



THE *gratitude* PROJECT

“This is so stupid!”

“Man, their family always has the latest phones.”

“His is better!”

You’ve heard it all, raised your eyebrows, exhaled, and if you have kids, corrected. But maybe, like us, you’re getting the idea that underneath all that entitlement and whining is a heart issue.

Where did all the gratitude go?

Studies repeatedly show thankfulness makes us happier—to the point that in brain scans, it’s hard to differentiate between the two. And there are lots of reasons!

Gratitude steers our eyes from what we don’t have to what we do have.

As we’re thankful, we remember how good God’s been. How trustworthy.

We are more content. We’re more loving, joyful, peaceful, and who knows—maybe even more patient with each other. (That covers at least the first four fruits of the Holy Spirit, welcoming God’s voice into our lives and our families’.)

So to hew out the furrows of habit in your lives, we’ve designed

- Three weeks of twice-a-week hands-on activities.
- Thoughtful articles and prayers to internalize.
- A gratitude scavenger hunt.
- Conversation starters.
- A fall family bucket list.
- Prompts to create a Thanksgiving advent paper chain together.
- Thanksgiving BINGO.
- Scripture art to post or frame around the house—and more.

And on some of these activities, we’ve even provided the script to make it low-prep.

Ready to get started?



ACTIVITY
ONE

Get Caught Being
Grateful

*I will bless the LORD at all times; his
praise shall continually be in my
mouth. P S A L M 34:1*

Supplies needed:

- A jar (or a jar for each child if you want) to set on kitchen/dining table
- Printed sheet on last page to put around the jar
- Coins to put in the jar as kids practice gratitude

Anyone have an idea what “grateful” means? (Thankful.)

So what could it look like for you to be grateful? (Saying thank you.)

Sure! That’s a great one. Anyone got any other ideas on ways you can express gratitude? (Wait for kids’ answers first.)

- Talk about what we appreciate about someone.
- Compliment someone about something you appreciate—“Great dinner, Dad!” “Mom, you look really nice today!” “Thanks for picking up my backpack.”
- Write a thank-you note.
- We can help out when someone’s doing something nice for us—like taking your dishes to the sink after dinner, or helping a parent when they’re getting all of you ready for school.
- Express gratitude in our prayers.

We’ve decided that for a reward each week, the winning kid gets to... (Feel free to allow a few rewards to pick from, since kids are motivated differently. Ideas: Go out for a drink with a parent. Pick a movie for movie night. Have a day off chores. Pick a snack from the grocery store, etc.)

Thankfulness isn’t just important because it makes you look like a good kid, like when you brush your hair or shake an adult’s hand. Thankfulness changes us! Got any ideas how? (Wait for kids’ answers first.)

- It reminds us how good God’s been to us. That helps us worship Him!
- Being thankful gets our minds off of all the things we want, want, want all the time. Instead, it helps us focus on all the things we have.
- It helps us stop complaining—even us parents! A lot of things around us try to convince us we need more things to be happier. But most of the world (80%!) doesn’t have most of these things—like even a faucet in their house, or a shower, or a toilet, or heat. Most of them don’t have a car or a computer or great education. But still we complain. And that’s not okay. God’s given us good things, but we keep thinking about how much we want more.
- It helps us be patient with each other, because we can let go of the things we want all the time.

So we’ll have a new competition every week this month. We’re going to keep a tally of times we see each of you showing gratitude. If you don’t win one week, maybe you’ll try really hard the next week and get it. But obviously, since this is about being thankful? No complaining. (Duh.)

We’re excited about this, guys! Let’s kick this off with each of us thanking God for something in our lives that happened just today.

Bonus project for November

Kids: How would you like to earn a little money just by showing gratitude? This month, every time you show gratitude to someone, we’re going to put a coin in a jar. Now there is one catch—it’s not for you. We want you to take the money you earn and in December give it to a special charity, cause, or needy family. You’re earning money to give it away. You just might have more fun giving it away than spending it on yourself!

ACTIVITY
TWO

My Favorite
Complaint

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15

Supplies needed:

- Washable marker
- Empty cardboard box (should be a good size for kids to hold; cereal boxes work great). Using a pencil or pen, poke a small hole in the bottom.

