



GRATITUDE

Showing appreciation by choosing attitudes and actions of thankfulness in all circumstances

“Thank you.” We often speak these two words of gratefulness without much thought. Whether casually interacting with a cashier or graciously accepting a compliment, it is easy to respond with a polite “thank you” out of a habit of common courtesy. While there is certainly nothing wrong with outwardly exhibiting good manners, godly gratitude arises from a habit deeply embedded within the heart.

When we equip our little ones with attitudes of appreciation and contentment, we persuade their hearts to evaluate life with a steady, balanced perspective.

Saturating one’s whole life, gratitude is a God-honoring habit deliberately learned and consciously practiced. Gratitude is among the most necessary and fundamental qualities of all faithful followers of Christ. When we equip our little ones with attitudes of appreciation and contentment, we persuade their hearts to evaluate life with a steady, balanced perspective. Therefore, we parents must embrace each and every opportunity to teach and nurture the attitude of humble gratitude within our children’s hearts.



Shepherding your child’s heart to reflect Christ-like gratitude will require a tremendous investment of your time and love.

Gratitude defined

Like all godly attributes, the quality of gratitude grows and flourishes through patient and consistent shepherding. A reliable definition for the godly trait of **gratitude** is “**showing appreciation by choosing attitudes and actions of thankfulness in all circumstances.**”

It is important to realize that gratefulness is not a natural response to our blessings and circumstances. It is an acquired response—a response that God fully expects us to learn and demonstrate ([Colossians 3:16-17](#)). Shepherding your child’s heart to reflect Christ-like gratitude will require a tremendous investment of your time and love. There is no substitute for either.



Together with your child's growing appreciation for God's goodness, he or she should also acquire appreciation for the kindnesses of others.



Shifting the focus

Much like stepping stones, nurturing our children's understanding of gratitude will progress with each carefully planned step forward. Beginning at a young age, our children need to be guided in moving away from focusing on their own feelings and desires and toward focusing on God's gifts and deeds of goodness ([Psalm 40:5](#)). By promoting your children's awareness of God's daily benefits, you lay the foundation for increasing their trust in God's unfailing love. With abiding respect for the Most High's generous hand permeating your home during your children's tender years, they will come to understand and appreciate the source of all blessings.

Together with your child's growing appreciation for God's goodness, he or she should also acquire appreciation for the kindnesses of others. Since human beings are inherently self-centered, it is essential to actively guide our children to look outside themselves ([Philippians 2:1-5](#)). While a sweet "thank you" begins the process of expressing gratefulness for young children, as they mature, the level of acknowledgment should deepen.

Cultivating positive thoughts and attitudes about simple pleasures and ordinary events trains your child to be cheerful in the moment and grateful for the gift of life.

Appreciation engages the heart. It can only be gained when one genuinely values the selfless effort expended by another. Proper gratitude requires consideration of the giver. Appreciation allows your children to express sincere gratitude—even for a gift they may not be thrilled about receiving—because they value the thoughtfulness and kindness of the giver. Showing appreciation toward others springs from respecting the effort involved in another's act of kindness.

Remember that we cannot force our children to be grateful. No matter how many times we may compel them to express thankfulness, they of their own free will ultimately choose their own attitudes. Gratitude is an attitude of choice! (The accounts of ancient Israel in the wilderness serve to emphasize this point.) Since your children's attitudes directly influence their perspectives, it is imperative that you prudently and thoughtfully shepherd their thinking toward attitudes and actions of thankfulness. Cultivating positive thoughts and attitudes about simple pleasures and ordinary events trains your child to be cheerful in the moment and grateful for the gift of life ([Proverbs 17:22](#); [Philippians 4:8](#)).



Gratitude during trials

Godly gratitude rightly belongs in *all* circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). True thankfulness does not fluctuate based on one's circumstances or possessions (Philippians 4:10-13). True thankfulness does not fluctuate based on emotions. True thankfulness steadily flows from a heart that appreciates God's continual goodness (Psalm 23:6; Hebrews 13:5).

Take time to reflect on previous challenges, recalling the lessons and gifts God provided through those adversities.

When difficult and disappointing times arise, it will require effort and wisdom to guide your child's understanding and attitudes. Do not allow your child to surrender to self-pity; your child needs to promote a habit of gratitude, regardless of the situation. Helping your child focus on the steadfast love of God is the perfect place to start (Psalm 100:5; John 3:16).

