

Grateful

How gratitude can set your kids up for life and can transform your own!



Feb 2013

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This Month...

- Su 3 **Ord Time 4
Love is...**
- Fr 8 St Josephine
Bakhita
- Su 10 **Ord Time 5
Fishers of People**
- Mo 11 Our Lady of
Lourdes
- Tu 12 Shrove Tuesday
- We 13 **Ash Wednesday**
- Th 14 Sts Cyril,
Methodius &
Valentine
- Su 17 **Lent 1
Wilderness**
- Th 21 St Peter Damien
- Su 24 **Lent 2
Transfigured**

Thriving Kids

“It was a typical school yard conversation. A bunch of mothers were talking about the various challenges their kids were facing - the usual stuff. “You just want them to be happy, you know” was the concluding statement.” - Barbara

We all know that when kids are happy, they tend to thrive at school and in life. Thus parents are generally very dedicated to promoting their child’s happiness. It comes from our love for them and is an admirable goal. The problem is that many parents think that thriving comes from happiness whereas in fact, it’s the other way around: happiness is the result of a thriving child.



So the question for parents is: how do we help our kids to thrive?

**How can we set them up for life,
so that they are not just happy and
contented, but also people of virtue,
able to engage with the community and
contribute to it?**



"It was hitting 40°C on the property and we were all complaining about the heat. The kids were irritable and squabbling over who got to sit closer to the fan. Then my wife commented... 'Imagine how difficult it must have been for the early settlers... Traveling for days to get out here, carrying all their water and food, flies and heat waves in Summer, freezing cold in Winter, only a tent till they built their cottages – all without power tools!'

The conversation took off in a new direction – we admired our forebears for their resilience and expressed our gratitude for the legacy of their labours – a gift we now enjoyed. As the temperature climbed to 42, we sweated through that heat wave with renewed determination and good cheer."

- Paul

Gratitude

One of the simplest and most effective things parents can do to promote wellbeing is to foster a habit of gratitude in their children. Like a pair of X-ray glasses, gratitude transforms the way we see our situation; instead of feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, gratitude highlights the positive and mobilizes our resources to make the best of any situation. Thus, people of gratitude are more resilient, more optimistic, more joyful.



The Science of Gratitude

We've all heard of the saying "count your blessings". It's simple, practical advice that fosters gratitude and optimism. Turns out, that science now backs up this age-old wisdom. Here are some of the reported benefits when subjects kept a gratitude journal*:

1. They exercised more regularly
2. They had fewer physical symptoms
3. They felt better about their lives
4. They felt more optimistic about the upcoming week
5. They were more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals (academic, interpersonal and health-based)

* See page 7.





6. They had higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy
7. They were more likely to report having helped someone with a personal problem or having offered emotional support to another
8. They had a greater sense of feeling connected to others
9. They had longer sleep duration and better sleep quality



Ref: [Emmons & McCullough, 2003](#)



The Gratitude Journal

One of the tools used by scientists studying the impact of gratitude is 'the Gratitude Journal' – a simple habit of reflecting on and recording the positives in your life. To kick start a habit of gratitude in your children, try one of these ideas...

- 1. Gratitude Calendar.** Buy or make a calendar to record your daily or weekly 'gratitude moment'. Download CathFamily's template:
- 2. Gratitude Jar.** Regularly write down on a slip of paper the date and something for which you are grateful that day. Collect them all in a large jar. On New Year's Eve, take turns to draw a 'gratitude moment' from the jar and re-live the joy together.

- 3. Gratitude Board.** Use a pin board or magnetic board to display written gratitude moments or mementoes such as movie tickets, dried flowers, birthday cards, photos etc.
- 4. Windows of Gratitude.** Use dry erase markers to write or draw your gratitude moment on a window or mirror. It can be erased each week and started over.
- 5. Photo Journal.** Take a photo each day and 'post' it into your Gratitude journal – it can be a digital or paper version.

The George Bailey Technique

We often take the regular small blessings for granted - clean, running water for example, or our spouse's steadfast income, or our dog's 'happy to see you' greeting. They're so regular and predictable that we just come to expect it. They get absorbed into the background weave of our lives and soon we don't even notice that they're there.

But what if they weren't?

Imagine for minute how different your life would be if you turned on the tap and instead of clean water, dirty brown sludge poured forth. Imagine that this was permanent. How would your life be affected? Go through a





typical week and note the activities you couldn't do, or couldn't do easily, like wash your hair or clothes. Think it through...how will you flush the toilet, boil an egg, wash the car or run the dishwasher? How much has your appreciation for clean, running water increased now?