What are the things you most complain about?

Take turns talking about two things you usually complain about. (Parents, too.) Tell your family one that feels like a silly thing to complain about, and one thing that really does make you feel frustrated.

Using a marker, write one word that reminds you of your first usual complaint on one hand, and another word on the back of your other hand that reminds you of your second complaint.

You probably remember the story of the Israelites in the wilderness. They were stuck in a desert with maybe four million other people. Good news was, God decided to give every single one of them manna—flaky stuff that tasted like crackers with honey.

Let's listen in.

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh, that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength

is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at. (Numbers 11: 4-6)

Anyone happen to remember what the Israelites were doing in Egypt in the first place?

Answer: They were slaves!

Remember what God did to get them out?

Answer: He sent the 10 plagues and parted the Red Sea, killing all of the Egyptians chasing after them.

Grab your cardboard box and look through the hole. Can you see things? (Yep.)

Can you see a lot of things? (Nope.)

Why? The box blocks out most of what you see.

This is like what complaining does for us. It focuses us in on what we want to see ... and blocks out almost everything else.

God had brought the Israelites out of slavery (and even with money from the Egyptians—see Exodus 12:33-36), guided them as a pillar of fire and a cloud, trampled their enemies for them, and fed them in the desert with miracle food that showed up outside their door every morning—better than takeout!

But rather than remembering all God had done and was doing for them, they got caught up in wanting more.

Being thankful is an awesome replacement for complaining. It helps us focus on God.

Cross out the word on the back of your hand. Write three things you're thankful for. (Try to make them related to the thing you want to complain about. If you complain about school, thank God for a kind teacher, a brain that works, and a better education than most of the world.)

Share your thankful things with your family! (If you want, you can put a loose rubber band around each wrist to snap lightly when you're tempted to complain!)

ACTIVITY
THREE

Hands-on
Gratitude

*So I will bless you as long as I live; in
your name I will lift up my hands.*

PSALM 63:4

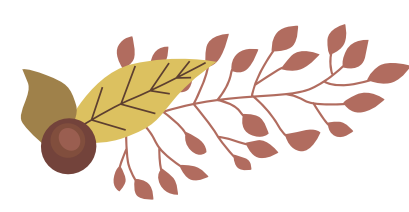
Supplies needed:

- Markers or paints
- Ink pad (optional)
- Pen or pencil

Draw or paint a simple tree on a large sheet of paper. (Each family member can have his or her own, or you can create one as a family. Remember: Trees are easy to draw by building “Y” shapes on other “Y” shapes.) Use kids’ thumbprints to create “leaves” on the tree: Dip their thumbs in a thin layer of paint, or use an ink pad. (Fall colors are fun for this!)

After the paint or ink has dried, ask your child to write in items they’re thankful for.

- Have a little contest: Who can make the leafiest, thankfulness-est tree?
- What did you think of that no one else thought of?



ACTIVITY
FOUR

Keep On Going:
The Chain Challenge

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in
Christ Jesus for you.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Supplies needed:

- Paper (construction paper works great)
- Pens, pencils, or markers
- Stapler or tape

Did you know? When scientists study people’s brains, they have a hard time telling a difference between the brains of happy people and thankful people. Science shows us that thankful people are actually happier!

Question: What’s one thing your parents have to remind you to do?

Maybe it’s brushing your teeth, saying thank you, or remembering to feed the dog. They’re helping you make good habits.

But good habits don’t usually just happen. We have to practice.

The great news? In today’s verse, God tells us one habit He always wants us to do. He asks us to have a habit of being thankful.

So today, we’re brushing up on our thankfulness habit by training our brains to think more about what God does for us.

Here’s the challenge. How long of a paper chain can your family make if each link has a word or picture you’re thankful for? Can you get it across the kitchen? Up the staircase?

Bonus challenge: Don’t use any of the ideas you’ve already used in the other activities!



ACTIVITY
FIVE

Thankfulness

Scavenger Hunt

*I will give thanks to the LORD
with my whole heart; I will recount all
of your wonderful deeds.*

PSALM 9:1

Supplies needed:

- Pen or pencil
- Scavenger Hunt checklist included in this pdf

Would you believe we can hunt for things to be thankful for in unexpected places? We've got 30 of them in our home right here! How many can you find in 10 minutes? Smaller kids, bring an adult with you.



