

Gratefulness

Character... It starts with me!

MONTHLY FAITH BUILDER BULLETIN

NOVEMBER 2012

Vs. Unthankfulness

I WILL:

- show my parents and teachers that I appreciate them
- write "thank you" notes
- take care of my things
- be content with what I have
- count my benefits rather than my burdens

FEATURES

Find it in the Bible	2
Character Model; Lesson on the Leper	3
Safe Within the Bounds; Team Building Activity - Pickpocket	4
A Thankful Turkey; Platforms and Promises	5
Going Without	6
Yuck Presents	7
Croskey's Corner	8
For the Family	9
CEO this month	10
Poster	11
Prayer	12

Expressing sincere appreciation to God and others for the ways they have benefitted my life.

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." Cicero argued this centuries ago but it appears to be time-honored wisdom. A constant and consistent focus on Gratefulness is transformational in our lives. Gratefulness goes beyond the simple kindness of responding to a gift with a "Thank You". Gratefulness is

being grateful for the giver, not just gift. It is seeking the good when faced with difficulties and failures. It is recognizing that the greatest blessings in our lives are the people and then showing genuine appreciation for them in your life. It is understanding that the best way to say "thank you" is to give back and that it may not be

directly to the person who gave to you. Focusing on gratefulness helps us to be more Christ-like in our relationships and attitudes. When we are grateful we feel and act abundantly blessed. This feeling ripples into everything we do.

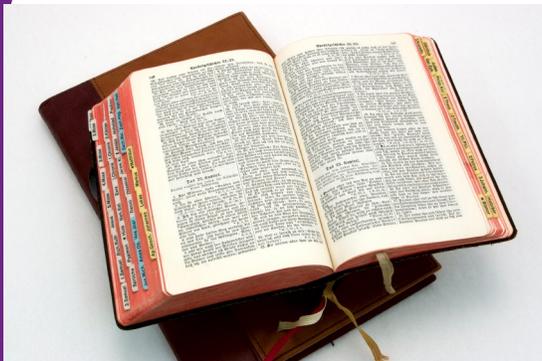
This month, practice gratefulness in good times and in bad.



"For the person of faith, practicing good character is a matter of loving God, self, and others."

John Pierce, founding member of the Character Council

Find It In The Bible



“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”

Hebrews 12:28

“Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”

Psalms 100:3-4

“All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”

2 Corinthians 4:15

“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

Ephesians 1:16

“Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as

much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.”

John 6:11

“I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

Daniel 2:23

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Colossians 2:6-7

“After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.”

Acts 27:35

“Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Ephesians 5:19-20

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”

Hebrews 12:28-29

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

James 1:17

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

2 Corinthians 9:15

“So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.”

John 11:41

The Grateful Leper

One day, when Jesus was walking through a small village he noticed a group of ten lepers. They stood far away from the crowd and shouted, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." The lepers knew who Jesus was and that he had the power to heal their leprosy. Jesus heard their cry for help. He took pity on their condition and healed the sores that covered them. He shouted back to them to show themselves to the priest. This is what they had to do to prove they were no longer contagious

and could return to the city.

Having faith in Jesus, the lepers began to make their way to the priest. As they were walking, they noticed that their sores were healed and their skin was clear. They had been healed! Now they started to run to the priest, singing and dancing as they went.

Suddenly, one of them remembered that he needed to thank Jesus so he went back to where Jesus was. He began praising God loudly and then he threw himself at

Jesus' feet and said, "Thank You." What a heartfelt gesture it was to place himself at the feet of Jesus and simply say "Thank You". This was so much more than a show of manners. It is heartfelt gratefulness.

"Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?'"

Luke 17:17

Lesson on the Leper

Provide each person with a large Band-aid or a swatch of gauze and any kind of tape meant for skin. Have a discussion about how Jesus cured the lepers because of their faith. Talk about the kinds of hurts that Jesus can heal for us. Anything that is causing us pain can be healed by Jesus. Now have each person take their bandage in their hands and think of something that Jesus can heal in their lives. Now have them write "Thank you Jesus" on the Bandage. Have them take turns putting the bandages on each other. Suggest using a hand or arm or even a leg as long as it is visible. As they bandage each other remind them that as followers of Jesus we need to be on the lookout for the hurts of others and do what we can to help them feel better.



