

## **Character Trait for November, 2013 – Gratefulness**

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The character trait for the month of November in Opelika this year is “gratefulness”. The definition of gratefulness is being thankful for the good that happens. Someone who shows the character trait of gratitude recognizes with all honesty and humbleness that there have been others who have helped them, encouraged them, and invested a part of themselves into their life, helping them to become the person of character they are today.

It’s an appropriate character trait for November, this being the month of Thanksgiving and a time when most folks pause to give thanks for what they have, for those they love, and for the many blessings they can count in their lives.

But gratefulness is more of a “heart issue” than a “skill” issue, in that it doesn’t take any kind of expertise to develop. It simply takes an “attitude”. But sadly, our American culture is seemingly becoming one of “entitlement”, with those who fall into the “me generation” taking on the attitude of “what have you done for me lately? I deserve more!” So the question becomes, “How do we instill this trait of gratefulness into our children and make it a behavior pattern in all of our family’s lives in light of this growing attitude of entitlement? Below are some examples of things anyone can do:

1. Verbalize our gratefulness to others. A heartfelt, sincere “thank you” is not only an appropriate thing to say, it also shows to others that you recognize their kindness and are happy to acknowledge it out loud.
2. The art of writing “thank you” cards, letters or emails are another way of reinforcing the attitude of gratitude in our children and young adults.
3. Whenever something “bad” happens in your day take a moment to analyze the situation. Look for even just *one* positive aspect in the situation and dwell on that. It might be something as passive as “the day is over and I made it through the day!” The purpose with this exercise is to remember that every situation has a “silver lining” which we can be grateful for! We might not be able to see it at the moment it happens, but some good can come out of nearly every situation if we keep ourselves open to it. Finding that “silver lining” moment, and focusing on it, helps us put bad days or bad events into perspective and get past them. In the Book of Proverbs 17:22 we are reminded that “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” This should be a reminder to us all that when bad things happen
4. Start *listing* one thing and/or person you are grateful for each day and keep that list “available” to read. Write your thoughts down and give a sentence or two of “why” you

are grateful for that person / thing/ situation. Not only will it help you find joy in everyday things, but reading from that list will give you a noteworthy diversion on those days when things aren't going so well. Note: For those folks who have Facebook accounts, you might have noticed several of your friends listing something they are grateful for each day of this November. They are "counting their blessings"; and what a list they will have on Thanksgiving Day to help make the day extra special! If you haven't started a list, it's never too late to do so! And it doesn't have to end with November!

5. For those with children who tend to pout or throw a fit when they can't have something they want, try watching some documentaries about third world countries with your kids to see how they live, or visit a hospital or homeless shelter to show them what "real troubles" look like.
6. Finally, a tangible lesson of gratitude can be demonstrated by explaining and showing what that old saying "when life gives you lemons, make lemonade" really means. Take a lemon and cut it into slices. Have your children *taste* the lemon just as it is. Have them describe the lemon. Then, add some sugar to a slice and have them taste it again. Explain to them the meaning of the saying: lemons can either be "endured" causing you to grimace and be "sour" in your attitude all of the time – *OR* – you can add some "sugar" (which represents an attitude of gratitude) and make lemonade!

The important thing for all of us to remember is this: real thankfulness requires us to make the heartfelt decision to develop an attitude of gratefulness in our lives and then put that attitude into practice as we converse with others! Not only is gratitude an admirable trait which can endear us to those we converse with, it helps keep us grounded in grace!

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