ACTIVITY
SIX

Gratitude

Hide and Seek

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when
you meet trials of various kinds.*

JAMES 1:2

Supplies needed:

- Slips of paper (larger pieces for small children—perhaps quartered sheets of paper)
- Pens, pencils, or markers
- A comb (optional)

But we might have to try hard to find it.

We can start as simple as, "I'm breathing. I'm alive." Or, "I have a home where I feel safe." Or, "I have a family who loves me."

Finding thankfulness is a little like running a comb through our day, finding God's little gifts.

Sit apart from each other as you write things you're thankful for on five separate slips of paper.

Adults, hide your slips of paper while the kids wait in another room. The child who finds the most slips of paper wins a small reward. Read your parents' answers aloud.

Then, the kids hide their papers for the adults! Read the kids' answers aloud.

On bad days, sometimes thankfulness is a little like hide and seek. What we're thankful for might not always stick out—but it is there! God is always good.





Thankfulness

Scavenger Hunt



An object you share with your dad	Something under your bed	Something on your bookshelf	Something in your fridge	An object more than ten years old
Something in a photograph	Something found outside	Something in a cupboard	Something alive (that isn't a person!)	Something that moves
Something that helps you relax	Someone in a poor country might not have this	Something your life would be difficult without	Something over six feet high	A favorite food
Something that helps you keep clean	An object not belonging just to you	An object that makes you feel loved	A way for you to be creative	A way to help you have fun with your family
Sometimes complained about by you	An object you help out with	A way to enjoy how you're made	A reminder of a happy memory	Something that keeps you safe
Something that keeps you comfortable	Something that makes you happy	Something that helps you sleep	Something that protects you from the weather	Something that reminds you that you are loved by God







About Those Dishes: What I Learned from My Wife about Gratitude

BY CARLOS SANTIAGO

I had fully intended on clearing the sink of dishes, but after washing the two big pans I got distracted. Later that evening, lying in bed, my wife turned to me and said, “About the dishes ...”

Uh oh, I thought. I had completely forgotten to finish them! My mind immediately began to race. What had I been doing? Why had I gotten distracted? I needed to come up with an excuse—fast.

I had just begun to form my defense when she said, “Thank you for scrubbing the big ones. They’re heavy, and I really appreciated you taking care of them.”

My mouth opened, but no words came out.

In marriage, a spirit of thanksgiving can make a huge difference. What you focus on most is what you’ll notice most.

PRAY | *Lord, I confess that I am often faster to complain than I am to thank. Help me to appreciate my spouse as Your perfect gift to me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

If you give thanks for your spouse's efforts at provision, then you begin to notice efforts of cleaning that you once overlooked. If you give thanks for your spouse's efforts at cleaning, you begin to notice examples that you never saw before.

Focusing on the negative can have the opposite effect. The more we complain, the more evidence we find to justify our complaints. This breeds disappointment and bitterness and often spills out in the form of crude jokes, curses, insults, and sarcasm.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to focus on the positive.

My wife and I have different ways of viewing time. To me, 15 minutes early is on time. To her, two or three minutes late is no big deal. This has caused much friction in our marriage over the years.

One day, as I was sitting in my car fuming because she wasn't ready, I realized I should shift my focus. I began praying for my wife and thanking God for making her the perfect companion for me. As I did, I began to realize why she is usually late. God gifted her with a deep desire to take care of the needs of others. While I was sitting in my car judging her, she was preparing a bag with snacks she thought I might appreciate later that afternoon.

On my own, I would have never realized this. But by tapping into God's mysterious power, I was able to appreciate her thoughtfulness.

Next time you find yourself wanting to complain about your spouse, try thanking God for your spouse instead. You may be surprised by what you notice next.

