



SAYING “THANK YOU”

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
His steadfast love endures forever!

Psalm 118:1

As a child, I thought it was so unfair of my parents to insist that I write a thank you note before I played with a toy, read a new book, or spent money I had just been given. Today, I am so grateful that my parents instilled an attitude of gratitude and encouraged me to express it. But they did more than insist that the kids do it; they wrote thank you notes and said “thank you,” too. It is a wonderful legacy and, of course, I have tried to instill the same attitude and behaviors in my children and grandchildren.

In a culture rife with a sense of entitlement, an arrogance that implies that “the world owes me everything,” it is wonderfully refreshing to hear children, youth, and adults say, “thank you.” But how will we teach it?

The most effective things you can do to assure that the child you love will express gratitude are:

- **MODEL** saying “thank you” to a friend who brings you dinner, to the store clerk who waits on you, to your child who pitched in and helped.
- **Make** saying “thank you” an **EXPECTATION** for your child. Before friends come for a birthday party, gently remind your child to say “thank you,” no matter what the gift is.
- **EXPLAIN** why being thankful is an important value in your family.
- **TALK** about the people in your child’s life for whom you are grateful - family, friends, teachers, coaches, neighbors, and friends at church. Encourage your child to express gratitude, naming specific things they appreciate,
- **CATCH** your child expressing gratitude and affirm the child’s behavior.
- Let your child overhear you **TELL** someone else what the child did!
- When your child forgets, remind them of a time they expressed gratitude and predict a future time when they will remember.

Please don’t force your child to say, “thank you,” which often sounds forced and insincere, or shame your child in front of others for not having thanked.

Make sure that you let your child know how thankful you are that your child was born and is in your family. Say it out loud. Drop a note in your child’s lunch. Put a note on the pillow of a beloved. Write a card and tuck it into a suitcase or duffle bag before your child leaves for camp. “I am so glad that you were born! I’m so glad you are in our family!” It’s also a great birthday greeting. And it works, whether your child arrived in your family by birth, adoption, marriage, or foster care.

One powerful practice for instilling gratitude in children is to share the things for which we are grateful every evening at dinner or before we tuck children into bed. Take turns. Let every prayer you pray together include naming all of the things for which you thank God.

Stumped or having a hard time getting started? Try these:

- Go for a walk together, looking for the things you are really glad that God made.
- Look around your home or child's room, until your child sees something they really appreciate. Name it.
- Remember the people who have shaped you, provided opportunities for you, and supported you to become the person you are. Tell your child the story of these people. Let them hear you call or visit the person to thank them for the role they played in your life. Let them read a note or email or text you send, if they don't live close enough for a visit. If that person is no longer alive, thank God for them in your evening prayers.
- Consider the hard things with which you are not currently dealing - illness, homelessness, violence, estrangement from family or friends. Give thanks for health and home, peace and loving relationships.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Write a family thank you note to someone who has done something for which you are all grateful. Have a child draw a picture and write a note on the other side. If children cannot yet write, have them dictate and have an adult write it down.
2. When you write a thank you note, email, or text, let your child know what you are doing and why. Consider reading it aloud before you send it.
3. When your child does something to help, thank them, even if it is something you asked them to do. Tell them why you are grateful.
4. When your child expresses thanks, tell them how much you appreciate their gratitude.
5. Make "thank you, God" part of all of your prayers and table graces. Remember to thank God for the best gift of all - the love we know in Jesus Christ.