A Thankful Turkey

Create a fake turkey by dressing up a brown paper bag to look like a turkey. Be sure to leave the “neck” open for stuffing. You may even want to bring in a roasting pan or other props for effect. Hand out blocks of paper in the colors of stuffing ingredients: white for bread, green for celery or peppers, yellow for egg, brown for spices, etc. You may also have other colors so that each person can find something that represents their families traditional stuffing ingredients. The foundation for stuffing is bread so on these strips, they need to write down Bible verses about being Thankful or gifts that come from God. You may need a concordance available for this part. People add flavor and uniqueness to our lives so on the colored paper for the other stuffing ingredients, write down the people for whom we are thankful. The brown paper represents the spices in the dressing, so on the brown paper, have them write down their talents that they can use in spreading the Kingdom of God. As they finish writing on the papers, you can have them come up to the turkey, crumble up the paper and stuff it into the turkey. They can all be working on different colors so that they can share the concordance. Allow each person to pick a bible verse to put on their “bread” pieces that means something to them. This may mean that there are duplicates but that is okay. When everyone is finished, show off your nice fat Turkey stuffed with all of the blessings in our lives.

*All these **blessings** will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God. Deuteronomy 28:2*



Team~Building Activity

Building a culture of good character requires building the group into a community. Here is this month’s teambuilding activity:

Platforms and Promises

Set the stage for an election. You can choose or create a position that everyone will run for such as “Pastor” or “Activities Director”. You may also allow each one to run for whatever office they choose encouraging creativity in selecting or making up a fictitious office. You can limit it to the church realm or open it up as wide as you want. Each person will create a flyer on a sheet of paper, identifying the office they seek and why they would make a good candidate. Talk about platforms and promises so they understand the boundaries of what they can do in the office they seek. When they are finished, have each share their flyer. You may also want to give them an additional 20-30 seconds for a campaign speech. Be sure to advise them that they are only to address their qualifications and not another candidates unworthiness! If time and setting allows, you may want to end with an election to see who would win. (Even if they all run for a different office, the students could choose who had the most convincing arguments.) If not, have each of them pretend that they just won. Now what? Talk about the responsibilities of the position(s) they now hold. Review the qualifications that they spoke of while campaigning. Can you find common themes among the qualities they listed? Can you find some unique qualifications among your candidates?

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Peter 1:4



Links of Gratitude

During each meeting this month, have each person write one person for which they are grateful on a strip of paper and why they are grateful, and make a chain in your meeting space. Use colors appropriate for the season. Have each person share their gratitude as they place their link on the chain. See how long the chain is at the end of the month. For non-writers, you can have them draw a picture of the people for whom they are grateful and make a quilt of gratitude. After you have done this for a few times, ask them if anyone of them shared their gratefulness with the actual person they named on a link. If so, ask them how the person reacted and how they felt expressing gratitude. Was it easy? Did it get easier the more you did it? If they haven't expressed their gratefulness, encourage them to do so.



Going Without

Begin a discussion about a time when storms knocked out power for an extended period of time. Ask them what they missed most about not having electricity. Ask about if there has been someone in their life who has taken a long trip or was ill a long time. How did it feel to go without seeing that person? Did they appreciate them that much more when they returned? Have any of them ever broken a bone or sprained a joint that required a cast or a brace that prevented you from using the injured body part? What accommodations did they have to make to not use the injured part? Did it put a strain on other working parts? How did they feel when the use of it returned? Ask if anyone has lost a toy or another treasured belonging? How did it feel to know that something important was lost? What did it feel like when you found it again? Did you treat it any differently? Has anyone been lost or separated from their family in a public place? How did it feel to not know anyone and not be able to locate the person you were with? Did you actively look for them and stand still and hope they found you? What did the reunion with them feel like? Did you hold onto them even tighter?

All of these examples help us to see people and things that we take for granted. Instead of waiting for a time when something or someone is gone, encourage them to speak to individuals and express their gratefulness.



“...I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20b

Gratefulness in Poetry

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who won't survive the week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 20 million people around the world.

If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read anything at all.