*For more on thankfulness, read "[Gratitude Is a Choice](#)" by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth on [FamilyLife.com](#).
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“GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.” -*Psalm 136:1*

“What do you say?” Putting Gratitude into Kids’ Hearts

BY LAUREN MILLER

GratITUDE is expected in American culture. How many times have we heard parents with a scolding tone ask their children, “What do you say?” expecting them to respond with a half-hearted “thank you”? The phrase is demanded as if the words themselves were important. But grateful people are marked by more than the occasional expression of thanks. They are marked by their hearts.

In her popular book *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*, Ann Voskamp shares her personal discovery of the power of thankfulness to dissolve discontentment and worry in her life. She captures a simple yet profound truth about thankfulness: “As long as thanks is possible, then joy is always possible.” With thankfulness comes a repositioning of your focus from dissatisfaction to adoration of God’s goodness, and therefore the gratefulness changes your heart, from one of discontent to fullness of joy.

Part of training a child to be grateful involves encouraging gratefulness when they least feel it. It’s when the family must eat chicken soup for the fifth day in a row, the air conditioning



“Saying the words ‘thank you’ will grant zero joy unless they flow from a genuine heart.”

-Lauren Miller



stops working, or when they have homework coming out of their ears—those are the opportunities for shaping thankfulness. Saying the words “thank you” will grant zero joy unless they flow from a genuine heart.

I remember sitting on the stairs with my mom and sister when I was young and verbally “popcorning” all of the qualities of God we could think of for which to thank Him. Setting aside time and creating projects like this can go a long way. This single exercise has stuck with me my whole life.

Another helpful exercise is memorizing Scripture and singing songs that remind us: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 136:1). Use those truths to teach your children the wonderful characteristics of God that they can depend on—they will never run out of reasons to be thankful.

Finally, share with them what you yourself thanked God for today. Tell them how grateful you are that God placed the blessings and the struggles in your life. Be an example of true gratitude to your children by taking off a heart of complaint and putting on a heart of praise. Your children will see that Christian thanksgiving isn’t just a bunch of words. It’s a condition of the heart.

To learn more about building character in your child, [visit FamilyLife’s Art of Parenting®](#).

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Pebbles in My Sneakers: Learning Thanks in All Things

BY DENNIS RAINEY

Do you ever feel as though the circumstances of life are about to overwhelm you? It is said we are worn down less by the mountain we climb than by the grain of sand in our shoe. I agree. Would you like to know what pebbles seem to frequent my sneakers?

1. People who try to make me feel guilty.
2. My checking account.
3. My garage. (It continually proves the second law of thermodynamics—the universe is moving from order to disorder.)
4. The incessant ringing of the telephone.
5. Sibling rivalry.
6. Things that break and need fixing.
7. A drippy faucet. A smoking fireplace. And a leaky pipe in the ceiling.
8. Car problems that always occur at the most inopportune times.
9. A whining child.
10. Things that aren't where I left them. Or forgetting where I left them.
11. More sibling rivalry.
12. An unresolved conflict with a family member.
13. And tripping over all the stuff that six children can drag out! There have been times when the floors at our place were symbolic of a lot of life's circumstances: piled with the unpredictable and regularly cluttered with chaos.

I once took a census of our floors: there were enough children's books on the floor to load a good-sized library truck. And Legos! Legos may be creative and all, but they drive me crazy—10 zillion pieces specially designed to disappear forever down heat registers, or to be sucked into the abyss of the vacuum cleaner.

Are we out of control? Partially. But doesn't it happen to everyone from time to time? Little things get to us. Frequently.

Honestly, big problems are difficult, and there are more serious problems that do confound us, but today, tonight, right now, this is where more of us live—in the midst of the little things. It's called reality.

It reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw on a pickup truck some time ago: REALITY IS FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T COPE WITH DRUGS. I really do understand why we have a culture of "cop-outs."

WHERE IS GOD?

Is God involved in the details of life? Could God possibly want to teach us something in a flat tire? Does He really want to invade every moment of our day, or would He prefer to reserve the 9:30 until 12:00 time slot on Sunday mornings?

One of the most practical spiritual truths is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NASB)—"In everything give thanks ... " Just four little words that measure my walk with God. I'll never forget the first time I heard the concept of giving thanks in all things. It was 100 percent foreign to me. I didn't think like that. I was used to either calling things "bad luck," getting ticked off, or just shrugging my shoulders while muttering, "What's the use?"

