# *Perspective*

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***November 5, 2026***

**Lessons from Plymouth Rock**

Contrary to the popular story, the Pilgrims did not have to come to America for religious freedom. They could have had that freedom among the Dutch. By the 1650s, English colonists and writers often assumed the Dutch Republic was a haven for religious dissent. This was due to the Union of Utrecht (1579), a treaty among the northern Protestant provinces that declared "every particular person shall remain free in his religion." However, the Dutch government soon changed their policy under the sway of Calvinism, and they banned Catholic Mass, closed monasteries, and restricted non-Calvinist Protestants. In 1620 the Pilgrims left Leiden, Netherlands fleeing poverty, fears of losing their English identity, and political instability; they sought a place to build a more stable, self-sustaining community in America. There were 102 passengers aboard the Mayflower which departed on September 16, 1620 from Plymouth, England, including 35–40 religious Separatists. The remaining number were non-Separatist settlers, artisans, laborers, and others recruited by investors. These Separatists held nearly the same Calvinist religious beliefs as conforming Puritans, but unlike them, Pilgrims believed that their churches should be separate from the Church of England, which led them to be labelled "Separatists." There are some key factors which caused this fledgling colony of people to serve as a seed planted at Plymouth that would grow into the most powerful nation on Earth. Let's explore the lessons we can learn from Plymouth Rock.

**The tough winters of 1620-21**

"The winter of 1620–21 was mild compared to other Little Ice Age winters in North America, but still colder than today and harsher than the Pilgrims expected. The main challenges were not extreme cold alone, but the combination of cold, damp conditions, lack of shelter, and poor health. In November 1620, a group of English settlers called the Pilgrims…arrived in Cape Cod in the present-day state of Massachusetts, USA. The Pilgrims traveled aboard their ship, the Mayflower, sailing across the Atlantic Ocean from England for two months. The ship was originally supposed to dock further south, near the Hudson River in New York, but rough seas threw it off course. After a month of exploring, the Pilgrims finally anchored in Plymouth Bay, Massachusetts, where they would go on to establish the second permanent English colony in the Americas, after Jamestown in Virginia. Throughout the winter of 1620, the Pilgrims lived on the Mayflower, ferrying to land to work on building their settlement. The Pilgrims moved into Plymouth colony by March of 1621, five months after arriving in the Americas. Of the 100 passengers on the Mayflower, less than half survived the winter of 1620 to 1621. Confined to the ship for most of the winter, many Pilgrims died from disease. Pilgrims survived in the New World with help from the Indigenous Patuxet people, who belonged to the larger Wampanoag nation. The Patuxet taught the Pilgrims how to endure the harsh weather conditions, plant local crops, and fish." (Smith College)

**Survival keys**

The Pilgrims were tough pioneers, yet they needed help to survive in the new world they sought to conquer. Wikipedia states, "The most critical factor was the peace treaty between Plymouth settlers and Wampanoag chief Massasoit, negotiated by Edward Winslow."

"This alliance provided security, trade, and access to local knowledge. Squanto (Tisquantum), a Patuxet survivor and interpreter, taught the Pilgrims essential survival skills, including the Three Sisters agricultural method (corn, beans, squash), the use of alewife fish fertilizer, and local foraging techniques. These innovations were vital because the settlers' European crops were poorly adapted to New England's climate and soil." (alphaomni. blog)

Key to our survival is also having alliances to help us when we cannot do it alone. King Solomon wisely wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:12, "*Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."*

Our strength lies in having a strong relationship with our Creator God, and godly friendships with others. The imagery of the "threefold cord" is a common proverb in the Bible and in other ancient wisdom literature. It emphasizes that unity and teamwork increase strength for times of troubles. Proverbs 17:17 teaches us that same principle: *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."*

The surrounding verses (Proverbs 17:16–18) emphasize that genuine love is shown not only in times of prosperity but also in times of hardship, and a "brother" — in the sense of a close, family-like bond — is one who stands by you when you are in trouble.

Proverbs 27:17 admonishes us about the great value of good friendships and mutual influence on one another, *"As iron sharpens iron, So, a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."*

The surrounding verses (27:16–18) speak about the importance of not forsaking friends, the influence of companionship, and the rewards of being faithful in service. God does not desire we be alone, but that we be a part of congregations of like-minded people who can love and strengthen each other.

**Selecting the best dwelling site**

The early settlers did not capriciously choose where the colony should be established. They scouted out a place which would be ideal to build a community with the necessary resources. The Plymouth location offered good harbor anchorage, a reliable water supply, cleared fields, and a defensible hilltop site. This made it easier to establish a self-sustaining settlement and defend against potential threats which could arise.

One does not make plans for trouble when it comes, then it is too late. Proverbs 22:3 instructs us: *"When trouble arises, a wise man hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished."*

The wise anticipate trouble beforehand. The imagery is practical: wisdom involves foresight and self-protection, while foolishness involves recklessness and ignoring warning signs.

Jesus Christ taught His disciples by this parable: *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 'But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.'" (Matthew7:24-27)*

Our lives are built on the Rock --- Jesus Christ, and we follow the example He left and strive to walk in His footsteps (I Peter 2:21).

Plymouth Rock became important to the Plymouth Colony because it was traditionally believed to mark the spot where the Pilgrims first stepped ashore from the Mayflower in December 1620, symbolizing the beginning of their settlement and the founding of the colony. The rock became over time a symbol of the Pilgrims' endurance and determination, and the start of a new society in the New World.

**Adapting when trials arise and learning to be self-sufficient**

The New World of America presented constant challenges from communal living to learning to adapt in a free economy. It took five years for the Plymouth colony to become self-sufficient through farming, fishing, and trade. The combination of local food sources, fishing, and the Wampanoag alliance ensured stability during the colony's formative years. Wikipedia states, "Plymouth's survival hinged on political cooperation with Native allies, practical agricultural knowledge, a defensible and resource-rich site, and adaptive economic systems. These factors together allowed the colony to overcome its harsh first winter and establish a lasting presence in New England."

**We ought to grow to be spiritually strong enough to help others**

The Plymouth Colony settlers had to help each other particularly when sickness struck so many. The few remaining had to care for the many. It was a heavy duty to lay up wood for fires for cooking and keeping from freezing to death, preparing and cooking for all the sick, and even burying those who died.

Some are veterans in the church and very knowledgeable about Scripture, and there are some who are new to the truth., and lack clear understanding. There are those who are strong in the faith, and those who are weak. In terms of character, some will be very stable, and some may be struggling with the foibles of this human flesh. God always expects those who are stronger to help the weak with great humility and grace. Paul wrote, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). The apostle Paul also wrote in I Thessalonians 5:14, *"And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone."*

These verses remind us that we should not just care for the strong but especially focus on helping the weak. Patience is emphasized here, showing that our support should be consistent, and always reflecting God's love.

Our spiritual survival depends on principles which were practiced by the Pilgrims of Plymouth Rock. If we apply them, we will not only survive into the future, but we shall thrive on into the kingdom of God.