



Positive Parenting
December 2013

GREED VS GRATITUDE: IT'S YOUR CHOICE!

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And **be thankful**. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ* dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and **with gratitude in your hearts** sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.*

Colossians 3:15-16

Will you and your family have “gratitude in your hearts” this season? How will others recognize your thankfulness and your generosity? Or will this be another Christmas season in which the insatiable desire for more and more stuff squeezes out the impulse to be grateful?

So, greed or gratitude? Which will it be for you and yours this Advent? Parents and grandparents worry about the children they love becoming greedy and grouchy, dissatisfied and disinterested in others. It's easy to blame that weighted choice on our rampantly consumerist culture. Red and green trimmings festooned the stores before kids were back to school. Ads, intended to make us dissatisfied with anything other than the wares they hawk, bombard us day and night. We are exhausted. We spend too much. We eat too much. We sleep too little. We race around to too many events. The season in which we are called to celebrate God's greatest gift to us in Jesus becomes an endurance contest, a season we yearn to have over.

How will you push back greed this season and usher in a season of gratitude and generosity?

- Make family time a priority. Set aside time each day simply to be together, to let the others know how much you love them, how thankful you are for them.
- Model gratitude. Say thank you to children who help, to the checker at the grocery store, to delivery men and women, to people ringing bells for the Salvation Army, to those who plow snow on your street. Let kids see your example.
- Set aside some money this year to give to a cause that reflects the light of Christ into the world. It can be \$5 or \$50 or \$150. The amount doesn't matter, but let

everyone contribute. Then, as a family, choose the cause that reflects your family's core values.

- Instead of giving gifts this year to those who really do not need or appreciate more stuff, give the gift of time - a walk, a cup of coffee, a ride to an appointment, a visit, a child's drawing, tickets to an event, babysitting so a stressed parent can breathe, or give a family heirloom and the story behind it.
- Give experiences or lessons or education that open the world for a child.
- Listen to music that soothes the soul and celebrates the gift of Jesus.
- Don't try to condense Christmas into two days. Call a friend in January, when you have time to focus on the gift of that friendship. Spread it out. Savor.

This is the perfect time to remember and retell a Native American story. A grandfather explained to his grandson that every person has two wolves battling inside of them. "One is Evil - It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is Good - It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?" His grandfather replied simply, "The one you feed."

And so it is for all of us. This season, for all of the children you love, may you feed gratitude and generosity, not greed. And may the peace of Christ rule in your hearts!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Make a list of things for which your family gives thanks. Write each item on a slip of paper and make a paper chain out of the slips. Tear one off each day of Advent. Light a candle. Gather your family. Read the description of the thing for which your family is giving thanks today. Go around the circle and talk about how this is a gift to each of you. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving.
2. Put out a basket and invite your family to place something in it each day that your family would like to give to someone else who might need it more. Consider toys, books, clothes, food, pots and pans, a backpack, a gift card. Be creative. Look at all you have through the eyes of generosity. Plan how you will give these things to those who need them. Do it. Together. Afterward, gather and talk about how it made you feel to give.
3. Catch your kids being grateful and appreciative and thankful. Describe how they have expressed gratitude to another person or to God. Tell them how much you appreciate this character trait in them. Buy them thank you cards and have a family time when you sit down to write notes of thanks for gifts, for time spent together, for special kindnesses this year.
4. When your child is afflicted with greed, the green-eyed monster, and has trouble sharing with others, being grateful for what they already have, or wanting everything they see, reassure them that "You are better than that." Tell them a story about a time they were generous and really good at sharing. Predict that they will soon be generous and grateful again.



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5. Place a manger with an infant Jesus in it under your Christmas tree. Have a basket of straw next to it. Whenever anyone in your family does something loving, giving, generous, and kind, something that reminds you of God's gift of Jesus, give that person a piece of the straw to add to the manger. Watch how your family's love cradles the Christ Child.