But I began to practice this newly found command and to my amazement I started to notice a change in my attitude about life in general. I began to realize that God wanted to invade every area of my life. Every area.

LEARNING TO GIVE THANKS

Does He really want us to give thanks in all things? "I mean c'mon, isn't that a bit fanatical?" you might ask. Why could this possibly be so important to God? Let me suggest three reasons.

First, giving thanks in all things expresses faith—faith in the God who knows what He's doing—faith in the God who sovereignly rules in all that happens to us. Isn't that what He wants from us?

Second, He commanded us to give thanks because He knew we wouldn't do it naturally. Giving thanks in all things means I am no longer walking as a mere man, grumbling and griping about "stuff," but walking as a spiritual man (1 Corinthians 2:14-15)—a man who sees God at work ... even in the grains of sand that tend to fill my shoes.

Isn't that a little bit of what's wrong with twenty-first century Christianity? Don't we divorce God from the details of daily experience? Don't we ultimately live like those things which we can't seem to control? Let's be honest, we'd rather gripe, complain, and be miserable about circumstances than give thanks.

Third, He wants to teach us how to deal with the irritating grains of sand so we can get on with climbing the mountains He has for us. All we see are the pebbles, and we think if we could just remove all those pebbles then we could get on with living. But God wants to use those irritants to instruct us and see us grow up. I wonder how many times He's had to teach me the same lesson before I finally learned it by obeying Him?

The following is an excerpt from a letter I wrote years ago, and it contains a written snapshot of our family under the siege of circumstances.

To start out with, we have been living out of suitcases for the past seven weeks, with our two little ones, both under 2, going through Pampers like they owned the factory! You can guess what malady they were overtaken by!

We've had checks bounce because our paycheck was in the post office in Dallas and we couldn't get it out to deposit it. Not only were all those rubbery checks a stab to my credit rating, but also my pride.

My billfold and Barbara's purse were relieved from our presence (stolen or lost) in the big west Texas city of—get this—Rising Star. Not only did we lose all of our credit cards, but our identification as well. After a couple of hours of frustrated searching and finding nothing, I was finally able to thank God that He was in control of our traveling disaster team.

Still gluttons for punishment, we pressed on to Colorado where we decided to camp out with our two little ones (this was primarily because we didn't have enough capital on our person to finance a motel room). That night a deluge of rain camped with us. Our tent was transformed from a shelter into a funnel.

**"LIFT YOUR EYES AND HEART
BY STOPPING RIGHT NOW
AND EXPRESSING THANKS
TO THE ONE WHO WILL NOT
DISAPPOINT."** **-Dennis Rainey**

We were kept dry by massive applications of Ashley's diapers, placed at strategic locations to soak up the minor floods, which occurred repeatedly in our tent. By the time we finally arrived for training, we were wondering if we were the ones the Lord wanted to start this ministry to the home. It seemed as though our home had quite a few bruises, scrapes, and lacerations. Let me confide in you that we had lost our perspective of thanking God "in all things."

Then a couple of days later a flash flood hit Estes Park—the worst in Colorado history—taking the lives of seven fellow Campus Crusade for Christ staff members. Vonette Bright (the wife of founder Bill Bright) and 21 other wives of those in leadership barely escaped a 20-foot wall of water by going up the side of the canyon in total darkness.

You know something? That disastrous incident really changed our perspective. We didn't really have any problems. God showed us that we had our lives and the privilege of serving the King of kings and the Lord of lords. God used that tragedy to teach us many valuable lessons.

Pressured? Overwhelmed? Why not consider giving thanks for that which is so weighty? Feeling hemmed-in by life's daily drudgeries? Why not express faith and thankfulness that God knows what He's doing? Are you angry, resentful, and embittered about that over which you have no control? Why not give up these futile feelings and give thanks to the One who is in control? Had a bad day? Week? Month? Lift your eyes and heart by stopping right now and expressing thanks to the One who will not disappoint.

Do you have some grit and gravel in your shoe that feel like a herd of boulders? Before you try to empty them out, why don't you stop right now and give thanks for that rock pile and ask Him to teach you what you need to learn.

