers to those questions.

Dr. James Dobson: Todd, I read just in the last day or two that in a school district in Seattle, the school board sent a letter to the teachers reminding them that Thanksgiving is not a happy time. I mean, those who come from a liberal perspective just can't seem to stand the notion that there is optimism and reason for appreciation and thanksgiving and happiness. You heard that?

Todd Akin: Isn't that amazing?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Todd Akin: Well, the Thanksgiving that the Pilgrims celebrated, they invited Massasoit who turned out to be a very good Indian chief and a good friend of the settlers for many years through his life. They invited him to come with a brave or two, and he arrived with a whole bunch of Braves and they had a good enough Thanksgiving for the first meal that they decided they'd stay three more days. And so they had foot races and wrestling and had all sorts of military drills and things, and the Indians would hunt up deer and Turkey and the settlers were cooking up pies and different things like that. And so it was really a three-day celebration. I think if it were a time for gloomy people to sit around and navel gaze, I don't think the Indians would've stuck down there for three days.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you and Lulli have six children, address this issue from the point of view of parents. I'm sure you would say, as we would, that it's extremely important for parents who come from our understanding of the Bible and of Jesus Christ that we teach them this foundation and tell them the history that the schools are not going to teach.

Todd Akin: Well, I think that's absolutely right. I think it goes way beyond just the fact that the Pilgrims gave thanks to God. It goes way beyond that. It goes to the point

that we should be looking at our Bibles for answers to things. You see, that's what made the Pilgrims contributions so tremendously significant. They gave us things that were the beginning of a new civilization in a way. And reading over some of their quotes, that's something liberals just can't take away. For instance, their quote as Bradford is kind of finishing up his understanding of what they did in Plymouth, and almost wistfully looking ahead he said that maybe the things that we have done here have in a sense lit a candle that will lighten possibly even an entire new nation.

You see, they had a sense of vision. They came here not just for religious freedom, they came here to build something new and something special. And they believed that the Bible was like a gold mine and it had more things to dig out of it. As you understood it, mankind could apply it and could bless civilization more and more. And I think we've lost that sense of optimism and hope. I think that that's something that we can learn from the Pilgrims in spite of what seemed like terrible, terrible things. First of all, the storms that blew them off course and that gave us the Mayflower Compact, but also the other different trials that they underwent, how those things turned out for God's purposes in history.

Dr. James Dobson: I've shared this before, but we have a little ceremony in our family that's become kind of a tradition. We've done it many, many times. The kids understand it, they look forward to it. But each member of the family around the table after eating the Thanksgiving dinner is given a little cup with two kernels of dried corn in them. And Shirley first tells this Thanksgiving story, again we've all heard it, but it's important to hear it again. And then we begin usually with me and you take the two kernels of corn, put it in your hand, and then drop them one at a time back into the cup and explain something that you're grateful for or thankful for that the Lord has given in the previous year. And then it goes on to the next person and goes all the way around. Year after year after year, we are in tears when we get to the end of the ceremony because there are members who have survived illnesses and there is love and appreciation expressed to one another, love for our kids. It's just a very, very meaningful thing. It's a way of celebrating Thanksgiving by being thankful. Thankful to whom? To God from whom all blessings flow. Congressman, we're almost out of time. Anything else you'd like to say to us?

Todd Akin: Well, Jim, just along the lines of what you said. Our church started a tradition about, oh, I'm thinking 15 or more years ago, and the beginning of the Thanksgiving service, it's a unique service in our church. We've got 12 pretty sturdy guys and they have pretty good size rocks and they bring these large pieces of rock up on the platform and put 12 of them together. This was symbolic of the Israelites going across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, and it was these are stones or an Ebenezer of remembrance. And then what happens is there's no sermon or anything, but people are allowed to come forward and say what they're thankful to God for and then they put on this rock altar, if you will, some little trinket that's a reflection of something that they said they were thankful for.

Dr. James Dobson: What are you going to do with your family this year?

Todd Akin: Well, we'll go to that same worship service and then we're going to enjoy a Turkey that'll be cooked up and a lot of fellowship. I'm fortunate to have three of my sons that are in military service that will be home, so that makes mom and dad pretty happy when the kids are home.

Dr. James Dobson: You have to be very proud of them.

Todd Akin: Oh, I sure am. Every one of them.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Let's end our program by addressing them because there are many families that are separated by long distances, by war, by the certainty of danger. And what would you say to those families that are making that incredible sacrifice at a family time?

