



Gratitude

Each month worship, religious education, community outreach ministry, covenant groups, and Wellspring Wednesday programs will offer opportunities to contemplate, consider, contend with and discuss an intergenerational curriculum based on monthly themes. Our hope is that this approach will bind us more closely together and inform our lives in effective and positive ways. November's theme is... Gratitude

It feels good to be grateful; when something wonderful happens, when the sun comes out after three days of gloom, when wildflowers bloom in mountain meadows, a feeling of gratitude wells up in us and we turn toward the beauty and bow just a bit to our Maker. Gratitude, then, is a feeling and it can be ever so much more. It can be a discipline. With practice over time gratitude can become a way of life.

The great Unitarian poet e.e. cummings wrote, "i thank you god for most this amazing day." When embraced as a spiritual practice, gratitude can make most every day amazing. Gratitude can teach our eyes to see. Imagine, if you will, the worst possible conditions. Our minds turn toward the brutalities of war, the horrors of the concentration camps, the more intimate agonies of grief. In every situation, no matter how dire, there is room for gratitude.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, his brilliant reflection on his experience as an inmate in the German camps, Victor Frankel asks us to remember that even there, even in the midst of terror and torture and the ultimate degradation, human beings are able to choose. Some say the final existential choice is suicide. God says, "I set before you life and death, blessings and curses, choose life that you and your descendants might live." Might not the final existential choice be gratitude?

When we first hear terrible news the bottom falls out of the world. We feel as though we are falling. Then, by some mysterious partnership of mind and heart, we catch ourselves mid-air. Rather than submit to the downward spiral into despair we start to see how grief carves out a place where gratitude takes root. In the midst of grief it's sensible to ask, what gifts did the one I've loved and lost bring into the world? How can I

*i
thank
you god
for this
amazing
day*

cultivate like gifts in my life? Such questions and the answers they inspire help to turn our grief to gratitude. The ability to transform suffering is one of the most powerful results of spiritual maturity.

The great American Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield writes in *The Wise Heart*:

"Gratitude is a gracious acknowledgement of all that sustains us, a bow to our blessings, great and small. Gratitude is the confidence in life itself. In it, we feel the same force that pushes grass through cracks in the sidewalk invigorate our own life. In Tibet, the monks and nuns even offer prayers of gratitude for the suffering they have been given: 'Grant that I might have enough suffering to awaken in me the deepest possible compassion and wisdom.' Gratitude does not envy or compare. Gratitude receives in wonder the myriad offering of rain and sunlight, the care that supports every single life. As gratitude grows it gives rise to joy."

Worship Theme Resources

Books

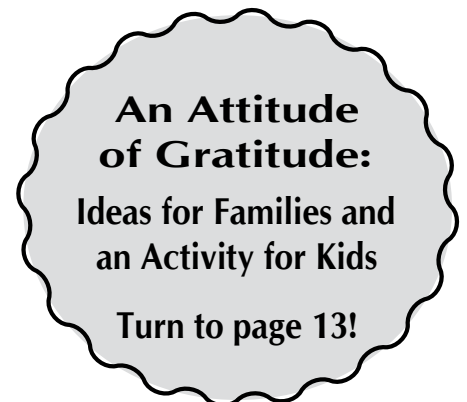
Gratefulness: The Heart of Prayer
David Steindl-Rast (Paulist Press 1990)

The Grateful Heart: Daily Blessings for the Evening Meal from the Buddha to the Beatles
M.J. Ryan, Editor (Conari Press 2002)

Films

Pay it Forward
(2000) Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt and Haley Joel Osment star in this touching tale of the transforming power of gratitude. A great family film appropriate for children 8 and over.

Awakenings
(1990) Robert De Niro, Robin Williams and Julie Kavner come together to bring the Oliver Sacks book to life.



**An Attitude
of Gratitude:
Ideas for Families and
an Activity for Kids**

Turn to page 13!

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE: IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

Gratitude is a sentiment that we can nurture in our children with regular practice. Luckily, there's a good foundation in the hearts of children for thanks. Sofia Cavaletti, Montessori religious educator, asserts that "the prayer of children up to the age of seven or eight is almost exclusively prayer of thanksgiving and praise." How can we build on that instinctive relationship of gratitude that our kids have to the Source of Life? Here are some ideas:

Mealtime Grace

Even simple words of thanksgiving make an impression at the family dinner table. Many families express gratitude for the earth that provides our food and the many hands that bring it to our plates. Our Wellspring Wednesday prayer is easy and meaningful. Let your child(ren) lead this prayer while the rest of the family echoes the words: "We give thanks for being / We give thanks for being here / We give thanks for being here together."

Thank You Notes

Encourage the practice of writing notes for kind favors and gifts received.

Family Gratitude Journal

Record small and big blessings in a journal or box throughout the year. Read the entries at Thanksgiving dinner.

Beware of the Impostor: Guilt

Compelling our kids to be thankful for what they have because so many other children have not can cross the line from nurturing gratitude into cultivating guilt. Be careful. Engage your child in discussion about *why* we have ample food on our tables when so many families are hungry. Ask what we can do, out of our sense of gratitude, to change the unfairness in our world.

Slow Down and Show Kids How to Smell the Roses

Model gratitude. If, witnessing the beauty of even a single red leaf on the sidewalk, you feel a surge of gratitude — *speak that sentiment aloud to your child*. Children absorb their parents' religious practices, and gratitude is indeed a practice.

Kids' Literature - Gratitude

McCourt, Lisa. *The Most Thankful Thing*. (Grades K-4) A sweet, funny book about a daughter who tries to guess what her mom is most thankful for.

Nolan, Dennis. *Androcles and the Lion*. (Grades 4-6). A beautiful retelling of the Roman fable.

Rotner, Shelly. *Feeling Thankful*. (pre-K) A photo essay of children in moments of joyful thanksgiving.

Wood, Douglas. *The Secret of Giving Thanks*. (Grades K-4) A reflective narrative of a young girl experiencing gratitude.

KIDS! Try this...

Making lists is fun!

List what things you feel thankful for...

The COLOR I'm most grateful for is

_____.

The TOY or GAME I'm most grateful for is

_____.

The FOOD I'm most grateful for is

_____.

TWO FRIENDS I'm most grateful for are

_____ and

_____.

The SEASON I'm most grateful for is

_____.

The MEMORY I'm most grateful for is

_____.

My TALENT that I'm most grateful for is

_____.

SOMETHING ELSE that I'm really, really grateful for is

_____.