

Beyond Saying Grace

How often are our attempts at being thankful fairly shallow? Even when we say thank you to someone, how often is that more of a rote response and not sincere? Here are some ways to spend some time practicing and expressing gratitude to others and God:

Come Back with Thanks

The Bible has a great story about Jesus healing a group of lepers who, in their excitement at being “made clean,” all run off. One leper comes back to thank Jesus. Jesus asks where the others are, and the leper—or former leper at this point—doesn’t know. Read this story with your group, Luke 17:11–19. Split the reading into four parts and have one person read the words of Jesus, two people read together the part of the lepers, and one person be the narrator. After reading the passage, talk about the plight of lepers in ancient times. Talk about their isolation from their family and community. Your group might imagine why the other lepers were in such a hurry that they did not come back to thank Jesus. What might group members have said were they the leper who returned to thank Jesus? When do they take time to “go back” and thank someone for her kindness or work or positive influence on them?

Priceless People

Set out mini 100 Grand chocolate bars with blank address labels attached to the back (any kind of blank sticker) and markers on a table. Have youth write the name of someone they think is priceless on a candy bar. They may repeat names or choose two or three people to add to their sticker. Sit in a circle or around the table of candy bars. Ask each person in the group to share one or two of the people he or she wrote on the 100 Grand bars and why he or she is grateful for that person or what makes them priceless. Ask if they have ever sincerely said thank you to one of their priceless people? If so, how did they show thanks? If not, what has stopped or inhibited them? Ask them to raise their hands if they have to write thank-you notes at Christmas or after a birthday or special occasion. Do they enjoy writing the notes? If so, what makes it enjoyable? If not, why do they see it as a burden? Have they ever received a thank-you note? If so, how did that feel?

Thank-You Notes

Have students write thank-you notes to one or more of the people they view to be priceless. Leaders should collect the notes for mailing, or students can take notes home and mail them. Encourage them to think about what they wrote and to spend some time talking to God about that person and thanking God for that person.

Gratitude Chain

Take strips of paper and make a gratitude chain by writing something or someone’s name on each strip of paper and then taping or stapling it in interconnecting circles. Over the next week (or month, depending on how long your chain is), take time each day to thank God for the item or person on the chain link for that day. While practicing this daily gratitude, participants may find that they become a more grateful person.

Pictionary

Ask each participant to write down one item they are thankful for. Put that piece of paper in a basket. Split into two teams. Have one student pick a piece of paper out of the basket and draw the item using no words. Each team tries to be the first to guess correctly.

A Few of My Favorite Things

Play the song “My Favorite Things” from *The Sound of Music*. Working in groups, encourage students to rewrite the lyrics using some of their favorite things. Sing this new song as a way of telling God you are thankful.

Grace and Thanks

Blessing food before a meal can be a way of saying thank you for the food and to those who have prepared the meal. Many of our blessings are sung. Split your group into two or three smaller groups. Give teams 5 to 10 minutes to write down as many of these sung blessings (with lyrics) as they can. At the end of 5 minutes, have one team start by singing their blessing. As soon as they are finished singing their blessing, team two must start singing a different blessing, and so on. The team that sings the most songs/blessings wins.

Silly Service

Saying thank you or serving others doesn't always have to be serious. Sometimes a lighthearted show of appreciation can brighten a person's day. Consider decorating a small pumpkin, gourd, or pinecone with glitter, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, and paint. Attach a note of appreciation for a pastor, church staff member, or church volunteer.

Gratitude Circle

Close a gathering with a gratitude circle where you pray and thank each other and hold hands in a way that mimics the healing touch of Jesus. Have each person reach across the circle and take two different people's hands. These are the two people to pray for at the appropriate moment in the prayer (given below). When it is time, the whole group prays out loud the names of those whose hands they hold.

“God, for each person in this circle, we give thanks to you. Not just a nod of thanks but deep gratitude. For our connectedness, we thank you. For our learning, we thank you. For our willingness to risk and be vulnerable, we thank you. Now God, we lift each person to you by name: _____ (say the names of those whose hands you hold). Bless each of us and help us to be strengthened by our time together so that we may do your work in the world with loving and thankful hearts. Amen.”

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