

STAYING THANKFUL

“Gratitude isn’t only a celebration when good things happen. Gratitude is a declaration that God is good no matter what happens.”
— Ann Voskamp

Some moments need to be savored: the look of surprised delight from the curly-headed 4-year-old as she hugs her aging grandfather, showering him with spontaneous giggles and an exuberant “Thank you! Thank you!!” But we know that it is possible for that joyous moment to be quickly replaced by tears of disappointment or sighs of frustration when expectations and reality don’t match. And for some, disappointment and an ungrateful heart can become a life-long habit. God offers a different option – an enduring option – to us and our children. He invites us to a life of gratitude, staying thankful.



But, rejoicing in what God brings to us, rather than our own preferences, isn’t our default. Gratitude is not a natural posture. While only the Spirit of God can create gratitude in us and in our children, it’s our responsibility to pursue it. As he transforms us, staying thankful will become an abiding condition, not a passing thought. Staying thankful becomes an unshakable part of who we are as we fix our focus on the reality of God’s presence and how he continually cares for us.

Gratitude is not found momentarily at the end of difficulty. If it is a part of who we are, it will carry us through the middle of hard things. Gratitude and stress cannot co-exist, but gratitude and peace cohabitate beautifully. Scripture tells us, “Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18) And that is echoed in Philippians 4:6, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.” We can give thanks to God through anything, because our God works through everything.

Inviting our children into practices of gratitude does more than just make them more pleasant to be around. It sets them up for a life of joy. Practices of gratitude fight back against the culture of entitlement that surrounds our children. Staying thankful brings songs of joy to drown out the clamor of “I deserve better.” Gratitude is the light that shines from a humble heart and displaces discontentment. Staying thankful reinforces the habit of yielding to the choices of God rather than demanding the right to make our own selections. Joy is the fruit of pursuing thankful life practices.

Being joyful isn’t what makes you grateful. Being grateful is what makes you joyful. (Ann VosKamp) Practice staying thankful – experience joy!

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INVITATIONS TO ENGAGE

Start the conversation with your child!

“Come and sit with me a minute. I want to share a secret about what happens when we practice staying thankful.”

EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6 years old)

Every morning you can choose a crayon and declare that to be your Staying Thankful Color for the day. Throughout the day watch for things to be thankful for that are that color. Every time you encounter something to be thankful for, stop and talk to God about it. Sing a thankful song or make up a thankful dance to express your gratitude to God. At the end of the day give God praise for those colorful reminders of his love for you. At the end of the week use your box of crayons to remind you of what you have been thankful for.

ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10 years old)

You will need to draw a big heart in the middle of this page with a pencil to give an outline for a Wordle. You can erase the outline once we have filled up the heart with words. Think about ways that God shows love to you. Then write about things you are thankful for. You can write in different directions or in different sized letters or with different colors. You can write around the edge or through the middle or in different kinds of writing. You can draw little pictures if you want. I'm going to read I Thessalonians 5:18 to you slowly while you fill up the Wordle with things you are thankful for. “Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” All week long we can add more hearts to the page to help us stay thankful.

PRETEEN/EARLY ADOLESCENT (10-14 years old)

I know you know about math equations, but I'd like to give you an equation for life. Write this equation across the top of your page: Watchful + Thankful = Joyful. Think about that equation while I read this Word from God from Philippians 4:6, “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.” God shows us his love in so many ways, we just need to watch for him. Underneath that equation write the word THANKFUL on your paper with lots of space between the letters. Under the letter, write a list of things that start with T that you are thankful for. Then maybe you can think of some things you are thankful for that start with the other letters. To help us stay thankful, you can add to this word picture throughout the week. Let's read the verse again slowly and ask God to remind us of things to add to the list.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

[Take the Joy Dare](#) (free printable) by Ann Voskamp

Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena and illustrated by Christian Robinson