

Keeping “Thankfulness” In Thanksgiving By Sharing From Our Abundance

Romans 12:10 & 13

*“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love...
contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”*

Sharing from our abundance: Thankfulness can be learned many ways. The most difficult for children though is from a purely academic or instructional reference point. 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 to evaluate as to whether there will be any connect between the teaching projects and everyday life of the family. The first, and I emphasize 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 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 projects which we engaged in, but again, it should be noted that these were done in the context of a family that ate evening meals together. These meals began with a prayer of Thanksgiving and included family Bible reading and discussions.

Children’s toy sort

A. What you need

1. Research beforehand whereby you select a homeless shelter, orphanage, children’s hospital or charity which is soliciting used toys.
2. A box marked with the charity’s name
3. Another box for those toys which go to brothers or sisters
4. A trash bag for broken or severely worn toys.

B. Procedure

1. First, talk with the children about the needs of the poor, the orphans and the disadvantaged at Christmas time. Talk with them about how the wise men brought gifts to baby Jesus and that they can today give to Jesus by giving to the poor. Impress upon them that when they give to the poor they are giving to Jesus so that they do not want to give away broken toys or worn out toys. This became an annual event to which our children actually looked forward. What this is, is an opportunity for your children to help those who are less advantaged than they are, while at the same time you are able to weed out those unused toys which they have outgrown.
2. It may be helpful to read and discuss one or more of the following passages...
Matthew 10:42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

Luke 6:38 Give , and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

Malachi 1:6-8

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?' "You are presenting

defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is to be despised.' 'But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?'" says the LORD of hosts.

3. Each child would go through their room, closet, under the bed, etc. and with the aid of the parent make a pile of toys, stuffed animals, etc., which are rarely played with or have been outgrown.
4. The child then selects the toys –
 - a. Toss: This is a severely used or broken toy which is not nice enough to give away or to pass down to a younger brother or sister. These toys are selected out of the pile at the very beginning and placed in a trash bag. Any toy that is not in good enough condition to be given by the child to Jesus is not good enough for the poor. The child is learning that this gift is really to God, so all those toys not good enough for baby Jesus will be tossed.
 - b. Pass Down: This is a toy that will go to a brother or sister. You as a parent can help the child think through toys that he or she has outgrown but can be shared with a younger brother or sister. The child should set these aside and then personally give them to their brother or sister.
 - c. Keep One: This is a toy the child wishes to keep for future use
 - d. Give One: This is a toy in good condition that will be given to a charity and goes into the charity box. Remember, please, please, please, do not teach your child to pass on junk to the poor.
 - e. Remember this is not punishment. The child should not be made to give away favorite toys, toys of special sentimental value, toys of family value or anything which you as a parent know can be passed down to a younger brother or sister. Rather your child is learning to give from the abundance which God bestows.
5. Let the children go with you to deliver the toys.
 - a. Before departing, you gather around the box and ask God to bless the children who will receive the toys.
 - b. You also thank God for blessing you that you might share.
 - c. You and the children deliver the toys.
 - d. Then afterwards in the car you pray with the children, thanking the Lord for a family which loves them and blesses them that they might share with others.

Thanksgiving Bake Day

1. This is a variation of the above. The children spend a day helping mommy bake Thanksgiving cookies and treats. These are then wrapped and readied to be given away. The children make or sign Thank You Cards which go with each treat. Before going on “deliveries” you discuss with the children how important it is to be thankful for those who serve and bless us through the year. On the way you discuss things these people do which are a blessing and for which we should be thankful.
2. Below is a list of people that would be included on our Thanksgiving Treat delivery day.
 - a. Military Recruiting Station
 - b. Police Station
 - c. Fire Station
 - d. Pastor’s Home
 - e. Support Staff
 - f. Home missionaries such as college and military staff
 - g. Make and send military box
 - h. Make and send missionary box

Include An International Friend or Family For Thanksgiving Dinner

This can be a wonderful experience for your family. Many internationals are intrigued by Thanksgiving. They have heard about it but do not understand it. Also satan has instilled doubt in many internationals about Christianity by whispering in their ears that if they become Christians their extended family will disintegrate, children will become disrespectful and family traditions will be lost. It is a great honor in most foreign cultures to be included in a family or religious holiday gathering and you will greatly raise the person or family you invite in the eyes of their extended family. This elevation will go a great way in easing the conflict when they become Christians and will open many doors for them to witness to their family, when that day arrives. By including an international family in your Thanksgiving celebration you can lay to rest this obstacle to evangelism and open the eyes of your children to the witnessing opportunities they are all around. The meal should include a prayer, a Bible reading, sharing at the table on what you are thankful for, for the year and the gospel of Christ. You may want to discuss the following passages at your regular family sit-down meal devotionals in the days leading up to the visit of the international family for Thanksgiving Dinner.

Exodus 22:22-23 You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry;

Exodus 23:9 You shall not oppress a stranger , since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger , for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger . I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19:33-34 When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 16:10-12 Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.