

CREATING A GRATEFUL HEART

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It is very difficult in this day and age to be totally satisfied with what we have at any given time. This is predominantly brought about by the enormous amount of advertising that hits us from every side – “You should have this.” “You deserve that.” “Upgrade now.” “You are not cool if you don’t wear this.” It is easy to become dissatisfied when we are constantly comparing ourselves with what others have.

When we are surrounded by ‘stuff’ we tend to want more. Just think about it. If we had no stuff, then any stuff would be fabulous. As I look back on the times I have felt overwhelmingly grateful, it has often been in situations where someone has helped me when I could not help myself. Two such occasions spring to mind. We were traveling a long distance trying to reach our destination before dark. We had just updated our car and I must confess I was pretty proud of it. Wandering cows are no respecter of vehicles and our car was almost totaled in a split second. We could have been killed, but God spared us. A friend came to our rescue by lending us his rattling old bomb of a car. Suddenly my perspective about keeping up appearances changed and I was truly touched by his generosity.

There was another time when we were in ‘full time’ Christian ministry raising our own support and had completely run out of money. We had \$5 left. I visited a lovely old man whose back yard was bulging with vegetables. I gave him my \$5 and he gave me more vegetables than I could carry. I shared them with my neighbor who was in similar dire straits. We were all very blessed by that man’s care of us at that time.

It is not only when people unexpectedly give us money or share their possessions that we need to feel grateful. Didn’t Jesus tell us that the birds of the air don’t think about where their next meal will come from? They are just happy to be alive. When we have a positive attitude towards life, we are more likely to see the goodness around us and be grateful just to be where we are.

In an era of ‘must-haves’, how can we teach our children what it means to be grateful? We believe that a successful family is God-centered, parent-directed, family-orientated and outwardly-focused. Children need to learn that it is not all about them. Part of being outwardly focused is in being concerned about the needs of others. When we show benevolence by giving our possessions and our time to voluntary organizations, to our neighbors and friends, our kids see first-hand what effect generosity has on others. It also shows them how little it takes to be happy with a few things rather than a lot.

Don’t give your kids everything they ask for. The more they have, the less value they place on it. It creates an expectation that they will always have stuff,

and this does not prepare them for potentially rough times ahead. By giving them a small amount of money to buy their own toys, they learn to manage their finances and value what they save for. By encouraging them to give some of their toys away on a regular basis it keeps their own play stuff to a minimum, but also teaches them the value in sharing with those who have less than them. It is a wonderful idea to sponsor an overseas child or to have your kids fill a shoebox with gifts to give away to a needy child each Christmas using their pocket money. Teach them to show kindness to needy families by having the kids bake cookies for others or to treat them to the movies. When we do the above we are creating in our children an awareness of the needs of others. You literally have to train your kids not to think about themselves first. Gratitude and generosity are wonderful attributes. Thanksgiving and Christmas are perfect times to demonstrate that we care. Teach your kids how. They deserve it!

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.