**Cultivating Thankfulness In Our Children -** October 27, 2020

Imagine giving your children a beautifully wrapped package. They eagerly tear off the wrapping to find the treasures inside. What do they find? Simple cards with these words: *A breath, A heartbeat, Air, Sunshine, Rain, A glass of water, A piece of bread*…What might their reaction be? Would a smile come to their faces? Confusion? Disappointment? Complaints? Yet each of the cards should be a humble and joyful reminder of the daily, and even moment-by-moment, generous and gracious provision of God.

***…he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.
—Acts 17:25b***

***The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.
—Psalm 145:9***

Every person’s response should be,

***…I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.
—Psalm 9:1***

But how often do we actually “give thanks to the LORD”? How often do our children hear it from our lips? Will they grow up to be men and women who give heartfelt thanks to God?

*We live in a culture where there is a spirit of entitlement—where we think we deserve all of these great things. If something doesn’t go our way, we feel like we’ve been robbed and deprived. And even when a person gets what they think they’re already entitled to, they’re not grateful for it. After all, “I deserved it!”*

*In contrast, Puritan pastor Richard Baxter wrote, “Resolve to spend most of your time in thanksgiving and praising God. If you cannot do it with the joy that you should, yet do it as you can...Doing it as you can is the way to be able to do it better. Thanksgiving stirreth up thankfulness in the heart.”*

*Baxter is right—expressing gratitude makes a grateful heart. Children who learn to say thanks become more thankful. Gratitude is a wonderful perspective-shaping habit.*(“[Combating the Spirit of Entitlement with Gratitude](https://www.epm.org/blog/2014/Feb/5/entitlement-gratitude),” [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org/))

We cannot transform our children’s hearts to *make* them truly thankful. Even more so, we cannot bring about the redeeming work necessary to make them thankful children of God, in Christ. But we can train and guide them toward this goal. Here are a few things parents can do:

* **Develop a God-dependence mentality in your children**. Use verses such as Acts 17:25 to help your children understand our complete dependence on God. We cannot live for even a moment apart from His gracious provision.
* **Emphasize that we are undeserving of any of God’s good gifts.**One way to break the entitlement mentality is to show children what we actually do deserve: God’s righteous condemnation (Romans 6:23a; Ephesians 2:1-3). Yet, all of humanity experiences a measure of God’s gracious provision (Psalm 145:9). Therefore, we no reason to boast. Every good thing is an undeserved gift from God. God deserves immeasurable thanks.
* **Point out the “ordinary” evidences of God’s goodness.**Too often, we miss the thousands upon thousands of everyday evidences of God’s generous provision. Have your children see how long they can hold their breath. That is just one tiny example of the goodness of God. During the day, help your children to recognize these, and then give God thanks for them.
* **Develop “thank you” habits.** Outward habits taught at a young age are more likely to become ingrained in the heart as they age and mature. They are learning the “how” and “what” before they can truly comprehend the “why.”
* **Model thankfulness.**Our children learn a lot from watching us. Are we more likely to grumble about a situation, or verbally give thanksgiving to God no matter what the circumstance? Do we thank others in front of our children? Do we thank our children when warranted?
* **Heartfelt thankfulness to God is not only what we should do, but also what will make us happy.**As a family, search the Bible (e.g., use esv.org) for the words “give thanks,” “thankful,” and “thanksgiving.” How does God’s command to give Him thanks work for the joy of His people?
* **Be intentional to include thanksgiving in prayer.**Many times, we (and our children) fall into the habit of making our prayers long on requests and short on thanksgiving to God. Before praying with your children, ask them to note specific things from the day for which to thank God. Begin your prayers with praise and thanksgiving to God.
* **Lead them in singing thanks to God.**Singing great hymns and songs together as a family is a wonderful way to encourage thanksgiving to God—hymns such as [*My Heart Is Filled with Thankfulness*](http://www.gettymusic.com/my-heart-is-filled-with-thankfulness), *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, and *Now Thank We All Our God,* to name a few.
* **Ask God for hearts that are more thankful.**Let your children know that none of us—even Christians—are as thankful as we should be. We need the Holy Spirit’s help to make us more thankful.
* **Teach them that a thankless heart is evidence of sin.**Read and talk about verses such as Romans 1:21, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
* **Remind them God has provided for our greatest need in Christ.**Be careful to give children an eternal perspective on God’s good gifts. We need more than the material provisions God provides. We need Christ! Read and talk about verses such as 1 Peter 1:3-4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” Trusting in Christ for salvation is the only means of thanksgiving that is pleasing to God and satisfying to our souls.

By God’s grace, may we raise a generation of children who shine as a light in an ungrateful world! May they boldly, continually, and joyfully shout thanksgiving to God, through whom all blessings flow!

***About the Author***

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