

MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN

GOD'S KINGDOM BELONGS TO PEOPLE LIKE THESE CHILDREN - LUKE 18.16B



Thanksgiving Day with Children and Families

What's not to love about [Thanksgiving](#)? For most of us, the day brings time off from work, an abundance of delicious food, and an opportunity to gather with family and friends to share our heartfelt gratitude toward our Creator. Some United Methodist churches may have worship services on Thanksgiving Day; others may offer services earlier in the week or be part of a community-wide service of thanksgiving. In addition to these corporate acts of worship, worship in the home can be an important part of helping the whole family experience a deep sense of gratitude to God.

Explore the Psalms of Thanksgiving with Children

Select several psalms of Thanksgiving, such as Psalms 100, 105:1-6, 113:1-4, 117, and 148, to read together from to children from the Common English Bible or one of the simple translations recommended from [DM Ministry with Children](#). Talk about ways the psalmist mentions people expressing thankfulness (praising, shouting, singing, remembering God's mighty acts, etc.). Talk about some of these and other ways we express thankfulness to God (dancing, praying quietly, creating works of art...). Wonder together with children, and follow up with an activity.

Wonderings:

- I wonder why we have a special day to celebrate our thankfulness to God.
- I wonder how we show our thankfulness to God every day, not just on Thanksgiving Day.
- I wonder if there's a difference between saying that we're thankful for something and showing that we're thankful for it.
- I wonder how we feel when someone shows that they're thankful for us or for something we have done for them.
- I wonder how God feels when we show that we're grateful for God's gifts to us.
- I wonder how we show our thankfulness for the people we love.
- I wonder how we show our thankfulness to people we may not even know but who help us (restaurant servers, store clerks, etc.).
- I wonder how we can share some of the things we're thankful for with people in our community who don't have all the things they need.

Activity Starters:

- Invite each family member to draw a picture of something he or she is thankful for.
- Write notes of appreciation to people who make your lives better but may be overlooked — such as those who collect your trash, a librarian, school or church custodians, your letter carrier, or the secretary at your church.
- Write the letters of the alphabet going vertically down a sheet of paper. Work together to come up with one thing you're thankful for each letter.

Lynn W. Gilliam is Editor of [Pockets magazine](#) at The Upper Room.

Conversation Starter:

Help children connect the things they feel thankful for to actions that show thankfulness.

- If I'm thankful for my family, I ... (speak to others with kindness, respect each family member, reach out to someone who may not have family nearby).
- If I'm thankful for my food, I ... (give thanks for those who grow and prepare my food, find ways to share with those who may not have enough food by collecting donations for or volunteering at a food bank).
- If I'm thankful for my pet, I ... (spend time playing with it, take responsibility for caring for it, collect supplies for our local animal shelter ...).

Come up with at least one action you will take as a family to show your gratitude to God.

Encourage families to have conversation about people for whom they are thankful

Along with the previously mentioned Wonderings, introduce *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* by Chief Jake Swamp to families. Share a "message of gratitude that originated with the Native people of upstate New York and Canada and that is still spoken at ceremonial gatherings held by the Iroquois, or Six Nations".

Families Create Together

- Write and illustrate your own psalm of praise together. Post it where all the family can see it, and recite it together as a table blessing or act of family worship. If you'd like to sing your psalm, choose a familiar tune that works with the words you wrote.
- Cut leaf shapes from construction paper. Keep the shapes and a couple of markers in a basket or bowl on your table or another place where the family gathers. Ask family members to write things they're thankful for on the leaves. Draw a tree or wreath outline on a sheet of poster board, add a title such as "We give thanks to God for..." and hang it where the whole family will see it. Once a week, take the leaves that have been written on out of the basket and pray a prayer of thanksgiving together for the things named. Attach the leaves to your tree or wreath.

Reminder: Be sensitive to family dynamics.

Accessible Worship

A wonderful Family Thanksgiving Worship Service is available from [Pockets magazine](#).

Resources and Books for Children

- *Pockets* magazine, November issue on Gratitude
- *Before I Sleep I Say Thank You* by Carol Gordon Ekster
- *Thank You, Sarah: The Woman Who Saved Thanksgiving* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *Gracias Thanks* by Pat Mora
- *Sweet Potato Pie* by Kathleen D. Lindsey
- *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving* by Catherine O'Neill Grace
- *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen
- *Sharing the Bread* by Pat Zietlow Miller
- *The Thankful Book* by Todd Parr

Lynn W. Gilliam is Editor of [Pockets magazine](#) at The Upper Room.