

# MY FAMILY'S *Gratitude* PLAN

**FAMILYLIFE**<sup>®</sup>  
Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

| A Cru Ministry |







## Thankful Spirit

**BY CARLOS SANTIAGO**

I had fully intended on clearing the sink of dishes, but after washing the two big pans I got distracted. Later that evening, lying in bed, my wife turned to me and said, “About the dishes ...”.

*Uh oh*, I thought. I completely forgot to finish them! My mind immediately began to race. What had I been doing? Why had I gotten distracted? I needed to come up with an excuse—fast.

I had just begun to form my defense when she said, “Thank you for scrubbing the big ones. They’re heavy, and I really appreciated you taking care of them.”

My mouth opened, but no words came out.

In marriage, a spirit of thanksgiving can make a huge difference. What you focus on most is what you’ll notice most.

**PRAY**

*Lord, I confess that I am often faster to complain than I am to thank. Help me to appreciate my spouse as Your perfect gift to me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

If you give thanks for your spouse's efforts at provision, then you begin to notice efforts at provision that you once overlooked. If you give thanks for your spouse's efforts at cleaning, you begin to notice examples that you never saw before.

Focusing on the negative can have the opposite effect. The more we complain, the more evidence we find to justify our complaints. This breeds disappointment and bitterness and often spills out in the form of crude jokes, curses, insults, and sarcasm.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to focus on the positive.

My wife and I have different ways of viewing time. To me, 15 minutes early is on time. To her, two or three minutes late is no big deal. This has caused much friction in our marriage over the years.

One day, as I was sitting in my car fuming because she wasn't ready, I realized I should shift my focus. I began praying for my wife and thanking God for making her the perfect companion for me. As I did, I began to realize why she is usually late. God gifted her with a deep desire to take care of the needs of others. While I was sitting in my car judging her, she was preparing a bag with snacks she thought I might appreciate later that afternoon.

On my own, I would have never realized this. But by tapping into God's mysterious power, I was able to appreciate her thoughtfulness.

Next time you find yourself wanting to complain about your spouse, try thanking God for your spouse instead. You may be surprised by what you notice next.

## #GIVETHANKSFOR

*What do you [#givethanksfor](#) this month? Check out our daily [Facebook posts](#) for inspiration and screenshot our [Instagram story](#) posts each day to let others know what you're grateful for!*



---

"GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR  
HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS STEADFAST  
LOVE ENDURES FOREVER -*Psalm 136:1*


## Gratitude

BY LAUREN MILLER

**G**ratITUDE is expected in American culture. How many times have we heard parents with a scolding tone ask their children, "What do you say?" expecting them to respond with a half-hearted "thank you"? The phrase is demanded as if the words themselves were important. But grateful people are marked by more than the occasional expression of thanks. They are marked by their hearts.


In her popular book *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*, Ann Voskamp shares her personal discovery of the power of thankfulness to dissolve discontentment and worry in her life. She captures a simple yet profound truth about thankfulness: "As long as thanks is possible, then joy is always possible." With thankfulness comes a repositioning of your focus from dissatisfaction to adoration of God's goodness, and therefore the gratefulness changes your heart, from one of discontent to fullness of joy.

Part of training gratefulness in a child involves encouraging it when they least feel grateful. It's when the family must eat chicken soup for the fifth day in a row, the air conditioning stops

A photograph of a woman with dark braided hair and a young girl smiling and holding hands outdoors. The woman is looking at the girl, and they are both smiling. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and sunlight.

*"Saying the words 'thank you' will grant zero joy  
unless they flow from genuine heart."* -Lauren Miller





working, or when they have homework coming out of their ears—those are the opportunities for shaping thankfulness. Saying the words “thank you” will grant zero joy unless they flow from a genuine heart.

