



## 7 Ideas to Make “Thanks” Last Longer Than Thanksgiving

Already looking up hot deals, huh? Isn't it ironic that Thanksgiving Day begins the biggest shopping season of the year? Over the meal, we thank God “for all He’s given us,” “for family,” “for good food”... but before the table gets cleared, the online shopping ensues. We don’t want to miss out on buying what moments ago we convinced everyone we were content without.

Somehow when it’s 50% percent off it’s a different story.

What if we stopped treating gratitude like green bean casserole—something to dish out once a year? Not that we aren’t thankful at all throughout the year, but is it the lifestyle it should be? Would a consistent emphasis on gratitude change the dynamics, attitudes, even the noise, in your family?

Here are seven ways to emphasize gratitude in your home all year long.

### **1. Don’t tolerate complaint.**

Growing up, we ate whatever Mom put on the dinner table. If she made buckwheat groats (true story), we ate it. If she made broccoli *and* salad, we ate it. We were expected to obey our parents and be thankful for the food we were given. Because of their intolerance for picky eaters, my sister and I grew to enjoy *almost* every food.

However, I’ve been known for complaining about what we didn’t have on the table. I wanted bread. I wanted chicken with sauce. One Sunday afternoon, my sister and I went on strike singing “We’re going on strike! No chicken, no turkey, no quinoa, no broccoli!” I wanted food that non-paleo, non-sugar-free families ate.

Yet my parents stood firm and called me out on my complaining attitude. Because of their early expectation of a grateful heart, whenever I complained, I knew deep down it was disrespectful.

When the noise of whining escalates, try to nip it in the bud. Even with your older children, let them know in a loving way that you will not tolerate complaining in your home.

## **2. Live out what you expect.**

When I was a child, my family enjoyed ambling through model homes on empty afternoons. It was fun to analyze each design, deciding what we liked or didn't about the floorplans and identifying which room we would pick for ourselves.

But without fail, each time we returned to our own home my mom would brightly remark, "Well, what a lovely home this is!" She never wanted us to grow discontent with what God had blessed us with.

Do you complain about your outdated kitchen? Do you gripe over your lack of shoe options?

If you don't set the example of gratitude, don't expect it of your kids.

## **3. Inspire awe of God.**

We like to ask "why?" It's one of the first questions humans learn. But when we don't know why we should be thankful, it's pretty impossible to muster up gratitude. *What is there to give thanks for? Who am I supposed to thank?*

Psalm 100:4-5 reads: "Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." This passage miraculously satisfies both questions: *Who should we thank? God. Why should we thank him? Because He's always good, always loving, and always faithful.*

The more intimately we know someone, the more grateful we tend to be when we receive gifts from them. For example, I care far more when a friend buys me a book she knows I'll love, than if I win a ruffled gift card. I may be thankful for the gift card, but the book means more because of who bought it.

Sing songs, read books, and memorize Scripture with your kids that clearly communicate the nature of God. Saturate your family with knowledge of His nature and see how gratitude follows.

#### **4. Go outside.**

Nothing reminds me more of God's beauty than standing outside—listening to the geese or gazing at Orion. My mind is never more clogged with discontentment than when I've been pent up inside, cloistered off from the beauty of nature.

Seeing, smelling, listening to beautiful things reminds me of God's beauty and reminds me to thank Him for His creation. Verbalize your praise to your family. "Isn't the orange on that butterfly incredible? I'm so glad God thought to design that."

#### **5. Remind yourselves what God's already done.**

The issue with gratitude is that it's not natural. Although we know God gives us good things, dry seasons can quench our appreciation. It's easy to fall into amnesia about the times God extended mercy and grace.

One of the best things you can do to make your home surge with gratitude is to reflect. Read through old journals. Think back to when God eased your anxiety or curbed your temptation to argue. Recalling how God's character has been displayed in your life will remind you of what He can do in your future too.

#### **6. Remember Christ.**

The Apostle Paul knew all about the difficulty of gratitude. For goodness' sake, he sat in a Roman prison while writing his letter to the church in Philippi! Yet he shared, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12-13).

Paul's mood didn't ebb and flow with the ease of his life but remained rooted in the strength of Christ. Neither was his supernatural contentment due to personality; his satisfaction on Christ anchored him in all seasons.

In spaces where gratitude least seems to fit, remind your family you still have Christ. And *still have Christ* is not a slight against Him as if He were our last and least-profitable resort. Nothing is greater than knowing Him, whether we enjoy wealth or suffer loss.

#### **7. Pray**

At the end of the day, it's your kids' choice whether or not to be thankful. You can pull out all the biblical tips, and your children might still persist in complaining. It's a daily battle. So spend actual time in your day in prayer, and ask God to make your children content with what they have.

You don't always have to pray silently about these things. In the car, after a temper tantrum, or around the dinner table, feel free to insert a teaching moment by praying for the contentment of their hearts.

Keep in mind that the idyllic "thankful home" does not exist. Even families of Christian leaders wrestle with the same selfishness and discontentment plaguing everyone else. But we can't throw up our arms because of perfection's impracticality. Like everything else in our lives, we must obey what Scripture asks of us, knowing the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.

What can you do to make thankfulness last longer than your holiday meal?

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