Who is George Bailey?

George is the central character in the film "It's a Wonderful Life" (1947). He's contemplating suicide so that his family might get an insurance pay out which would clear a debt for which he is about to be arrested when his guardian angel shows him what life would be like in his town if he never existed. The town is a mess – his brother died because he wasn't there to save him, his wife never married, his children were never born, lots of people in town were worse off. In a moment of truth he realises the great blessing his life has been.

The George Bailey Technique is like the inverse of 'counting your blessings' – it's more like 'cancelling your blessings' so that you can more clearly appreciate the myriad ways your life is in fact blessed.

Try it: Pick a family member that you find difficult to appreciate and try to imagine all the ways that your life, and the lives of those you love, would be affected if that person never existed.



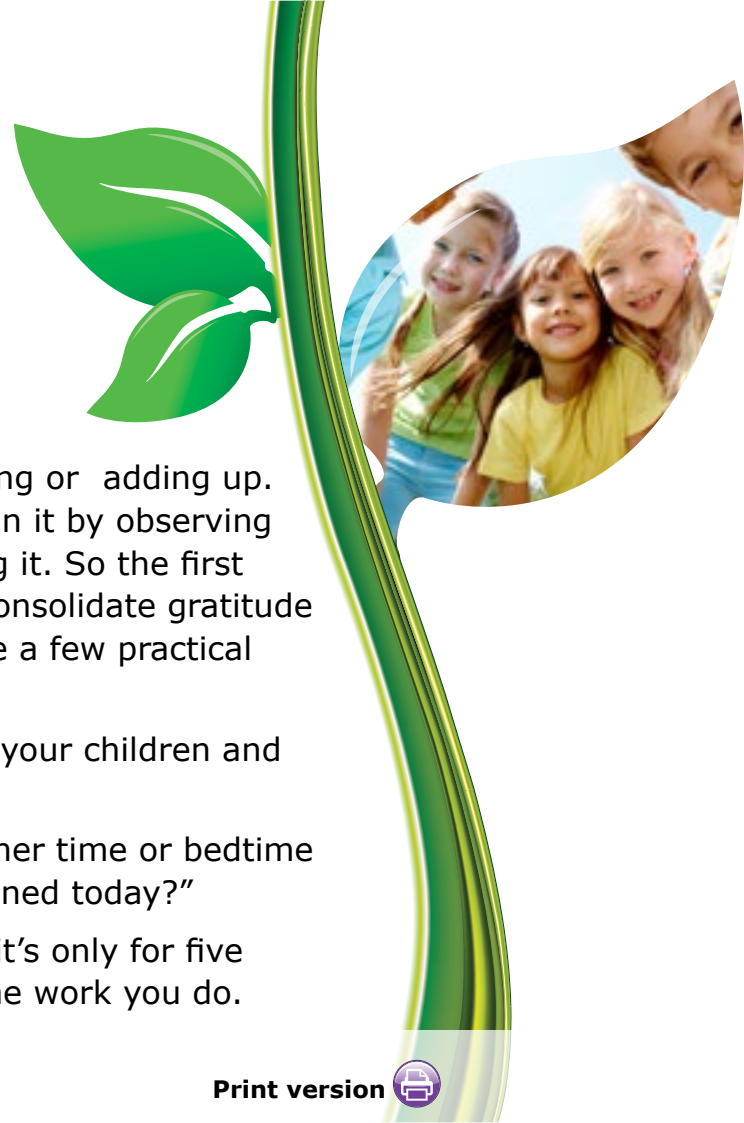
Gratitude in Prayer

"When I was a teenager, I got this book called "Gratitude – the Heart of Prayer". It inspired me to be more consciously thankful to God, to not just take the blessings in my life for granted. As a person who is inclined towards cynicism, gratitude doesn't come naturally to me, so I've just made it a routine of my prayer life – I always start with prayers of thanks and praise before I go to my petitions."

-Sarah

Fundamentally, Christians are people of gratitude. Central to our faith, is the experience of salvation through Jesus, the Son of God who suffered and died for us in perfect love. Gratitude and an overwhelming awe for God's immense love are foundational to our prayer life. How appropriate that the central prayer of the church is the Eucharist which means 'thanksgiving' in Greek.