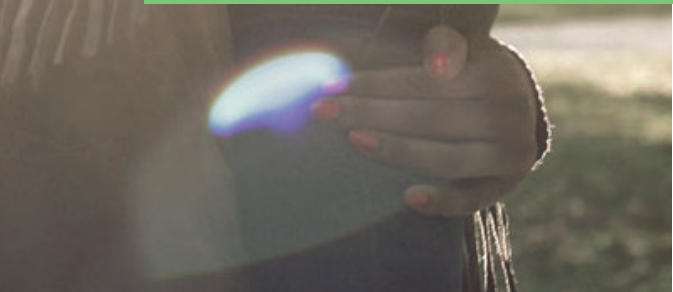
I remember sitting on the stairs with my mom and sister when I was young and verbally “popcorning” all of the qualities of God we could think of for which to thank Him. Setting aside time and creating projects like this can go a long way. This single exercise has stuck with me my whole life.

Another helpful exercise is memorizing scripture and singing songs that remind us: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 136:1). Use those truths to teach your children the wonderful characteristics of God that they can depend on—they will never run out of reasons to be thankful.

Finally, share with them what you yourself thanked God for today. Tell them how grateful you are that God placed the blessings and the struggles in your life. Be an example of true gratitude to your children by taking off a heart of complaint and putting on a heart of praise. Your children will see that Christian thanksgiving isn’t just a bunch of words. It’s a condition of the heart.

## #GIVETHANKSFOR

What do you [#givethanksfor](#) this month? Check out or daily [Facebook posts](#) for inspiration and screenshot our [Instagram story](#) posts each day to let others know what you're grateful for!



To learn more about building character in your child, visit [FamilyLife's Art of Parenting](#).



## Giving Thanks in All Things

**BY DENNIS RAINEY**

**D**o you ever feel as though the circumstances of life are about to overwhelm you? It is said, we are worn down less by the mountain we climb than by the grain of sand in our shoe. I agree. Would you like to know what pebbles seem to frequent my sneakers?

1. People who try to make me feel guilty.
2. My checking account.
3. My garage. (It continually proves the second law of thermodynamics—the universe is moving from order to disorder.)
4. The incessant ringing of the telephone.
5. Sibling rivalry.
6. Things that break and need fixing.
7. A drippy faucet. A smoking fireplace. And a leaky pipe in the ceiling.
8. Car problems that always occur at the most inopportune times.
9. A whining child.
10. Things that aren't where I left them. Or forgetting where I left them.
11. More sibling rivalry.
12. An unresolved conflict with a family member.
13. And tripping over all the stuff that six children can drag out! There have been times when the floors at our place were symbolic of a lot of life's circumstances: piled with the unpredictable and regularly cluttered with chaos.

I once took a census of our floors: there were enough children's books on the floor to load a good-sized library truck. And Legos! Legos may be creative and all, but they drive me crazy—10 zillion pieces specially designed to disappear forever down heat registers, or to be sucked into the abyss of the vacuum cleaner.

Are we out of control? Partially. But doesn't it happen to everyone from time to time? Little things get to us. Frequently.

Honestly, big problems are difficult, and there are more serious problems that do confound us, but today, tonight, right now, this is where more of us live—in the midst of the little things. It's called reality.

It reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw on a pickup truck some time ago: REALITY IS FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T COPE WITH DRUGS. I really do understand why we have a culture of "cop outs."

## WHERE IS GOD?

Is God involved in the details of life? Could God possibly want to teach us something in a flat tire? Does He really want to invade every moment of our day or would He prefer to reserve the 9:30 until 12:00 time slot on Sunday mornings?

One of the most practical spiritual truths is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:18—"In everything give thanks ... " Just four little words that measure my walk with God. I'll never forget the first time I heard the concept of giving thanks in all things. It was 100 percent foreign to me. I didn't think like that. I was used to either calling things "bad luck," getting ticked off, or just shrugging my shoulders while muttering, "What's the use."

But I began to practice this newly found command and to my amazement I started to notice a change in my attitude about life in general. I began to realize that God wanted to invade every area of my life. Every area.

