

No 'Normal' Thanksgiving This Year, but Maybe in 2021

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Last week a second pharmaceutical company announced that its vaccine is showing great effectiveness against Covid-19 in testing. That company, Moderna, said its vaccine appears to be 94.5 percent effective, according to preliminary data from an ongoing study. A week before that, competitor Pfizer announced that its vaccine is showing a 90 percent effective rate in its clinical tests.

These announcements put both companies on track to seek permission from the FDA within weeks for emergency use of their vaccines in the United States.

While the likelihood of these vaccines being available soon has to be considered good news in the fight against the pandemic, they won't rescue this year's Thanksgiving gatherings from the kind of dampers many state governors and public health officials are recommending during this time when the virus is surging.

Because even asymptomatic people can spread the disease, many of those recommendations call for keeping holiday gatherings to 10 individuals or fewer and asking people not to travel. Some say it's best to limit attendance to members of your own household.

Obviously, the likelihood of an attendee carrying the virus into your gathering goes up significantly the more guests you have. For those wanting a localized risk assessment, there's a map developed by Georgia Tech researchers that allows you to zoom in on your area, choose the number of people you think will attend and learn the odds of at least one Covid-19 positive person being there, assuming those in attendance have the general probability of infection. See the map in the links list below.

Beyond this Thanksgiving, however, the vaccines offer hope of life eventually returning to "normal," but not as quickly as any of us would like.

"There is an end to this," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. But he and many other health officials say that in the meantime, it will require the public to continue wearing masks, maintaining distance from others, avoiding crowds and being willing to receive a vaccination against the virus.

"People shouldn't think of vaccines as the savior," said Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a professor of vaccinology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. "Vaccines are, along with hygienic measures, a way to get in control of this virus, but we need both."

"If you have a very, very highly effective vaccine and we convince most of the people in the country to take the vaccine, we could get back to a degree of normality maybe by the end of 2021," Fauci said.

By the end of 2021! We want normality sooner, but many projections say we need to be ready for a concerted effort over several more months.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[There May Be a Covid-19 Vaccine by the End of the Year, But 'Normality' May Not Come Until End of 2021.](#) *USA Today*

[Officials Issue a Blunt Message for Thanksgiving: Keep Your Gathering Small and Don't Travel.](#) *NBC News*

[2nd Virus Vaccine Shows Striking Success in US Tests.](#) *AP News*

[Covid-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool.](#) *Georgia Tech*

[Applying the News Story](#)

Regarding this Thanksgiving -- and judging by what we hear from high-profile health officials -- it appears we're faced with the choice between risking our health and that of our family members or foregoing Thanksgiving gatherings altogether, and hoping for better choices when Thanksgiving 2021 comes around.

Does it strike you that there's something very biblical in those circumstances? Hope itself is a major theme in the scriptures; hope is a projection of our goals and desires into the future, trusting in God. Likewise, restoration is a biblical theme, which can include a return to normality or the way life was before the pandemic. Hope and restoration are the "tomorrow factor" in the Bible.

Tomorrow is the stuff of prophecy. "The days are coming when ..." proclaimed the prophets. Such prophecies were often uttered during dark and dismal days in Israel's history when not only the present but also the future looked bleak. But "tomorrow" was one way the prophets kept Israel's faith alive. In biblical terms, tomorrow -- the future, the time that has not yet arrived -- is the assurance that the present is never the end of the story. It proclaims that the darkness of today will not survive into tomorrow.

Tomorrow is one of the keys for understanding Christianity, too. We explain it something like this: When you embrace the way of Christ, you enter the kingdom of God, which is already here in some ways. But you also inherit the hope of the kingdom to come, where God's love and power will have full sway, where all wrongs will be righted and where there will be neither sorrow nor suffering anymore.

Thus hope and restoration -- the tomorrow factor -- are the topics of this discussion.

[The Big Questions](#)

1. For what are you thankful this year? What impact, if any, have the present circumstances, including not gathering for worship, had on your faith in God? Why? How does the Bible's "tomorrow factor" operate in your life today?

[The Big Question 2](#)

2. What to you is the most depressing thing for you about living through this pandemic? What, if anything, or who, if anyone, has helped you deal with any pandemic-related despair? What is the most hopeful thing about living through the pandemic?

3. What might be the first thing you will do when the "all clear" from the virus is given? What would a return to "normality" look like for you? Might there be a "new normal" for you? Why?

4. What accommodations have you had to make to continue on during the pandemic and which ones of those, if any, might you want to continue once the pandemic is behind us? Why?

5. How much of your hope for restoration of your pre-pandemic way of life is based on the availability of a vaccine? Explain.

[Closing Prayer](#)