Todd Akin: Well, I think the first thing I would say personally is I would say thank you. And I would also say this isn't something new for us in America. From the beginning of time, from the beginning of us being a nation, there has always been these struggles and conflicts and difficult times for Americans. Just as the Pilgrims had a very, very hard, almost half of them died in the first four months. And just as Washington has struggled with a terrible war against the biggest military power in history. It shouldn't be a surprise that we also are being called to stand up for what our forefathers believed. If you think about it, that statement that comes really from the Mayflower Compact, our Declaration of Independence, it's a simple formula. There's a God, he gives basic rights to all people, and it's the job of the government to protect those rights. And what do terrorists believe? They believe you butcher innocent people to make a political statement. We believe that life is a gift of God. They believe in terrorism to force you to do something you don't want to do. We believe God gives every man liberty so that the man can serve God and can rejoice and obey him with their lives. So it isn't an odd thing that we find ourselves head-to-head with people who disagree on that fundamental plane, that there is a God that gives basic rights to all people.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's well said. When Shirley and I had our devotions together last night, we prayed for those families that are separated at this time. We prayed for our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and in other places, Korea and Germany, other places around the world, including those who are here domestically. And we prayed for our government and for those that are making decisions. And at this Thanksgiving time, I do hope that our listeners will be mindful of those families that are sacrificing to defend our freedoms and also to be thankful to God for all that He's done. The secular world pulls us into the materialism of Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and Easter and renders them almost meaningless if you depend on the culture to emphasize the things that are important. And that's why I wanted to have you on the broadcast, Congressman Akin, and thank you for what you're trying to do to defend those things. I don't want to turn this into a political statement, but you are a Congressman and I would like you to tell us just as we bring this to a close, whether you are encouraged or whether you are

discouraged with where we are as a nation. This is time to be in prayer about our country and where it's going, isn't it?

Todd Akin: It certainly is a very, very important time of prayer. I tend to be fairly optimistic, Jim, I'm trying to think of the right way to answer your question. And maybe perhaps it was when Hudson Taylor was in China, he had a mission full of little kids and no money to buy rice for them to feed them the next day. And his assistant came to him and said, "Oh, this is a horrible day. We have no money to buy any rice and there's no food for tomorrow morning." And Hudson Taylor's response was, "No, this is a good day because it means that God is going to have to answer our prayers today." And it was that day that a courier arrived that had traveled through the interior of China and had the money that had come from the mission board so that they had food for the kids the next morning. And I guess maybe my sense is that we're in a dark time as a nation right now, but sometimes in history, the very brightest days come after the very darkest.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, blessings to you, Todd. I appreciate you. I appreciate your love for the Lord and for this country, and thanks so much for being with us today to put the spotlight on Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving to whom? That's the question parents need to ask their kids. We're going to have a day of Thanksgiving, who are we thankful to and for what? And if they say the Indians, you've got some work to do, right? Thank you, my friend. God's blessings to you and have a great Thanksgiving.

Todd Akin: Thank you. The same to you, Jim, and your wonderful listeners.

Roger Marsh: And that's how we concluded our classic conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guest via telephone, Congressman Todd Akin. On today's edition of Family Talk, we heard their discussion about the true meaning of Thanksgiving and why it's so important for us as Christians and Americans to celebrate Thanksgiving for the right reasons. Not necessarily just focusing on the Pilgrims, giving thanks to the Native Americans who were there to provide a meal with them and share a meal with them after a long, hard winter, but rather to give our thanks to God for His graciousness, His righteousness, and His mercy toward the United States of America. Now, as I mentioned at the start of the program, this is a classic conversation that was recorded several years ago. In the years that have passed, Congressman Akin was stricken with prostate cancer, and in October of 2021, he went home to be with the Lord. But not before passing on a legacy of faith through his wife, Lulli, and their six children and many grandchildren as well. So we are grateful for the life and legacy of former Congressman, Todd Akin.

As we consider the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday, I want to direct your attention to a special resource we have available absolutely free at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) courtesy of Gary Bauer who's our senior vice president of public policy here at the Dobson Culture Center. Last year, Gary wrote an outstanding piece called "Reflections on the Origin of Thanksgiving and Its Influence on America. This was part of his *Defending Faith, Family and Freedom*

Podcast series and there's an excellent write up and also the podcast itself available for you if you'd like to take a look and listen at this outstanding resource to learn more about why it is so important for us as Christians who live in America to celebrate Thanksgiving. You can find that information when you go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) and then click on the link for the Defending Faith, Family and Freedom Podcast. You'll find that about halfway down our landing page. Again go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) and click on the button for the Defending Faith, Family and Freedom Podcast hosted by Gary Bauer.

And here on this day before Thanksgiving, please know how much we appreciate and are thankful for you for your prayers and faithful financial support. By the way, once Thanksgiving weekend starts, we get into Thanksgiving Day and then Black Friday, and Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday. Coming up next Tuesday, December the 3rd is Giving Tuesday. That's a day when Americans all across the country go online to give back, to make a contribution, to support their favorite non-profit organization. While we trust that Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is one of your favorites, and this coming Tuesday, December the 3rd, we have a special matching grant in place.

Every gift will be doubled up to \$100,000. So pray about how God would lead you to partner with us financially. And then make a note that on Tuesday, December 3rd, go online to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) or call us at 877-732-6825 with your best tax-deductible donation, and help us end the year on solid financial footing with your Giving Tuesday gift matched up to \$100,000. That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org), or call 877-732-6825. Well, I'm Roger Marsh on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and the entire staff here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening. May God continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow deeper in your relationship with Him. And happy early Thanksgiving from all of us here at Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.