



Family Bonds

Learning to be grateful

By Fanny Pedraza

One of the first rules of etiquette we teach our children is to say “thank you.” I marvel when I hear toddlers who have not yet learned to speak well utter charming approximations of the word when receiving something.

I am even more impressed when I hear them say “please” before each request. At such an early age the word precedes the thought. Later on, their “thank yous” are expressions of conscious grateful feelings that come from their hearts, not only their mouths. Gratitude is something that we gradually learn.

How do we learn gratitude? One effective way is by changing our focus towards the positive things that are already taking place in our lives, no matter how small those things are.

We all go through times when we feel, speak and act as if life owes us a huge debt. Nothing is good enough for us. We constantly swim in the sea of dissatisfaction — we complain about the weather, the traffic, our family, the neighbors, school, our work. In doing so, we overlook the blessings each person or situation brings with them.

As parents and teachers we can help our children develop awareness of the wonderful things that surround them and that happen in their life. We can teach them what gratitude is by asking them to share from their abundance with those who have nothing. We can open their eyes to God’s mercy and generosity, we can guide them in praying to their heavenly Father to create in them a grateful heart for the most valuable gift ever: Jesus, His only begotten Son.

Have we ever thought that the word “thank you” is by itself a prayer that transforms us? When we practice

being thankful we adopt a positive attitude — our vocabulary, our mindset and even our facial expressions change; we grow in awareness of spiritual things, not only material ones. When we are grateful we open ourselves up for better things, for positive feelings.

Why all this? Originally the word “thank” referred to a celebration acknowledging divine favors and benefits freely received. By expressing gratitude, we acknowledge and celebrate our God’s divine providence, his generosity and might; we see him as a loving and faithful Father who brings us into harmony with Him, with creation and with one another.

Gratitude is good for our soul, it soothes our moods; it immerses us in an ocean of serenity and peaceful joy.

Let us teach gratitude to our children. If they do not learn to appreciate the beauty and goodness that God bestows on them, they will be unhappy, even if they own the entire world.

To do as a family:

Have every member of your household read individually the following Scripture verses and respond to each question. Ask them to write a Psalm of Gratitude with their responses.

Romans 1:21: How can being ungrateful turn our thinking futile and darken our hearts?

John 3:16: For what gifts are you most grateful to God?


James 1: 17: What, who is the source of every gift in your life? How do you respond to those gifts?

Take turns reading each family member’s Psalm as you gather with your family to share your meals.

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