Sometimes we never outgrow our need to relearn the most fundamental lessons: "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

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The Replacements: Tips to Swap Kids' Whining for Gratitude

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

Does your family have a whiner?

One of my children, who is 5 years old, has managed to bring whining to an art form. We could wander into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory that happens to have the latest gaming system, a Chuck E. Cheese, his friends, and his grandparents inside, but my son would have no problem finding something that was not quite up to his expectations.

"COMBING THE DAY FOR THINGS I'M THANKFUL FOR IS REPLACING MY OLD WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD." -Janel Breitenstein





Another mom asked me recently if we had a whining and ingratitude issue in our family like she does in hers. Uh, definitely. But to tell the truth, my second-born isn't the only one in our family who has a problem with ungratefulness and complaining. Unfortunately, I have to wonder how much of it he's caught from his mother. It's not something you'd see unless maybe you lived with me. This is more of an x-ray issue. You'd see my problem if you saw my heart.

Recently I read a book titled *One Thousand Gifts*, by Ann Voskamp. A mother of six, Ann found herself transformed by a challenge to list 1,000 things for which she's thankful. So I pulled out a spiral notebook and got started writing my own list.

Here's what I didn't anticipate: Combing the day for things I'm thankful for is replacing my old way of seeing the world. It turns my eyes from all the things that aren't going my way—or even from the discouragement of legitimate problems—and onto the gifts God keeps piling up, just dumping

“IT TURNS MY EYES FROM ALL THE THINGS THAT AREN'T GOING MY WAY—OR EVEN FROM THE DISCOURAGEMENT OF LEGITIMATE PROBLEMS—AND ONTO THE GIFTS GOD KEEPS PILING UP..”

-Janel Breitenstein

them in stacks and stacks into my life. In essence, it helps me choose joy.

Refusing to complain is a good discipline for my mouth. But to transform my heart, God actually replaced my complaining by helping me see His goodness and worship Him for it.

As I thought about cultivating the ground for the gratitude God wants to grow in my kids' hearts, I was grateful for some of Ann's suggestions. As part of your daily



routine, she suggests, cover a window one sticky note at a time with things for which your kids are thankful. We covered a huge picture in the kitchen; the non-writers got help or drew pictures.

Another of Ann's suggestions was to help children start thankfulness journals of their own. We started one at the beginning of the new school year. I have talked my 7-year-old down from his initial well-intentioned goal of 1 billion items, and he is now going for 100 items for which he's grateful.

On that note, here are a few other ideas to help replace whining with thankfulness.

- When your child begins the whining wind-up, talk about his or her heart: "Right now, I think you're being tempted to focus on what you want. I need you to take your focus off your circumstances and desires. I want you to choose to focus on how big God is and the blessings He's giving you right now, this instant. Can you stop and think of three good things He's giving you right now? Then I'll hear what you have to say in a calm voice to me."
- Talk out loud and frequently about things for which you're thankful—big and small.
- Be consistent with a zero-tolerance policy on whining. Make the consequences known, and follow through swiftly when your child complains.
- Let your kids see you thanking waitresses, cleaning staff, Sunday school teachers, and "unseen" helpers. Prompt them quietly to thank people who serve them.
- Make thank-you notes a normal project in your home, and include people like pastors and your children's ministry leaders.

- Do not, I repeat, do not give your child anything they ask for in a whining voice. Author Ginger Plowman allows her children to come back two minutes after whining and offer the request again, the polite way.
- I follow a tip I learned from my aunt: I try not to pick up my children until they quit whining (which is different from crying). Otherwise, I might be teaching them that they can get picked up if they whine. Instead, this reinforces self-control and self-soothing.
- When you're driving, set a thankfulness challenge. See if together you can think of 50 things to be thankful for before you get to swimming lessons or 25 things before you get to the library.
- Expose your kids to the realities of life in other areas of the world. Sites like compassion.com are great for giving kids a window outside of the wealthy bubble of our culture. You can also request their free magazine for kids and receive their prayer calendar every month.
- Read some books together on thankfulness, like [Sam Crabtree's *Practicing Thankfulness: Cultivating a Grateful Heart in All Circumstances*](#). Talk specifically with your kids about how this relates to whining and complaining. Read picture books that talk about kids dealing with poverty and how we can respond with generosity. Pray for the real kids living in those realities, and thank God for the comforts you enjoy.
- Memorize some Scriptures together about gratitude (small rewards may help). Some to start with: Psalm 16:5–11, Psalm 100, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18.