Take time to reflect on previous challenges, recalling the lessons and gifts God provided through those adversities (Psalm 103:2; Romans 8:28). Gratitude should encompass every experience within daily life (James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6).

The sin of ingratitude

The Scriptures are full of the abounding goodness and tender mercies of our loving Father and Savior. Prayers of thanksgiving, psalms of praise, and attitudes of gratefulness are recorded for our encouragement and instruction. The account of the 10 lepers in Luke's gospel illustrates how one's attitude directly influences one's actions, revealing the heart.

In Luke 17, we read of a group of men with leprosy—nine Jews and one Samaritan—loudly crying out to Jesus Christ for His merciful healing. Without a doubt, this group of lepers had heard of the extraordinary healings and miracles worked through Jesus Christ and they were hopeful to have their burden of separation removed. Upon hearing and seeing their condition, Christ compassionately instructed them to present themselves to the priest to be examined and pronounced clean of the impure disease before returning to their families. On the way, all the men were completely healed of their isolating affliction.

He glorified God by humbly offering praise and thanksgiving at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Knowing that he had received a miraculous healing, the Samaritan immediately returned, throwing himself at the feet of Jesus Christ. Although the Samaritan may not have realized that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, he did understand that He was a faithful servant of God. He glorified God by humbly offering praise and thanksgiving at the feet of Jesus Christ (Luke 17:11-16).

As the account continues, Jesus Christ asks several convicting questions: "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18).



The sin of ingratitude causes calluses to grow upon our hearts, hardening our hearts to God's presence and benefits within our daily lives.

It was not for Jesus' benefit that the other nine return to offer gratitude; it was for their personal benefit. When we express our thanksgiving to God, we affirm our absolute dependence upon Him. Acknowledging our appreciation for His blessings, we draw closer to the giver of all good gifts ([James 1:17](#)). We must never value the gift more than the giver. Gratitude should become an increasing, defining mark of our character ([Ephesians 5:20](#)). The sin of ingratitude causes calluses to grow upon our hearts, hardening our hearts to God's presence and benefits within our daily lives.

The account of the 10 lepers exposes the sorrowful reality of personal ingratitude to God. Have we ever called out for help, gone forward in faith, received God's uplifting help, only to go happily on our way, ignorant of our ingratitude? This passage of Scripture also illustrates that a grateful heart is discerning, a grateful heart is humble, and a grateful heart is rare. Take the time to share the complete narrative in [Luke 17:11-19](#) with your children. Discuss the importance of offering praise and thanksgiving to God for His rich blessings and goodness. Teach your children how to offer prayers of thanksgiving by reading psalms of gratitude while praying with them. Make a deliberate effort to return to God in prayer, praising Him for His mercies and prolific blessings ([Psalm 63:3](#)).

The unadulterated word of God must not only be central in our homes, it must also be fully applied every day.

A stronger generation

We all love our children. We want the best for them. We want them to succeed in life. But if we are not careful, we might try to fill these parental feelings with overindulgence. This can actually deprive our children of the perspective and skills required for expressing genuine appreciation.

Parents living in affluent nations should carefully consider what is valued within their homes ([Colossians 3:1-2](#)). Overindulgence and covetous comparisons restrain the growth of gratitude. We should ask ourselves, *Am I comparing my family to my neighbor's family? Am I attempting to provide my children with unnecessary material things just to have them keep up with others? Am I choosing things over truth?* (See [Philippians 2:21](#) and [Luke 12:15](#).) For the benefit of our children, we need to *honestly* evaluate our personal level of gratitude. It is very difficult to teach what we do not internalize and exemplify.

Conscientious parents strive to equip their children to become a spiritually stronger generation. We are duty-bound to do our best to prepare a generation of faithful servants that diligently seeks to root its thoughts, speech and deeds within the sound, immovable words of the Almighty God—producing a life overflowing in thankfulness ([Deuteronomy 6:7; 11:19; Colossians 2:6-7](#)). We must strive to actively impart biblical knowledge and principles to our children so that they retain God's truth ([Deuteronomy 4:9](#)). We must guard against and resist the temptation to choose the convenient path ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)). The unadulterated word of God must not only be central in our homes, it must also be fully applied every day. As a result, our children will learn that God the Father and Christ our Savior are worthy of our unceasing gratitude and praise ([Ephesians 1:3](#)).