## LEARNING TO GIVE THANKS

Does He really want us to give thanks in all things? "I mean c'mon, isn't that a bit fanatical," you might ask. Why could this possibly be so important to God? Let me suggest three reasons.

First, giving thanks in all things expresses faith—faith in the God who knows what He's doing—faith in the God who sovereignly rules in all that happens to us. Isn't that what He wants from us?

Secondly, He commanded us to give thanks because He knew we wouldn't do it naturally. Giving thanks in all things means I am no longer walking as a mere man, grumbling and griping about "stuff," but walking as a spiritual man (1 Corinthians 2:14-15)—a man who sees God at work ... even in the grains of sand that tend to fill my shoes.

---

"LIFT YOUR EYES AND HEART  
BY STOPPING RIGHT NOW  
AND EXPRESSING THANKS  
TO THE ONE WHO WILL NOT  
DISAPPOINT." -Dennis Rainey

---

Isn't that a little bit of what's wrong with twenty-first century Christianity? Don't we divorce God from the details of daily experience? Don't we ultimately live like those things which we can't seem to control? Let's be honest, we'd rather gripe, complain, and be miserable about circumstances than give thanks.

Thirdly, He wants to teach us how to deal with the irritating grains of sand so we can get on with climbing the mountains He has for us. All we see are the pebbles, and we think if we could just remove all those pebbles then we could get on with living. But God wants to use those irritants to instruct us and see us grow up. I wonder how many times He's had to teach me the same lesson before I finally learned it by obeying Him?

The following is an excerpt from a letter I wrote years ago, and it contains a written snapshot of our family under the siege of circumstances.

To start out with, we have been living out of suitcases for the past seven weeks, with our two little ones, both under two, going through Pampers like they owned the factory! You can guess what malady they were overtaken by!

We've had checks bounce because our paycheck was in the post office in Dallas and we couldn't get it out to deposit it. Not only were all those rubbery checks a stab to my credit rating but also my pride.

My billfold and Barbara's purse were relieved from our presence (stolen or lost) in the big west Texas city of—get this—Rising Star. Not only did we lose all of our credit cards, but our identification as well. After a couple of hours of frustrated searching and finding nothing, I was finally able to thank God that He was in control of our traveling disaster team.

Still gluttons for punishment we pressed on to Colorado where we decided to camp out with our two little ones (this was primarily because we didn't have enough capital on our person to finance a motel room). That night a deluge of rain camped with us. Our tent was transformed from a shelter into a funnel.



We were kept dry by massive applications of Ashley's Pampers, placed at strategic locations to soak up the minor floods, which occurred repeatedly in our tent.

By the time we finally arrived for Family Ministry training, we were wondering if we were the ones the Lord wanted to start this ministry to the home. It seemed as though our home had quite a few bruises, scrapes, and lacerations. Let me confide in you that we had lost our perspective of thanking God "in all things."

Then a couple of days later a flash flood hit Estes Park—the worst in Colorado history—taking the lives of seven fellow Campus Crusade for Christ staff members. Vonette Bright (the wife of the Founder of CCC) and 21 other wives of those in leadership barely escaped a twenty-foot wall of water by going up the side of the canyon in total darkness.

You know something? That disastrous incident really changed our perspective. We didn't really have any problems. God showed us that we had our lives and the privilege of serving the King of kings and the Lord of lords. God used that tragedy to teach us many valuable lessons.

Pressured? Overwhelmed? Why not consider giving thanks for that which is so weighty? Feeling hemmed-in by life's daily drudgeries? Why not express faith and thankfulness that God knows what He's doing? Are you angry, resentful, and embittered about that over which you have no control? Why not give up these futile feelings and give thanks to the One who is in control? Had a bad day? Week? Month? Lift your eyes and heart by stopping right now and expressing thanks to the One who will not disappoint.