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The Choice: Grumbling vs. Gratitude

BY BARBARA RAINEY

Does it ever seem surprising to you that God made the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years because they grumbled? My kids may have spent 30 minutes in their rooms for griping, but 40 years? What a severe discipline! Ouch, it seems harsh.

God clearly is not pleased with grumbling. It doesn't make Him happy to hear His children complain constantly. Sound like any children you know?

Being grateful is a choice—not a feeling dependent on our circumstances—as we clearly see in the Pilgrims' lives. They believed that God was in control—"Providence," they called it. They responded to the circumstances of their lives with a perspective that said, "God has allowed this for our good."

The stories of those who have gone before us inspire our faith. When we consider those great saints listed in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrew 11 or our Pilgrim forefathers or those men and women we know in recent times who have modeled great dependence on God, our faith is stretched and increased. Their example of placing all hope in Jesus Christ encourages us to do the same.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Those who sailed on the Mayflower knew their Bibles well. They were convinced that God existed and could only be pleased through faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Someone has said, “Faith is a firm conviction, a personal surrender, and a conduct inspired by your surrender.” The Pilgrims were totally surrendered to God, and they believed that He was leading them to the New World. So they went, confident that He would guide and provide.

The Bible is full of verses on giving thanks. Our problem in America is not that we don’t know we are to be thankful, but often we choose to complain instead. The Psalms contain a number of verses that call thanksgiving a sacrifice:

“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.” -**Psalm 50:14 (NASB)**

“He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me.” -**Psalm 50:23 (NASB)**

“Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving.” -**Psalm 107:22 (NASB)**

“To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the LORD.” -**Psalm 116:17 (NASB)**

Why is it a sacrifice to give thanks to the Lord? Because being thankful forces us to take our eyes off ourselves and put them on the Lord. Giving up our self-focus is the kind of denial that pleases God.

As a nation, we have inherited a remarkable gift in our freedom to worship, but we have strayed far from our roots and heritage. We must return to the faith of our fathers. Developing a heart of gratitude is the beginning step in growing a stronger faith. Remember what God has done and believe that He will take care of us in the future.

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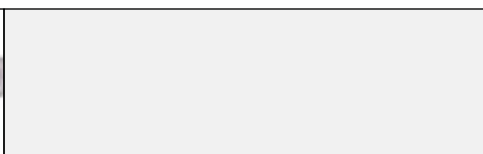







#GIVETHANKS

What do you #GiveThanks for this month? Check out our [Facebook posts](#) for inspiration and engage with us weekly on our [Instagram stories](#) to let others know what you’re grateful for!



DISCOVER THANKFULNESS

Does being around family and friends you don't see too often make you nervous? Uncomfortable even? Here is a great list of questions to help start meaningful conversations around your dinner table, on a road trip, or even to help engage the people around you in something other than their phone!

 <p>What is something that made you happy today?</p>	 <p>What does thankfulness mean to you?</p>	 <p>How has someone expressed gratefulness to you recently?</p>
 <p>What is something you hated as a kid but is now appreciated?</p>	 <p>When was the last time you were grateful for your sibling?</p>	 <p>What is something your parents did that you are thankful for?</p>
 <p>What is something you purchased for less than \$100 in the last six months that has changed your life?</p>	 <p>What are you least thankful for? Why?</p>	 <p>What are you most thankful for? Why?</p>

FALL FAMILY BUCKET LIST

Do you struggle to spend intentional time with your family? Even more so this time of year? This list was created to help you and your family create more memories and spend time together over the next few weeks. We hope you are able to reconnect as a family in the coming days!

■ Create a thankful jar—Each day, try to think about something you are grateful for. At the end of the month, look back and see how you were blessed!

■ Visit a pumpkin patch—Pick out a pumpkin for each family member and use them as decorations somewhere in your house!

■ Make caramel apples—Cover your favorite apple with caramel and decorate with your favorite toppings.

