

Cultivate a Grateful Attitude in Your Teenagers



The timing is ironic: After briefly pausing to count all our blessings this month, we're immediately bombarded by a lengthy onslaught of consumerism and wish-fulfillment.

According to the Journal of Consumer Research, the worse kids feel about themselves, the more obsessed they become with buying stuff. And because self-esteem takes a big hit during adolescence, countless retailers and brands are vying for the attention of teenagers trying to purchase their identity.

Author John Rosemond says that while adults generally attain 10% to 20% of the things they desire, kids are accustomed to receiving about 80% of what they want. And parents often make sure their teenagers aren't deprived of any luxury. No wonder materialism has such a strong hold on kids today.

The problem is that "stuff" can't meet our deepest needs or heal our hurts. Only God, the giver of all good gifts, can do that. Being content with—and grateful for—what we have is rooted in this knowledge of the source of all our blessings.

God not only promises to meet all our needs but commands us to give thanks in all circumstances, even the tough ones. As parents, you can help teenagers be grateful for what they already have and help them start to see the blessings in challenges and adversity. Use this issue of "The Parent Link" to talk to your kids about being thankful and content—two things everyone can work on this time of year.

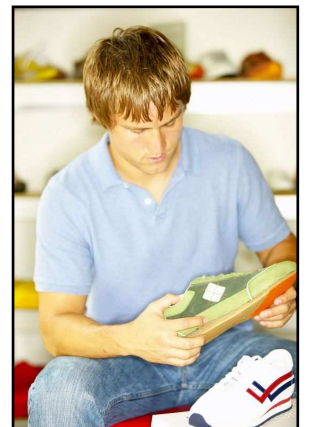
Here are some practical ideas for instilling a sense of gratitude in your teenagers. Try them this month as a family to enhance your Thanksgiving celebrations:

- 1. Keep a gratitude journal together.** Regularly write down things—big or small—for which you're thankful, even during tough times.
- 2. Offer a fresh perspective.** Have family members each write their names on a piece of paper. Pass around the papers, and have each person write down what they'd be thankful for if they were the person named.
- 3. Bring proof of your thanks.** Add a twist to Thanksgiving dinner by having everyone bring to the table three objects for which they're thankful. These objects represent: 1.) something new this year, 2.) something intangible, and 3.) something basic to their lives. Take turns sharing your objects.
- 4. Serve others.** Volunteer as a family to express your gratitude and to foster generosity. Watch for more about service opportunities in next month's newsletter.



Buying things is a priority for most young people. But a recent survey also shows that feeling appreciative can diminish materialism's impact.

- The average teenager has about \$90 in discretionary money each week.
- 71% of kids ages 8 to 18 say they'd be happier if they had more money to buy more things.
- 75% of teenagers say they like to share their favorite things with other people. The same number say they like to do favors for friends or family, even when they're busy.
- 76% of teenagers say that a list of things they have to be thankful for would be very long.



(Harris Interactive)

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Get teenagers talking about ways to incorporate gratitude into their lives all year long.

1. How content are you? Would your life be better if you had more money or more stuff? Explain.
2. What are you most thankful for, and why? What would you do if these things were taken away from you?
3. When is it hard for you to be thankful? What kinds of things are most difficult to be grateful for, and why?
4. How is it possible to "be thankful in all circumstances" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:18)?
5. How does it feel to be appreciated? How do you express thanks to others?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will give your teenagers a genuine "attitude of gratitude" for all the many blessings he provides.
2. Your teenagers will discover how to be content no matter what they have and no matter what challenges life brings.
3. Your family members can focus on giving thanks during the holidays, rather than on what they need or want.
4. Your teenagers won't be consumed by materialism but will find joy in generosity and service.

Verse of the month

"I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:11-13)

If anyone ever had a right to complain, it was the Apostle Paul. He endured persecution, beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, an unnamed physical torment, and probably martyrdom. Though he wasn't a wealthy man according to the world's standards, Paul had the one essential "possession": an unwavering faith in God, who provided for all his needs.