Do you have some grit and gravel in your shoe that feel like a herd of boulders? Before you try to empty them out, why don't you stop right now and give thanks for that rock pile and ask Him to teach you what you need to learn.

Sometimes we never outgrow our need to relearn the most fundamental lessons: "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

## #GIVETHANKSFOR

*What do you [#givethanksfor](#) this month? Check out or daily [Facebook posts](#) for inspiration and screenshot our [Instagram story](#) posts each day to let others know what you're grateful for!*



# Replace Whining With Gratitude in Your Children

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

**D**oes your family have a whinner?

One of my children, who is 5 years old, has managed to bring whining to an art form. We could wander into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory that happens to have a Wii, a Chuck E. Cheese, his friends, and his grandparents inside, but my son would have no problem finding something that was not quite up to his expectations.

---

"COMBING THE DAY FOR THINGS I'M THANKFUL FOR IS REPLACING MY OLD WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD." -Janel Breitenstein

---





Another mom asked me recently if we had a whining and ingratitude issue in our family like she does in hers. Uh, definitely. But to tell the truth, my second-born isn't the only one in our family who has a problem with ungratefulness and complaining. Unfortunately, I have to wonder how much of it he's caught from his mother. It's not something you'd see unless maybe you lived with me. This is more of an x-ray issue. You'd see my problem if you saw my heart.

Recently I read a book titled, *One Thousand Gifts*, by Ann Voskamp. A mother of six, Ann found herself transformed by a challenge to list 1,000 things for which she's thankful. So I pulled out a spiral notebook and got started writing my own list.

Here's what I didn't anticipate: Combing the day for things I'm thankful for is replacing my old way of seeing the world. It turns my eyes from all the things that aren't going my way—or even from the discouragement of legitimate problems—

---

"IT TURNS MY EYES FROM ALL THE THINGS THAT AREN'T GOING MY WAY—OR EVEN FROM THE DISCOURAGEMENT OF LEGITIMATE PROBLEMS—AND ONTO THE GIFTS GOD KEEPS PILING UP..."

-Janel Breitenstein

---

and onto the gifts God keeps piling up, just dumping them in stacks and stacks into my life. In essence, it helps me choose joy.

Refusing to complain is a good discipline for my mouth. But to transform my heart, God actually replaced my complaining by helping me see His goodness and worship Him for it.

As I thought about cultivating the ground for the gratitude God wants to grow in my kids' hearts, I was grateful for some of





Ann's suggestions. As part of your daily routine, she suggests, cover a window one sticky note at a time with things for which your kids are thankful. We covered a huge picture in the kitchen; the non-writers got help or drew pictures.

Another of Ann's suggestions was to help children start thankfulness journals of their own. We started one at the beginning of the new school year. I have talked my 7-year-old down from his initial well-intentioned goal of 1 billion items, and he is now going for 100 items for which he's grateful.

On that note, here are a few other ideas to help replace whining with thankfulness.

- When your child begins the whining wind-up, talk about his or her heart: "Right now, I think you're being tempted to focus on what you want. I need you to take your focus off your circumstances and desires. I want you to choose to focus on how big God is and the blessings He's giving you right now, this instant. Can you stop and think of three good things He's giving you right now? Then I'll hear what you have to say in a calm voice to me."
- Talk out loud and frequently about things for which you're thankful—big and small.
- Be consistent with a zero-tolerance policy on whining. Make the consequences known, and follow through swiftly when your child complains.
- Let your kids see you thanking waitresses, cleaning staff, Sunday school teachers, and "unseen" helpers. Prompt them quietly to thank people who serve them. Make thank-you notes a normal project in your home, and

your children's ministry leaders.

