

THANKSGIVING



Thanksgiving Dinner Place Cards

Before the meal, place cards are made with each person's name on the front of a folded card that is blank on the inside. Additional decorations or meaning of the name may be used to make each one special. After the meal, while people are still seated, the place cards are passed around and everyone writes one sentence expressing thankfulness for each person except their own. After all the writing is done, a leader reads the writing on each card (covering the name) and the group tries to guess who the card belongs to. This creates not only great affirmation for one another, but lots of fun, especially for the children.

Blessings Basket

Start the tradition of the "Blessings Basket." At the conclusion of the Thanksgiving meal, set a large basket in the middle of the table. From then on until Christmas, add gifts to the Blessings Basket for a needy family.

The Thanksgiving Box

A cardboard box is decorated with words of thanksgiving ("Thank you, Lord," "The _____ Family Thanksgiving Box," etc.). A slot is cut out in the top big enough to slip index cards or note paper through. On Thanksgiving day after the traditional meal, while still gathered, time is spent sharing what each person is most thankful for. The box is shown to the family members and placed in a special place. Throughout the year, anyone may write what they are thankful for and slip it into the box. The next Thanksgiving, after the meal, the box is opened and the cards are passed out to be read. Everyone is given the opportunity to guess who wrote it and when. Close the time together giving thanks for the past year.

Thanksgiving Ideas

The purpose of Thanksgiving Day is to **giving thanks**. Thanksgiving is not about things. It's about God's presence within our lives. We have been blessed with a faith that assures us that God's love for us is unconditional, ever-present, ever-faithful. Now if that isn't enough to be thankful for... That is the message for adults and children. So we might ask "When have I most recently felt God's presence?" If God is goodness, then when was the last time one of your children felt a sense of joy, comfort, goodness.

When we reflect on the pain of personal tragedies, community and national disasters, some may feel it even meaningless to talk about giving thanks. But we have all experienced the hope and cooperation that comes out of disaster. Neighbors helping neighbors is an example of the God acting deep within the hearts of His creation.

We celebrate thanksgiving not only to praise a God who is ever present but because as a people we need to. Thanksgiving is a value that gives us the opportunity to nurture a healthy attitude towards life and others. We "do thanksgiving" to help us focus on the meaning of a giftedness, love and family. It creates within us and our children grateful hearts. We focus on what we have rather than what we don't have. And in our consumer-age what a refreshing thought for adults and children alike. So how might we choose to slow the pace and truly give thanks?

† **Set the family table.**

If your family is like many American families, it may be a rare experience for the family to even gather at a table at the same time. Let this table be dressed with a sense of celebration. Let the setting time, itself, be a ritual. Use this opportunity to teach older family members how to set for a special setting. Your actions are already saying to them that this meal truly is significant.

† **Have the little ones create the center piece.**

Some are already coming home with wonderful turkeys, and the like, that have been made at pre-school. What an honor for them if it becomes the center of the family's gathering.

† **Pray a special blessing on each other.**

Begin with something like... "May God Bless you, _____, for the laughter you bring to our home..."

† **Include in your meal preparation, a dish that could be taken to a soup kitchen.**

Be sure that the family members are in on its preparation and delivery.

† **Invite a neighbor, without family, to share in your family celebration.**

Have the kids do the inviting.

† **Consider a Thanksgiving Prayer that would require a slip of paper for each family member.**

Write your name on the top of the paper. Pass it to the next person that he or she could write a sentence or two as to why he or she is thankful for them. Fold the paper in such a way to cover the sentence, but leaving the name exposed. Pass it on to the next family member. This would continue until the paper come back to its owner. Allow time for each person to read his/her own, and then share that with the family. You may even want to consider a slip of paper with God's name on it. Or just go around the table identifying people in their lives each is thankful for. And end it with a big Amen.

† **Pray a Psalm before your meal.**

The Psalms contain some wonderful prayers of thanks and praise. You may want to look them over. Take a close look at Psalm 66 or 138 for starters.

† **Be sure that the nightly prayer includes a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.**

By our nature, we seem to always ask for help, patience, and things from God. Perhaps this thanksgiving we will remember to thank and model that for our children. Thanksgiving, then is not one day in our calendar year but becomes for us a way of life.

A Thanksgiving Prayer

The family and guests stand or sit around the table upon which there is an unlighted candle.

Opening Prayer

We come to our table to welcome this feast of Thanksgiving with joy and with gladness. We have prepared this feast with good food and drink. We have gathered together and come around this table to feast and to celebrate the many things for which we are grateful.

Light the candle.

Giving Thanks

Each person is asked to state one thing that he or she is thankful for this Thanksgiving.

“I am thankful for _____.”

Blessing

The final prayer is read by family members -- each reading one paragraph until the prayer is completed.

Lord of all blessings, from you has come a full harvest of gifts to us.
With our uplifted hearts, we come today around this table to give thanks to you.

We are grateful for the gifts of our lives.
We are grateful for the family and friends you have given us.
We remember and give thanks for all of them today.

On this Thanksgiving Day,
we thank you for showing us how to return thanks
by lives of service, by acts of hospitality, by kindness to others, and by concern
for each other.

We are most grateful, today, for the way you, our loving God, have become
visible to us -- in one another, in our families, in our friends, and in the marvels
of creation itself.

Come, Lord of Gifts. Bless our table and all the food of this feast.
Let us thank the Lord today and all days.
AMEN.