

Your Favorite Ways to Draw Closer to God During Thanksgiving Weekend

This month we are entering a season which, in the United States, has been devoted to gratitude and thanksgiving for over 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 through it all to turn toward God and give thanks for His blessings. The fact that we are capable of thankfulness and of having 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:

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1. Daily Scripture Reading: Gather as a family to read and meditate on passages of the Bible that emphasize thanksgiving

and praise, such as Psalm 100, Psalm 136 and Colossians 3:17.

2. Gratitude Journal: Encourage each family member to keep a gratitude journal, writing down something they are thankful for each day. Share your entries with one another regularly.

3. Thanksgiving Prayer: Begin and end each day with a special prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for His blessings, guidance and love.

4. Acts of Kindness: Engage in acts of kindness and service as a family to express gratitude for what you have been given by giving back to the community, such as volunteering at a local shelter or food bank.

5. Family Thanksgiving Devotional: Choose a Christian-themed devotional or book focused on thanksgiving and read it together as a family, discussing the lessons and insights gained.

6. Share Your Blessings: Encourage children to share their blessings with those less fortunate by donating toys, clothes or food to charitable organizations.

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7. Thanksgiving Tree: Create a “Thanksgiving Tree” by placing a bare branch in a vase and have family members write things they are thankful for on paper leaves. Attach these leaves to the tree as a visual reminder of your blessings.

8. Worship and Praise: Attend a special Thanksgiving service at your church.

9. Invite Others: Extend an invitation to friends or neighbors who may be alone or in need during the Thanksgiving holiday to share in your celebration, spreading the spirit of gratitude and hospitality.

10. Family Thankfulness Tradition: Establish a unique family

tradition for Thanksgiving that centers around faith, such as each family member sharing a testimony of thanksgiving, reciting a favorite Bible verse or offering a special prayer of gratitude.

These activities will help your family grow closer to God and nurture a deep sense of thanksgiving in your hearts during the Thanksgiving holiday and throughout the year!

Patti Garibay is founder and executive director of American Heritage Girls, (AHG,), a national Christ-centered leadership and character development program. For nearly three decades, AHG has been at the forefront of countering the culture by leading girls and women to creating lives of integrity. Patti is the author of "Why Curse the Darkness When You Can Light A Candle?," a story of trust and obedience to inspire those who desire to make kingdom impact yet struggle with the fear of inadequacy.

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