- Do not, I repeat, do not give your child anything they ask for in a whining voice. Author Ginger Plowman allows her children to come back two minutes after whining and offer the request again, the polite way.
- I follow a tip I learned from my aunt: I try not to pick up my children until they quit whining (which is different from crying). Otherwise, I might be teaching them that they can get picked up if they whine. Instead, this reinforces self-control and self-soothing.
- When you're driving, set a thankfulness challenge. See if together you can think of 50 things to be thankful for before you get to swimming lessons or 25 things before you get to the library.
- Expose your kids to the realities of life in other areas of the world. Sites like [www.compassion.com](http://www.compassion.com) are great for giving kids a window outside of the wealthy bubble of our culture. You can also request their free magazine for kids and receive their prayer calendar every month.
- Read some books together on thankfulness, like Barbara Rainey's *Growing Together in Gratitude*. Talk specifically with your kids about how this relates to whining and complaining. Read picture books that talk about kids dealing with poverty and how we can respond with generosity. Pray for the real kids living in those realities, and thank God for the comforts you enjoy.
- Memorize some Scriptures together about gratitude (small rewards may help). Some to start with: Psalm 16:5–11, Psalm 100, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18.

Your turn. Please help those of us caught in the drama of whining! What practical tips do you have to stomp out whining and cultivate contentment?

## #GIVETHANKSFOR

*What do you [#givethanksfor](#) this month? Check out our daily [Facebook posts](#) for inspiration and screenshot our [Instagram story](#) posts each day to let others know what you're grateful for!*





## Grumbling or Gratitude?

BY BARBARA RAINEY

**D**oes it ever seem surprising to you that God made the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years because they grumbled? My kids may have spent 30 minutes in their rooms for griping, but 40 years? What a severe discipline! Ouch, it seems harsh.

God clearly is not pleased with grumbling. It doesn't make Him happy to hear His children complain constantly. Sound like any children you know?

Being grateful is a choice—not a feeling dependent on our circumstances—as we clearly see in the Pilgrims' lives. They believed that God was in control—"Providence," they called it. They responded to the circumstances of their lives with a perspective that said, "God has allowed this for our good."

John Piper has written in his book, *A Godward Life*:

*Remembering our dependence on past mercies kindles gratitude. Gratitude is past-oriented dependence; faith is future-oriented dependence. Both forms of dependence are humble, self-forgetting and God-exalting. If we do not believe that we are deeply dependent on God for all we have or hope to have, then the very spring of gratitude and faith runs dry.*

*Gratitude is what we express when we take time every Thanksgiving Day to remember God's past mercies and provisions and then pause to thank Him for them.*

The stories of those who have gone before us inspire our faith. When we consider those great saints listed in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrew 11 or our Pilgrim forefathers or those men and women we know in recent times who have modeled great dependence on God, our faith is



stretched and increased. Their example of placing all hope in Jesus Christ encourages us to do the same.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Those who sailed on the Mayflower knew their Bibles well. They were convinced that God existed and could only be pleased through faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Someone has said, "Faith is a firm conviction, a personal surrender, and a conduct inspired by your surrender." The Pilgrims were totally surrendered to God, and they believed that He was leading them to the New World. So they went, confident that He would guide and provide.

The Bible is full of verses on giving thanks. Our problem in America is not that we don't know we are to be thankful, but often we choose to complain instead. The Psalms contain a number of verses that call thanksgiving a sacrifice:

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving." -**Psalm 50:14**

"Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving." -**Psalm 107:22**

"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me." -**Psalm 50:23**

"To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the LORD." -**Psalm 116:17**

Why is it a sacrifice to give thanks to the Lord? Because being thankful forces us to take our eyes off ourselves and put them on the Lord. Giving up our self-focus is the kind of denial that pleases God.

As a nation, we have inherited a remarkable gift in our freedom to worship, but we have strayed far from our roots and heritage. We must return to the faith of our fathers. Developing a heart of gratitude is the beginning step in growing a stronger faith. Remember what God has done and believe that He will take care of us in the future.