A family should be neither quick to forget its blessings nor slow to forget its hardships.

Be a family that counts its blessings!

As simple as it sounds, start listing your blessings. Gratefulness cannot coexist with selfishness! What do you appreciate about each family member? What do you appreciate about your everyday life? What do you appreciate about God's creation? What do you appreciate about God's promises? Each day brings countless opportunities to feel thankful.

A family should be neither quick to forget its blessings nor slow to forget its hardships. Some life lessons cannot be learned in prosperity, but rather only through adversity ([Romans 5:3-5](#)). While not denying the struggles, model a willingness to accept every circumstance in life with an attitude of thankfulness. Do not be a family that fails to mark goodness within its daily life.



Be a family that shows gratitude!

Genuine thankfulness leads to action. A cheerful smile, a pleasant countenance, and a warm tone of voice is a great way to begin showing gratitude to God and others. Since your child will receive gifts, it is important to teach him or her to look the giver in the eye and say "thank you." Your child can additionally draw a picture or send a thank-you note to acknowledge the kindness.

It is vital that your child learns that he or she needs and benefits from the goodness of others every day, no matter how big or small the kindness. Teach your child how to give a sincere compliment to someone else. Thank your child for completing chores around the house. Everyone needs to feel valued and appreciated, even for doing what should be done. When your children sow the seeds of gratitude within everyday life, they reap the blessings of joy, generosity, contentment, peace, hope, and so much more ([2 Corinthians 9:6-11](#)). Do not be a family that neglects the action of expressing appreciation.

Be a family that gives!

One of the most beautiful aspects of gratitude is that a grateful heart is motivated to reciprocate kindness. As attitudes of gratitude spread within your home, actions of generosity will follow ([Galatians 6:7-10](#)). Your child will truly internalize the meaning of Christ's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" ([Acts 20:35](#)).

Since it is difficult to focus on oneself when giving to others, find opportunities to care for others without any expectation of return. Teach your child to be generous with what God has given your family. Give a word of encouragement to a friend. Give a smile to a stranger (exercising wisdom). Give a helping hand to a neighbor. Give your mercy to an enemy. Give your time to your family. Do not be a family that withholds a generous hand. "Give, and it will be given to you: a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your bosom" ([Luke 6:38](#)).



Repentance and forgiveness should be modeled, expected and embraced within our homes.

Be a family that forgives!

Our example is the most influential teaching tool within our home. How do you respond to your failings? Do you apologize? Seeking forgiveness removes barriers. When your children fail to treat others with kindness and concern, teach (and expect) them to apologize for their misconduct. Work with an older child to be specific when confessing a wrongdoing.

How do you respond to offenses? Do you forgive? Extending forgiveness guards against resentment. Work with your child to understand that everyone makes mistakes and poor choices. Have your child reflect on times when forgiveness was extended to him or her ([Psalm 130:3](#)). Explain that focusing on our hurts and disappointments keeps us from focusing on others. Gratitude is a powerful weapon against bitterness, hatred and revenge. Repentance and forgiveness should be modeled, expected and embraced within our homes ([Ephesians 4:31-32](#); [Romans 12:14-21](#)). Do not be a family that holds grudges.

Every day is brimming with situations to educate your child's heart in God's kindnesses, benefits and mercies.

Be a family that is God-centered!

Sincere, humble gratitude has an amazing way of putting life into its proper perspective. When your child stands in awe of God's love, power and majesty, he or she can properly interpret experiences and opportunities. Every day is brimming with situations to educate your child's heart in God's kindnesses, benefits and mercies. Our task is to frame those occasions within biblical truths and principles.



Contrast the enriching blessings of obedience to the painful consequences of disobedience ([Deuteronomy 28](#)). Highlight the gift of godly wisdom. Root your conversation in the Word of God. Make prayer and Bible study a regular part of your day. Let Scripture guide choices. During times of concern, seek God's direction as a family. Make gratitude a *way of life* within your home. Do not be a family that overlooks God.

Let's go on a treasure hunt

Let's face it: we all become discouraged. Life can easily become overwhelming, even despite our best efforts to choose to be grateful. The best remedy for your family is found within Scripture.



