

10 Ways to Practice Gratitude With Your family This Thanksgiving

This month we are entering a season which, in the United States, has been devoted to gratitude and thanksgiving for 400 years! While the Thanksgiving holiday has had a long and varied history within the United States, the practice of devoting sacrificial offerings, prayers, songs and psalms and even entire days to thanksgiving within the Christian faith goes back to the Old Testament foundations of our faith.

When we think back on the generations of American Christians who came before us, we remember the challenges that inspired their celebration of Thanksgiving: perilous ocean voyages; a long-fought revolution; the horrors of slavery; a civil war dividing our country; and times of great suffering, deprivation, poverty, racial conflict, widespread illness and war. Yet the human heart manages to turn toward God and give thanks for His blessings. The fact that we are capable of thankfulness, and have a relationship with God in order to express it, are in themselves gifts from God.

How can your family create a practice of gratitude in this season of Thanksgiving, and prepare your hearts for the season of Advent that is just around the corner? Here are some ideas for devotional times, conversation starters and activities your family can use to draw close to God and foster thanksgiving in your hearts:

1. Turn your mourning into thanksgiving: Maybe you had a tough year. Inflation, political divisiveness, mental health challenges, loss of loved ones are all reasons one can lament. Psalm 30 is a psalm of thanksgiving. The last two verses say, "You changed my mourning into dancing; You took off my

sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. So that my glory may praise You and not be silent. O Lord, my God, forever will I give You thanks." (Ps. 30:12-13, NABRE)

2. Hide God's Word in your hearts: Choose a verse about thankfulness or about God's faithfulness to memorize.

3. Learn about the Israelite's altars of remembrance: In Joshua 4, the Israelites built some altars out of 12 stones for ceremonial sacrifices, but they also built a different type of altar: an altar of remembrance to remind themselves of important events that demonstrated God's faithfulness to them. Read Joshua chapter 4 with your family. Then think of 12 ways that God has been faithful to your family. Find 12 small, smooth stones and write the things you want to thank God for on them. Display them somewhere that your family can see them, and remember to thank God for His faithfulness.

4. Learn some Greek words: Did you know that the word Eucharist, another word for Communion or The Lord's Supper, comes from the Greek word eucharisteo? In Greek, the word means "to give thanks." The prefix eu- means "good" or "well." The root word 'charis' means "grace." Notice the places where it says that Jesus "gave thanks." What do you think He was giving thanks for?

5. Make a prayer journal: Make or decorate a journal to use for a prayer journal. Keeping a record of what we have prayed for helps us to look back over our lives and remember how God answered our prayers and showed His faithfulness and love for us. When you're using your journal, make sure you're doing three things: praising God, asking Him for what you need or want Him to do and thanking God for what He has already done for you.

6. Say grace: The longstanding Christian tradition of praying before meals, or "saying grace," traces back to a Jewish tradition we see reflected throughout Scripture, such as in

Deuteronomy 8, in Jesus' prayer when He fed the multitude in each of the Gospels, in Luke 24:13-35 and in the example of Paul in Acts 27. How did the people in these stories experience God's provision? How have you experienced God's provision? How does understanding God's provision affect how we pray?

7. Experience God through nature: Read Mathew 6:25-27, then take a walk or a hike and count the number of birds and animals you see. How does God provide for the animals He has created?

8. Tell your family's story: Sometimes it is easier to see God's faithfulness when we look back over past circumstances and can see how they worked out for our good, even if we might not have seen it at the time. How has God been faithful to your family? All Christians are adopted into God's family. Even if you are the first person in your family to become a Christian, all Christians have a lineage that stretches through Jesus all the way back to Adam and Eve. God always keeps His promises to His people today just as He did in the Bible!

9. Thank God and praise Him: The difference between thanks and praise is usually that we thank God for what He does for us, and we praise God for who He is. God's people do both! Celebrating what God has done for us and praising who He is helps spread the Gospel so that more and more people come to trust in Christ, and God is glorified everywhere.

10. Find a way to share your blessings: Generosity both flows from and results in thanksgiving. When we are thankful for God's blessings, it often leads us to share what we have with others, which leads them to gratitude. How can your family share your blessings with others? Look for opportunities throughout the year to be generous in your immediate community, and in other areas of the world. Involve your whole family in looking for opportunities to be generous!

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”—Colossians 3:17, NIV

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