

## **Keeping “Thankfulness” In Thanksgiving At Meal Time**

In our Family Discipleship Seminar, Eleanor and I stress that one of the most important events in the life of a Christian family is the evening sit-down dinner. It is here that the family interacts over a protracted period. It is here that mom and dad can get a feel for the behavior and social skills of their children. It is here that the father can lead the family in prayer, reading and discussion of the Word of God. It is here that the father gets a good idea of the spiritual state of his children. It is here that the mother can observe the interaction of the children with each other. It is here that the father can model his role of spiritual leadership and the mother hers of submission and respect for this leadership. It is also here that day after day, week after week, month after month, year upon year that the children stop, are quiet, heads bowed, eyes closed and learn the importance of giving thanks to God. Thankfulness can be learned in many ways. The most difficult for children, though, is from a purely instinctual reference point. Lectures help very little in this area. Scripture memory, though very important, will not stand on its own. This spiritual discipline must be accompanied by the father and mother as role model and the family as actively engaged in thankfulness as a lifestyle. The best environment by far for this is the evening meal.

Many parents tell me that they are dismayed by how unthankful their children are. As I observe their homes and families I see little reason for the children to be thankful. Their rooms are filled with unused toys. They have no chores or responsibilities in terms of the upkeep of the house. They choose what they eat, what they wear, what time they go to bed and what entertains them. The family life of the home resembles more a co-operative or dormitory than a home. The family does not eat together. Each member of the family eats on their own schedule, perhaps in a room, in front of the TV, at a kitchen counter or at the table. Dad eats when he gets home, the children eat on the basis of their school, sports and social schedule and mom coordinates this as best she can.

For children to learn “thankfulness” it will take more than a few Sunday School or holiday projects. First and foremost, then, I would ask that the parents evaluate as to whether there will be any connect between these teaching projects and the everyday life of the family. The first, and I emphasize, the first change in the modern Christian family must be a return to the family sit-down evening dinner, where the father leads the family in a daily prayer of thanks. Apart from this, I offer little hope in the long-term benefits of a family lifestyle of disconnected teachings and projects from the day-to-day experience of the child in the context of his family.

Having said that, I present to you Thanksgiving in the context of the family sit-down meal. Again, it should be noted that these projects are to be done in the context of a family that regularly eats evening meals together. These meals should begin with a prayer of Thanksgiving and include family Bible reading and discussions led by the father as the spiritual head of the family.

### **I. The Thanksgiving Basket**

#### **A. Have a Thanksgiving Basket at the table.**

1. This is a small basket filled with Bible verses. (You may write your own or print and cut the verses from the list provided at the end of these projects.)
2. These are various themes: Salvation; Protection; Blessing, Etc. Each person takes a verse and prays a prayer of thanks based on the teaching in the verse. These are then placed back in the basket and repeated at the next meal.

#### **B. Variations**

1. Share something from Thankful Book;
2. Share one thing you are thankful for concerning the person to your left;
3. Each person prays a sentence prayer of Thankfulness;
4. Each person writes a Thank You Card before the meal begins. At the mealtime prayer, each person prays a prayer of thanksgiving for this person and then you mail these cards the next day.

5. Texting, cell phones and phone calls are off limits at our dinner table. Make this nuisance a blessing during the Thanksgiving Season. At the close of each family meal have each member of the family pray a prayer of thanks for a relative or staff person at church for which you are particularly thankful and then send them a “Thank You Text”.
6. Avoid prayers memorized by rote. The most insincere “thanks” I receive are those said by rote. Teach your children to talk to God as their heavenly Father and to give Him the thanks that a Father is due.

## **II. Take a gripe break**

- A. Make it-off limits to say anything negative or unthankful at the dinner table during Thanksgiving. If a person does (including you) the other members of the family may chime in “Thanksgiving Check” Then the person caught must go around and say something about each person at the table that he is thankful for.
- B. Eleanor once told me during the Thanksgiving/Christmas Holidays, “I am not going to let the world rob me of my joy.” It seems that the media takes a perverse pleasure during this time of the year in relaying to us every sad story, every wicked sin and every dark event, which is used to change a day of Thanksgiving into guilt and regret. To combat this for the month between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we lay aside newspapers, TV and radio and substitute reading the Bible, reading classic Christians novels concerning Thanksgiving and Christmas and playing hymns of praise and thanksgiving throughout the day.
- C. Let me also encourage you to take a gripe break. Instead of griping about the materialism of the season be thankful that God has blessed our country, that people are out buying gifts for loved ones and that this is the easiest time of the year to share Christ. Take a break from the griping media and replace it with the Word of God, edifying words of great saints and the great hymns of praise and thanksgiving. Instead of griping to the clerk, the merchant or the service person, begin to say, “Have a blessed Christmas”; “Praise God Jesus was born”; “God bless you this Christmas” and “Have you every read the Christmas story? Here, I have a New Testament right here for you.”
- D. Since we are on this topic, let me also encourage you not to allow others (especially members of your extended family) to ruin your Thanksgiving celebration. Do not perpetuate another generation of dysfunctional holiday memories out of a sense of obligation to pagan relatives. Your first priorities center around your wife and children and your spiritual leadership of the home during these Christian holidays.
- E. Also do not cheat your wife and children out of Thanksgiving traditions and memories while you fulfill your ego or guilt. If you are going to work in a soup kitchen wait till your kids are grown or do the early morning shift while they are still sleeping.

## **Suggested List Of Bible Verses For Your Thanksgiving Basket**

(You are free to print and cut these out and place them in your Thanksgiving Basket on your table)

*Psalm 71:20 Thou, who hast shown me many troubles and distresses, Wilt revive me again, And wilt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.*

*Psalm 116:7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.*

*Psalm 118:18 The Lord has disciplined me severely, But He has not given me over to death.*

*Psalms 139:14-16 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.*

*Isaiah 41:10 Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'*

*Lamentations 3:22-23 The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*

*Habakkuk 3:17, 18 Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

*John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

*Romans 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

*Romans 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, " Abba! Father!"*

*Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

*Romans 8:29-30 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 0 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

*Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*

*Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*

*Romans 8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

*Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love*

*Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ ( by grace you have been saved),*

*Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*Ephesians 2:11 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

*Philippians 2:5-8*

*5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,  
6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,*

*7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*

*8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

*Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

*2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

*Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.*

*Hebrews 12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. "*

*2 Peter 3:9-10 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. A New Heaven and Earth But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*

*1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.*

*1 John 5:11-13 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*