Share the parables in [Matthew 13:44-46](#). Read [Matthew 6:21](#) and the companion scripture in [Luke 12:34](#). Search the Scriptures for God's promises of loving-kindness ([Proverbs 2:1-5](#)).

Periodically declare to your family, "Let's go on a treasure hunt!" Read about creation and start listing all the amazing things often overlooked within His creation: gravity, sounds, colors, personalities. Marvel at God's power and creativity. Illustrate verses that provide word pictures of God's goodness. Review God's promises to uphold His people ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). Instill a proper fear of the Almighty God. A grateful heart seeks to view life from God's perspective.

Although the process of nurturing a grateful attitude within your child requires an attentive and firm commitment now, the benefits will last for eternity.

Lifelong benefits

Keeping a careful watch on your son's or daughter's attitude is essential. Do not allow him or her to coddle a self-centered attitude. Forbid pouting, moping, moodiness! As mentioned earlier, shepherding our child's heart to reflect Christ-like gratitude will require a tremendous investment of our time and love. There is no substitute for either. We absolutely *must* do the work. A self-absorbed child becomes a self-absorbed adult. Selfishness is not outgrown; it must be overcome. But the rewards of cultivating gratitude within our children far exceed the effort it requires.

A heart of gratefulness cannot be achieved overnight. With each child maturing at his or her own pace, it is an acquired attribute that gradually increases through your patient teaching and consistent modeling. More than a rote "thank you," your child needs to discover and understand that genuine gratitude produces joy and contentment in all situations. Although the process of nurturing a grateful attitude within your child requires an attentive and firm commitment now, the benefits will last for eternity. With God's mercy and insight, you can succeed in shepherding your child to choose gratitude.



TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Here are a few suggestions for establishing gratitude as a defining attribute within your family:

Write out a clear, workable **definition of gratitude** and display it prominently.

Write out one or **two scriptures** that will actively guide your family's attitudes and actions towards gratitude.

Read the psalms of David and record all the **blessings** that God liberally grants to the righteous.

Download and print the file "**The Ten Lepers**" and display it.

Keep a family "**Gratitude Journal**" or "**Treasure Chest**" to hold all the "treasure" you discover on your treasure hunts. Encourage each family member to actively contribute blessings on a regular basis.

Be a family that chooses **God-honoring gratitude!**



7 GUARD AND GUIDE SCRIPTURES

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. —Ecclesiastes 1:8

This scripture addresses the human heart's insatiable need to experience the next new and exciting thing—the newest book, the newest movie, the newest toy. If your child is certain that his or her happiness depends upon obtaining just *one more thing*, this is a wonderful verse to use to teach contentment. Contentment is not achieved from accumulating our wants, but rather from subtracting from our desires (1 Timothy 6:6-8). Contentment produces the fruit of gratitude. Discuss and emphasize the blessings that come from *not* having certain circumstances or possessions. Help your child understand that what he or she may perceive as a genuine need (when it is not) is nothing more than an illusion.

Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Ephesians 5:20

This verse emphasizes the need to live life circumspectly. Since “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17), our praise and thanksgiving belongs fully to our Creator. Although a person can ignore his or her dependence on the Eternal, it does not change the fact that one is completely dependent upon Him and His daily goodness.

When we withhold thanksgiving from the Eternal, we declare ourselves to be fools—denying His presence (Romans 1:21-22). We must be on guard against taking God's generosity for granted, failing to give any thought to the giver (Psalm 10:4). With each accomplishment—big or small—guide your child to rightly acknowledge God's presence and benefit. By your humble example, lead your children to live a life that is overflowing with thanksgiving toward our heavenly Father.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This verse declares the refreshing outcomes produced from choosing attitudes of gratitude! When we are grateful, our disposition changes. Gratitude produces joy: “rejoice always.” Gratitude produces praise toward God: “pray without ceasing.” Gratitude produces abundant thankfulness: “in everything give thanks.”



FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

We also recommend these additional (but certainly not exhaustive) scriptural passages that are relevant to the topic of gratitude:

God's goodness (Psalm 107:8)

A psalm of praise (Psalm 92:1-5)

Focus on the positive (Philippians 4:8)

The fruits of ingratitude (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Pure and undefiled religion (James 1:27)

Proper perspective (Ephesians 5:15-20)

Be thankful (Colossians 3:15)