You are so blessed in ways you may never even know.

by Stephen Eardley
"Reconnections & New Directions" 2003
Conference
Lester B. Pearson College

*"You cannot be grateful and bitter.
You cannot be grateful and unhappy.
You cannot be grateful and without hope.
You cannot be grateful and unloving.
So just be grateful."*

– Author Unknown

Be Thankful

Be thankful that you don't already have everything you desire,
If you did, what would there be to look forward to?

Be thankful when you don't know something
For it gives you the opportunity to learn.

Be thankful for the difficult times.
During those times you grow.

Be thankful for your limitations
Because they give you opportunities for improvement.

Be thankful for each new challenge
Because it will build your strength and character.

Be thankful for your mistakes
They will teach you valuable lessons.

Be thankful when you're tired and weary
Because it means you've made a difference.

It is easy to be thankful for the good things.
A life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are
also thankful for the setbacks.

GRATITUDE can turn a negative into a positive.
Find a way to be thankful for your troubles
and they can become your blessings.

Author Unknown

Share these with your group and then encourage them to write their own tribute to Gratitude. You can do an Acrostic of the word Grateful, Gratitude, Thank God or Thanksgiving or any other appropriate word. Other poem styles can be used or let them write an essay on the topic. Post the results around the room.

Did you know that the word 'Eucharist' means Thanksgiving?

Yuck Presents

This exercise is intended to give everyone practice at gracefully accepting gifts they view as less than desirable. Find some pictures of items that would make “yuck” gifts to your group such as ugly sweaters, kitchen appliances, or items that are intended for a much younger person. Place each picture in an envelope and draw a gift bow on the outside. Have the each one pick an envelope and open the gift. Their challenge is to accept it gracefully and gratefully. Model this with an envelope containing a gift that you don’t really want and show how it’s done. You may also choose to bring in some gifts from your own “gift dungeon” to further demonstrate (as long as they aren’t from someone in the this community.) If there isn’t time to make an envelope for each person, make enough for about 1/3 of the group. When all of those gift envelopes have been used have everyone return the gifts to the envelopes and mix them up and re-use them. Make sure to instruct everyone that they must be truthful and kind in what they say to the giver. Appreciation for a gift should be framed as gratefulness to the individual and not the value of the gift. Some examples are below:

For a plain sweater: “Thank you, Aunt Betty, for the warm sweater. It will certainly keep me toasty this winter. I appreciate your thoughtfulness.”



For toy that is for a younger child: “Thank you, Uncle Roger, for the cool toy truck. Now when play with my little brother I can have my own truck. I’ll think of you when we play with it.”

For utilitarian socks: “Thanks, Grandma for the socks. You never forget my birthday. I love you!”



If they give a good response but their tone or inflection doesn’t match, ask them if their attitude said the same thing as their words and give them a chance to re-state the Thank You. It is important to stress sincerity in their gratefulness.

To close, talk about the best gift we have ever received, our new life in Christ, bought with his death and resurrection. Spend some time in silent prayer, offering our thanks for this wonderful gift.



Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

John Newton

Croskey's Corner

Have you heard the story of John Newton? He was a British seaman, a slave for a time, an Anglican minister, and a hymn writer. He was impressed into service with the Royal Navy, beaten with the lash for attempting to desert, essentially marooned in Africa after serving aboard a slave ship, was enslaved himself, then was rescued. He returned to England, prayed that his life would be spared as he weathered a storm at sea, survived and reached England safely, became a minister, confessed his role in the slave trade, became an abolitionist, and immortalized his experiences in the hymn, *Amazing Grace*. Whew!

Newton was so grateful that Grace had led him “home” that he felt he had to write words that “sing God’s praise.” Grace and Gratefulness, if not the same thing, were certainly linked by his experiences. Gratefulness, the November Character Quality, is defined as “Expressing sincere appreciation to God and to others for the ways that they have benefited my life.” Gratefulness is certainly an appropriate emotion to focus on in the Thanksgiving season. For me, Thanksgiving brings to mind “Grace” as well. When I was a child, we always prayed before we ate dinner. (If my memory is correct, we were less likely to pray at lunch and possibly never prayed at breakfast.) We called it “saying grace.” I am sure that part of the purpose of this was for my brother and sister and me to learn HOW to pray and to participate as a family in the thanking process. As a result, I thought of Grace as “thanks.” Gradually, over the years, I have become more aware of one of the finer points of “Grace,” defined in one dictionary as immunity, an exemption, or a reprieve. For me, that kind of Grace is extremely moving and powerful.

