

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: More and more, I look at my kids with sadness because of their general selfishness and lack of awareness of people in need. How do we as parents help our children develop gratefulness and appreciation?

ANSWER: It should come as no surprise that many of our suburban kids lack these characteristics. Many of them have everything they want and never have had to wait for any of it. In our love for our children, and in our desire to give them good things (often things we never had), we often fail to give them a chance to develop the characteristics that come from a life of hard work, struggle, sacrifice, and postponed gratification. **Gratitude, appreciation, and other-centeredness never emerge in the absence of want, suffering, and exposure to the hurts of life.**

In Philippians 4: 11-13, St. Paul says: "For I have **learned** to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have **learned** the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The good news is that we can help our children **learn** gratefulness and appreciation, but it takes commitment, hard work, imagination, and time.

Some thoughts on what to do, and who to be:

1. **Seek frequent opportunities to give to others in a hands-on way.** These experiences are especially important to do **as a family** when the child is young. Volunteer in soup kitchens and nursing homes, attend mission trips and church work parties, visit prisons and juvenile facilities, sponsor children in developing countries, stop and talk with the Salvation Army bell ringers, etc. Use your imagination! Experiential learning has the best chance of changing children.

2. **Don't let your children quit** when they have made a commitment. Help them experience the satisfaction and accomplishment of "sticking it out." Empathize and commiserate, but don't let quitting become the easy out.

3. Provide the **opportunity of long-term projects**. Prepare them for a world where "instant gratification" is not always the norm. Being able to provide every material want for a child doesn't mean a parent should.

4. **Don't habitually rescue** your children from consequences. They will become morally bankrupt. Accountability molds godly behavior.

5. Don't take responsibility for your child's happiness. Challenge your child to live with the attitude of Christ and happiness just might come along in the process. ("Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." MT. 5:6)

6. Convince your children that these values are worthwhile by **modeling them yourself**. Let your children see the joy and satisfaction that living for others brings. Verbalize your contentment and gratitude in your prayers with your children.

7. Insist on commitment to God, family, school, friends, and work. ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself" MK 12:30,31).

8. Insist on living for others by self-sacrificial servant hood. ("The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" MT 20:28).

9. **Insist on perseverance** in accomplishment in both activities and relationships. ("Let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us" HEB 12:1).

10. If you are really brave, pray for events in the life of your family that are real struggles, but also opportunities for great change. (You will be changed as much as your children!)

The older your child is, the harder these things are to do. You must believe in their value, draw strength from your faith, and model the character of Christ. Ultimately, it is our relationship with Christ that can truly bless us with both contentment, gratitude, and appreciation.

Jack Lipski, MA

Christian Counselor

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