What's Up With Kids

When teenagers feel deprived rather than content, it affects your whole family, as well as kids' spiritual lives. At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, Chris and Beth Wagner of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding write about some consequences of materialism—and how parents can address the problem:

Materialism has a way of creeping into our hearts unknowingly. It often goes unaddressed. Teenagers and adults alike feel that the next purchase will fulfill their longings, only to make the purchase and still be left feeling empty. The emptiness builds up until we discover a new "must-have," and we hold out hope that this item will fill the void. The vicious cycle of materialism continues.

Though many of us already know it, God is the only one who can fill this void. Only the Holy Spirit can help teach us to become content with the wonderful gifts that God has given us. Seeking God's will allows us to be aligned with his ways rather than our own selfish desires. These are the truths we must live out in front of teenagers. Just as kids learn the materialism bug from our actions, modeling Christlike behavior demonstrates a life of contentment and thanksgiving.

Affirm your children's worth and let them know they're loved by you—and by Christ. Let your greatest gift to your teenagers be a reminder that not only are they your children, but they're also God's children who have new life through his life, death, and resurrection. That's a priceless, high-end gift worth boasting about.



MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: This band consists of three brothers and their cousin. The brothers' father (Leon) was a traveling Pentecostal minister, so the boys spent most of their childhood traveling in the South. Kings of Leon plays a mixture of Southern rock, blues, and garage rock. After touring with U2 in 2005, the band's popularity took off.

Albums: *Only By the Night* (2008), *Because of the Times* (2007), *Aha Shake Heartbreak* (2004), *Youth and Young Manhood* (2003)

What Parents Should Know: Band members, who use foul language in interviews, say their music is influenced by both their religious upbringing and liquor. Lyrics mention sex, alcohol, and drugs. Some albums contain parental advisories.

What Kings of Leon Says: "I don't consider myself to be a good person," says singer Caleb Followill. "I know I'm on the wrong path, brother. But at least I know, y'know. I almost quit this every day. I might pick up where my dad left off—maybe. I've got the stage time down already."

Discussion Questions: Read Matthew 7:13-14. Why do some people choose to go down the wrong path when they know it's wrong? Why can it be so hard to turn around and do what we know is right?

Christian Artist

Background: DecembeRadio was formed in 2003. Two members got their start touring with the opening band for evangelist Billy Wayne Arrington. They credit Arrington with helping them focus on God's intentions for their lives, rather than just being "rock stars." The band's self-titled album received a Grammy nomination and the Dove Award for Rock Album of the Year.

Albums: *Satisfied* (2008), *DecembeRadio* (2006), *Noise* (2005), *Dangerous* (2005)

What Parents Should Know: The band has a '70s hard-rock/blues-rock influence. Their sound has been compared to Led Zeppelin and Aerosmith. Of their musical style, the group says, "We are bringing the old school to the new school."

What DecembeRadio Says: "I feel like God calls us all to be a light," says drummer Boone Daughdrill. "We have a choice in how we respond to that. Hopefully we can be an encouragement to others, letting them know the satisfaction we've found in Christ as we rock 'n' roll for him."

Discussion Questions: How bright is your light shining for God right now? What are some ways you can increase it? Do you find satisfaction in following Christ? in telling others about him?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *Quantum of Solace* (releases Nov. 14)

Genre: Action/Adventure/Thriller

Rating: PG-13 (for intense sequences of violence and action, and some sexual content)

Synopsis: This new James Bond movie follows the secret agent (Daniel Craig) on his personal mission to settle the score with Vesper, a woman who betrayed his trust. Bond later finds out that Vesper was blackmailed by a secret organization. The mission takes 007 all over the world, meeting old allies to uncover the truth behind this sinister organization.

Discussion Questions: Has a friend ever betrayed you or stabbed you in the back? At the time, were you interested in that person's motives? Why or why not? What impact does betrayal have on relationships? What are some effective ways to repair a breach in trust?



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