■ Rake a neighbor's leaves—Find a neighbor that would be blessed to have the leaves raked out of their yard.

■ Volunteer at a food bank/soup kitchen/homeless shelter—You will bless others, and probably leave blessed yourself!

■ Take packaged treats to a neighbor—this time of year can be lonely for a lot of people. Take treats to a neighbor with a fun note just to brighten their day.

■ Take a nature walk—This time of year can be so beautiful! Take a few minutes to enjoy nature and God's creation!

■ Make a pine-cone bird feeder—Help feed the birds with a simple pine cone, peanut butter, and bird seed. Watching them eat can bring hours of joy!

■ Jump in a pile of leaves—release your inner child! Make a big pile of leaves then jump in them as a family!

■ Decorate placemats for Thanksgiving dinner. Have your children make placemats for each person joining you.


■ Make blessing bags for the homeless—Pack bags with toiletries or other useful items to hand out when you see a homeless person and help spread a little cheer!

■ Take blankets and hot cocoa outdoors to star gaze—There is something about a cool, crisp night and looking at stars that is so peaceful! Take a few minutes out of your day to enjoy God's creation with the family!

■ Try a new soup recipe as a family—On a cold day, a great bowl of soup can feel like a warm hug. Find that recipe you have been wanting to try and make it together.

THANKSGIVING ADVENT PAPER CHAIN PROMPTS

1. Who's a family member you're thankful for?
2. What's one thing you love about your school?
3. List one thing you're thankful for in your bedroom.
4. Name one thing you're thankful for in your house that someone in a poorer country might not have.
5. What's one way medical or eye care has helped you?
6. What's one vacation you're thankful you've experienced?
7. Thank God for an animal in your life.
8. What is one place you are thankful for where you feel safe?
9. What is one thing you're thankful for that your government pays for through taxes?
10. What's one thing you're thankful for that makes you laugh?
11. What is one creative thing you enjoy that you're thankful for?
12. Thank God for a friend.
13. Thank God for a sibling.
14. Thank God for a teacher.
15. What's one of your utilities (water, electricity, trash pickup) you can thank God for?
16. What is an appliance in your home that makes your life easier, like a stove, fridge, or washing machine, that many people don't have around the world?
17. What are you thankful for about your education?
18. What do you love about the place where you live?
19. Of the people who serve your community, who are you thankful for?
20. What is one thing you love to do that you're thankful for?
21. What's one thing you own that you enjoy and are thankful for?
22. Thank God for an item of clothing.
23. Thank God for a skill you've learned (how to read, how to add, how to tie your shoes).
24. Thank God for a free service in your community (parks, libraries, a lake).



Oh give thanks to
the LORD, for he is
good, for his steadfast
love endures
forever!

PSALM 106:1

THANKSGIVING BINGO

When you've got an entire line of activities completed, see your parent for a small surprise!

Tell a parent something you're thankful for about them.

Write a note of appreciation.

Hug a teacher and tell them you're thankful for them.

Write a note to a pastor, appreciating them.

Thank someone who might not usually be thanked for what they do.

Thank someone who serves you in your community.

Thank a cashier.

Thank a janitor.

Thank a sibling for doing something nice.

Draw a picture for someone you care about.

Thank a friend.

Thank an adult who cooks for you.

Write a note to someone who doesn't know you appreciate them.

Bring a small treat to someone who regularly helps you.

Leave a pre-packaged treat in your mailbox, thanking your postal carrier.

Make a card for a parent.

Call a grandparent or relative and tell them you're thankful for them.

Do something to help with Thanksgiving dinner.

Do something that would show a person you love that you appreciate them.

Ask someone else what they are thankful for.

Think of something you've never thought to thank God for.

Thank God for something beautiful.

Thank God for something you have that many people don't.

Find something to be thankful for when things go wrong.

Find something you appreciate about a person you don't like very much.



Create Your Own Gratitude Jar or Poster!

Use this label to create your own gratitude jar or poster!

This is a great way to get the whole family involved in finding things you are grateful for each day. Do you think your family could fill the whole jar or poster this month with things you are grateful for? Or better yet, could you and your family fill a gratitude jar or poster each month for a full year?