Teaching your Kids Gratitude



Gratitude is not a skill that you can teach like writing or adding up. It's a virtue. That means that children are formed in it by observing adults living by it and by the discipline of practicing it. So the first step to effective formation for your children is to consolidate gratitude in yourself and then help them practice it. Here are a few practical tips:

1. Say "please" and "thank you" when you talk to your children and remind them to say it too.
2. Daily debrief – ask your child as part of the dinner time or bedtime routine, "what were the good things that happened today?"
3. Get your kids to help you with a chore. Even if it's only for five minutes it helps to build their appreciation of the work you do.





When old enough, give them their own chores.

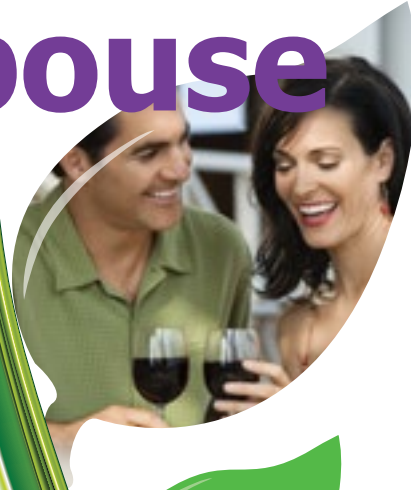
4. Grace before meals – thank God for the blessing of your food before the family eats.
5. Take note – help your child write thank you notes to friends who have hosted them to a play date or given them a gift.
6. Build the desire. Children who get toys and treats too quickly don't develop the desire nor do they experience the fullness of joy on finally acquiring it. Insist that your child wait for dinner instead of snacking and get them to save for substantial toys.
7. Practice charity. Involve your children in giving to those in need... get them to pack up their out-grown clothes and old toys and encourage them to give some of their pocket money to collections. Use the occasion to talk about your blessings.
8. Complaints to gratitude. When children complain about someone or having to do something unpleasant, help them to see the good in the person or situation and express it in words or prayer.

The Grateful Spouse

Francine & Byron Pirola

If gratitude is good for building resilience in children and bolstering hope in adults, it's close to a miracle drug for an ailing marriage. Here are three sure ways to use gratitude to transform your experience of your marriage from dull and burdensome to joyful and blessed.

- 1. Daily Appreciation.** So simple, but oh so important! Make it a personal discipline to name at least one thing that you've appreciated in your spouse each day... and tell him/her!
- 2. Gratitude Alchemy.** Take any negative event or encounter, such as an argument or your spouse losing a job. Acknowledge that it's been tough. Now think about any pearls of blessing that has resulted.



For example, maybe your argument gave you a new insight into each other's perspective, maybe the job loss galvanised your spouse to make a long overdue career change. Give thanks for that.

- 3. Inverse blessings.** Imagine what your life might be like if you never met your spouse (see **The George Bailey Technique p8**). Spend a full ten minutes and make a list of the things, people and experiences that would be missing from your life.

Pumped up Gratitude

Science tells us that the element of surprise makes it easier to be grateful. For example, if every day, you say "I love you" as your spouse leaves for work, over time he/she will likely begin to take it for granted. Make it easier for your spouse to appreciate you by mixing it up a bit; one day sing it, another write it on a note and slip it into a pocket, leave a sticky note on the dash board of the car, text it etc.



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St Valentine's Day 2013

Make a gratitude commitment for your honey this St Valentine's day. Do the **40 Day Gratitude Challenge** – a dose of appreciation every day for 40 days. For more information, download the flyer from the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council for St Valentine's Day – Grateful.



Lenten Rituals

Lent is not just about fasting and sacrifice. It is also the perfect time to make a commitment to develop a virtue. Why not as a family make a commitment to Gratitude? Check out CathFamily.org for some ideas and tips.



St Valentine's Day... for your kids

When we were kids, St Valentine's Day was eagerly anticipated... who would get an anonymous St Val's card? ... and who would it be from? Most times, the cards were pranks played by the boys or the girls on their friends. It got us thinking... what a perfect opportunity for parents to express their hopes for their teenage child's future romantic relationships and the discernment of their vocation.

For more on how you can help your child discern a vocation check out this [CathFamily](#) article.

Here's an outline of a letter you could pen to your teenage son or daughter.

1. Note how he/she is growing up and list some qualities you see in him/her and of which you are proud.
2. Acknowledge that romance will be part of his/her life and share how you hope this experience to unfold – that it will help him/her grow in faith and maturity.
3. Recognise that love and romance are part of God's creation and that God has a plan for their lives. Say how you are praying that God's plan will become clear.



