

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

How many times have you reminded your children to say “Thank you” when they’ve received something? More than you can count, right? Why do you do it? Part of the answer is that it’s polite, but at the heart of it is gratitude. We want people to know that we appreciate and are grateful when they help us or give us something. Our two authors this month help us go beyond the “Say thank you” level of gratitude. They remind us who the giver of all good gifts is and offer ways to focus on instilling a grateful heart in ourselves and our children.

—Nicole Balza

HOW CAN WE INSTILL GRATITUDE IN OUR CHILDREN?

I HAVE THREE children. I’ve tried to explain to them just how much I love them, but, as any parent knows, words fail in this case. Among the many things I wish for my children is that they grow up to be grateful to God for his provision, but even more so for his grace. I’ll tell you about some of the practical things my husband and I do to encourage gratitude, but in the end it all comes down to Jesus. The more our children understand their sinfulness and Jesus’ great love for them, the more grateful they’ll be. So we teach them God’s Word. God’s words don’t fail!

In practice, instilling gratitude in our children simply looks like daily discipleship. Dictionary.com says that “to disciple,” meaning teach or train, is an obsolete verb. But as Christian parents, we need to bring it back. As you disciple your children to know and be like Christ, I encourage you to look around you, look outside yourself, and look in the Bible.

Look around you. Your own life is full of examples of how God has forgiven you, provided for you, and been faithful to you. Talk about how thankful you are for these things. Around Thanksgiving we bring out our thankful box or pumpkin and jot down our blessings. The tradition of listing our blessings around the Thanksgiving dinner table is wonderful, but discipling is a year-round activity. When I lose my temper, I share that I struggle with the sin of anger and how thankful I am for Jesus’ forgiveness. We say a prayer of thanks when we avoid an accident on the freeway. We talk about how cool it is that God is providing for our church to build a new sanctuary and school. While many members are giving their money for this building, God is still faithfully meeting their needs.

Look outside yourself. To be truly thankful for what you have, it’s helpful to look outside your own small circle. Just keeping up with the daily news as a family helps us realize all for which we have to be thankful. Thank God that he forgives, provides for, and is faithful to his church all around the world.

Look in the Bible. Read God’s Word. By yourself. With your children. With your spouse. With a Bible study group. At your church. It’s full of examples of how God has forgiven sinners, provided for his children, and been faithful in keeping his promises. We talk as a family about the particular accounts we’re reading and how thankful we are that this is the kind of God we serve! My seventh grader does her Bible reading on the drive to school and often reads out loud or asks questions while the younger two listen.

It’s my privilege as a mom to remind my children over and over that Jesus lived, died, and rose for them and covers their sin with the white robe of his perfection. No matter what they do, they are forgiven. Yet they

HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

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still sin. Over and over. And it's my duty to teach them right from wrong and remind them over and over when they don't live up to God's standards. It's in understanding their sinfulness that they grow to be truly thankful for that robe of righteousness. See the cycle? It's the same one I'm constantly in if I'm in God's Word being reminded of my sin and God's grace every day. Over and over.



Laura Schaefer; her husband, Will; and their three children are members at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wisconsin.

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"KIDS TODAY just don't appreciate what they have!"

I remember the first time I made that statement out loud. I was immediately shocked by my own words. I had officially turned into a curmudgeon.

It is a bit ironic how each generation, when they reach a certain age, suddenly notices how spoiled and entitled the next generation is.

Over 2,000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Plato supposedly quipped to his young protégé Socrates, "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority. . . . They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers."

As wise King Solomon said, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Parents throughout history have struggled to teach their children to be grateful and appreciate what they have. Living in 21st-century America, our task is complicated by the many advances of modern technology we enjoy. Our children have every form of information and entertainment at their fingertips. They are growing up in a world in which Amazon delivers to their front door, Walmart does their shopping for them, and their cars drive themselves.

So how do we as Christian parents avoid raising entitled children and instill in them a spirit of gratitude to God? Here are a few suggestions:

Learn to say no. Just as God in his love and wisdom doesn't give us everything we ask for, so we should understand that it's loving to say no. We often want to give our kids a happy, fun-filled childhood, but we have to understand that giving children everything they want only spoils them.



Teach them to work. When my son was 11 years old, he asked us for a Nintendo Switch. Though we had the money to buy it, my wife and I talked about it. We felt he needed to learn the value of the money we often spent on him.

So we brainstormed with him about how he could earn the money to buy it himself. He ended up starting his own pecan business, picking and peeling pecans to sell. Within a few months, he had earned enough to buy his Switch.

Broaden their perspective. One of the reasons children fail to appreciate how richly God has blessed them is that they don't have the perspective of those who have less than they do. Visiting or volunteering regularly at a local nursing home or food pantry will help open your children's eyes to how abundantly God has blessed them.

Model gratitude. They say that the greatest sermon children can ever hear is the life of their parents. Live a life of gratitude and generosity. Talk to your children regularly about how Jesus has blessed you more than you deserve. Keep a notebook next to their bed and each night write down with them one blessing for which they are thankful. Teach them to thank God in prayer at mealtime and before bed.

With your words and actions, show your children what it means to have a grateful heart.



Andrew Schroer and his wife, Clariza, are raising two children in Edna, Texas. He is the author of *364 Days of Thanksgiving*, a devotional journal available at nph.net.

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