Maybe it’s because of my parental training in manners, but I think I learned that a life of manners meant doing for others, or having them do for me, and using good manners to acknowledge those acts. As that famous child development expert, Captain Kangaroo, taught us on his television program, “There are two little magic words./ They can open any door with ease./ One little word is Thanks,/ And the other little word is Please.” (Give me a call and I’ll sing it for you!) The lesson I learned there was that in order to get something from someone, to open any door,” I had to ask politely. When the service was provided, I had to thank the server. What I took away was that acts of kindness were favors, done for others, and reciprocated. I inferred from this that I had to earn such favors, and the “magic words” were recognition that I had received them. Sort of my receipt slip given to those who had rendered me a service.

Parents’ interaction with their kids often does not follow this reciprocating rule. Rather, parents – mine, certainly – do for their kids without expecting anything in return. I construed the world this way: if I wanted something from most people, I had to do something for them; I had to earn the favor. My parents did not count on this. Parental love was unencumbered by quid pro quo, “this service exchanged for that service.”

Learning about God muddied this “rule” further. Christians learn that people are given a gift from God, the sacrifice of His Son, freely given. This is Grace. It is my understanding that Jews and Muslims and probably many other religions have a version of this unearned gift from a Supreme Being. For example, paradise may be seen as a gift to Muslims from Allah, not some reward earned. God’s gift of the Promised Land to the Israelites falls into the same category, I think. So the love of God does not follow the formula of “this service being exchanged for that service.” Rather, it is a gift given out of love with no payment asked for nor expected. I guess that’s why we call Him “Father.”

Does this Grace-filled, Parent-like giving occur in every day living? I believe it does. Do you have a loved one or friend who has done some great favor for you? It may not have been requested by you. Often, you are incapable of repaying it. The giver knows you are unable to reciprocate. Yet you receive the gift with, as we say, no strings attached. How does it feel? For me, I feel a bit of shame. “I don’t deserve this. My friend/loved one thinks I am worthy of this. I am not. Or, if I am, he or she believes I can return the favor. I am ashamed to say I can’t.” The shame devolves into sadness and maybe even depression. Reminds me of the tax collector who prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (Luke 18: 13)

Maybe the wonder of all this is not so much that God would give me a gift I hadn’t earned. God is, well, God. I don’t really understand omnipotence or universal love. Maybe the miracle I can try to wrap my brain around is Grace from other imperfect humans. Why would someone do something for me if I don’t deserve it? I know I don’t always get credit for what I DO do. But why would I get “credit” for what I haven’t done? Or, what I didn’t earn? The answer, I guess, is that others are willing to do for me because they are kind, and they love me. They know I have not achieved perfection. They don’t care whether I have earned their love as a reward. They are filled with Grace and they are giving to me out of love. Well, I am Grateful for that so I guess I should say Grace.

Bill Croskey is a school psychologist from the Loveland City Schools

For the Family



We are studying the character quality of **Gratefulness**: Expressing sincere appreciation to God and others for the ways they have benefitted my life.

To practice Gratefulness I will:

- obey my authorities immediately
- have a cheerful attitude
- complete all that I am expected to do
- not complain
- go the “extra mile”

Family Activity:

Gratefulness Race

Gather the family and explain what it means to be grateful. Give each member a sheet of paper. Set a timer for 3 - 5 minutes depending on the age of the children. Each person should write down things for which they are grateful. Make sure this doesn't become a list of possessions by limiting “things” to a maximum of 5. Encourage them to write down people, activities, skills, relationships, etc. For each item, they must identify why they are grateful for that item. Younger members can be paired with a parent. Identify the activity as a challenge that comes with a prize to the person with the longest list. When the time is up, have each person read their list. The prize goes to the person with the longest list. If you feel that items on the list are silly, allow the rest of the family to challenge any item on the list. Now compare all of the lists. Instruct everyone to circle items that are unique to their list. You can optionally give a prize to the person with the most unique items. Now look at the lists together and ask how many of these items generated a thank you note to someone. Pick out several items on each person's list and have them write thank you notes. The notes do not have to be long, nor should they include that it was generated as part of a game. Help each child to write the note and encourage honesty and sincerity. This exercise can be performed frequently to get the family focused on creating an attitude of gratitude.