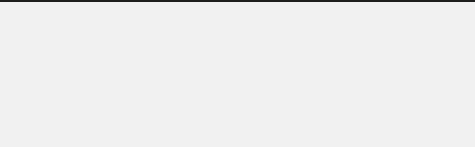

## #GIVETHANKSFOR

What do you [#givethanksfor](#) this month? Check out our daily [Facebook posts](#) for inspiration and screenshot our [Instagram story](#) posts each day to let others know what you're grateful for!



## DISCOVER THANKFULNESS

Does being around family and friends you don't see too often make you nervous? Uncomfortable even? Here is a great list of questions to help start meaningful conversations around your dinner table, on a road trip, or even to help engage the people around you in something other than their phone!

 <p>What is something that made you happy today?</p>	 <p>What does thankfulness mean to you?</p>	 <p>How has someone expressed gratefulness you recently?</p>
 <p>What is something you hated as a kid but is now appreciated?</p>	 <p>When was the last time you were grateful for your sibling?</p>	 <p>What is something your parents did that you are thankful for?</p>
 <p>What is something purchased under \$100 in the last 6 months that has changed your life?</p>	 <p>What are you least thankful for?</p> <p>Why?</p>	 <p>What are you most thankful for?</p> <p>Why?</p>

## FALL FAMILY BUCKET LIST

Do you struggle to spend intentional time with your family? Even more so this time of year? This list was created to help you and your family create more memories and spend time together over the next few weeks. We hope you are able to reconnect as a family in the coming days!

\_\_\_\_\_ Create a Thankful Jar- Each day, try to think about something you were grateful for. At the end of the month, look back and see how you were blessed!

\_\_\_\_\_ Visit a Pumpkin Patch- Pick out a pumpkin for each family member and use them as decorations somewhere in your house!

\_\_\_\_\_ Make Caramel apples- Cover your favorite apple with caramel and decorate with your favorite toppings.

\_\_\_\_\_ Rake a neighbor's leaves- Find a neighbor that would be blessed to have the leaves raked out of their yard.

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer at a food bank/soup kitchen/homeless shelter- Find a place to volunteer some of your time. You will bless others, and probably leave blessed yourself!

\_\_\_\_\_ Visit a Pumpkin Patch- Pick out a pumpkin for each family member and use them as decorations somewhere in your house!

\_\_\_\_\_ Take treats to a neighbor- This time of year can be lonely for a lot of people. Take treats to a neighbor with a fun note just to brighten their day.

\_\_\_\_\_ Take a nature walk- This time of year can be so beautiful! Take a few minutes to enjoy nature and God's creation!

\_\_\_\_\_ Try a new soup recipe as a family- On a cold day, a great bowl of soup can feel like a warm hug. Find that recipe you have been wanting to try and make it as a family!

\_\_\_\_\_ Make a pine cone bird feeder- Help feed the birds with a simple pinecone, peanut butter and bird seed. Watching them eat can bring hours of joy!

\_\_\_\_\_ Jump in a pile of leaves- Release your inner child! Make a big pile of leaves them jump in them as a family!

\_\_\_\_\_ Decorate placemats for Thanksgiving Dinner- Have your children make placemats for each person joining you for Thanksgiving dinner.

\_\_\_\_\_ Host a Friendsgiving Potluck- Invite friends and family over who won't be able to join you for Thanksgiving dinner and enjoy yummy food and make new memories!

\_\_\_\_\_ Have a bake sale and give proceeds to local charity- Sell your favorite treats to help raise money for a local charity or church.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make blessing bags for the homeless- Pack bags with toiletries or other useful items to hand out when you see a homeless person and help spread a little cheer!

\_\_\_\_\_ Organize a neighborhood fall party- Host a neighborhood fall party to get the kids together and adults to meet and get to know each other better.

\_\_\_\_\_ Take blankets and hot cocoa outdoors to stargaze- There is something about a cool, crisp night and looking at stars than is so peaceful! Take a few minutes out of your day to enjoy God's creation with the family!