Other ways to teach character in the home:

- Display the character quality and definition in a prominent place such as on the refrigerator or let each child decorate it for their bedroom door.
- At the dinner table ask if anyone noticed anyone (not just family members) demonstrating the character quality (or not demonstrating it).
- Point out news stories where character was or was not involved.
- Review the “I wills” and see if there are specific actions you can add to this list.
- During car trips, challenge the kids by describing scenarios and having them identify if it describes being the quality or being the opposite.
- Praise with character by recognizing the character quality involved rather than the achievement.
- For more ideas visit www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.php

Character
Education
Opportunities

In November



November 15: America Recycles Day



Since 1997, communities across the country have come together on November 15 to celebrate America Recycles Day. It is one day to educate and motivate. One day to get our neighbors, friends and community leaders excited about what can be accomplished when we all work together. One day to make recycling bigger and better 365 days a year. To get involved you can visit the website at

<http://americarecyclesday.org/>

Other Days You Can Use To Teach Character This Month

- 1 All Saint's Day
- 2 All Soul's Day
- 4 Daylight Saving Time Ends
- 4 Use Your Common Sense Day
- 6 Election Day
- 7 Eid al-Adha
- 8 National Parents As Teachers Day
- 11 Veterans Day
- 13 World Kindness Day
- 14 International Girls Day
- 15 America Recycles Day
- 15 National Philanthropy Day
- 16 International Day for Tolerance
- 17 Family Volunteer Day
- 22 Thanksgiving Day**
- 22 National Day of Mourning
- 23 You're Welcome Day
- 23 Black Friday
- 23 National Day of Listening
- 24 Small Business Saturday
- 24 Celebrate Your Unique Talent Day

“When you have eaten and
are satisfied, praise the LORD
your God for the good land
he has given you.”
Deuteronomy 8:10

Week 1 World Communication

Week 2 Pursuit of Happiness Week, National Donor Sabbath, World Kindness Week

Week 3 National Hunger & Homeless Awareness Week, National Bible Week

The Month of October is Military Family Appreciation Month, and National Family Literacy Month.

For more information on these and other holidays visit: <http://holidayinsights.com/moreholidays/november.htm>
or <http://www.brownielocks.com/november.html>

Gratefulness

Expressing sincere appreciation to God and others
for the ways they have benefitted my life.



**“Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed?
Where are the other nine?’”**

Luke 17:17

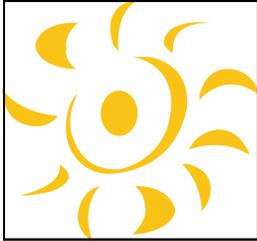
**Are you the ‘one’
or part of the nine?**

Prayer for Gratefulness

Dear Jesus,

We praise you for your goodness and mercy and thank you for the example of gratefulness in your life. We always remember that whenever you broke bread, you always gave thanks. Help us to remember to say Thanks and to write Thank you notes to those who have been kind to us. Guide our thoughts so that we are grateful for what we have and to take care of it and not focus on what we lack. Help us to remember to be appreciative for those who take care of us, especially you.

Amen.



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Character...It Starts With Me!

How to Use this Bulletin

This bulletin contains ideas that can be used for youth groups, Bible study groups, Sunday school classes, families or anyone who wants to build their faith with character. Pick those activities that are appropriate for your group or can be modified to be appropriate for your group.

Combine bible stories or verses with an activity to further the lesson.

Join older and younger groups, allowing the older group to lead an activity that they have already done for a younger group.

More resources can be found at www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.php

We would Love to hear from YOU!

Let us know what you think. What adjustments or additions did you make so that the activity was appropriate for your group? What other activities or stories did you use to teach this month's quality? Send your questions or comments to jtomey@charactercincinnati.org and you just may be featured in a future edition.