

GRATITUDE IN HARD PLACES

"Praise That Costs Something"

Key Passages

Psalm 34:1 — "I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips."

Psalm 100:4-5 — "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

Study Focus

Mia had stopped going around the table for Thanksgiving. The first year after her daughter's diagnosis, her mother-in-law had said "Well, at least she's here with us"—which was true, but which landed like a small knife. The next year, someone suggested they were "specially chosen" for this journey, which only made Mia feel more alone. This year she wondered if she even had anything to say.

Gratitude is complicated when life is hard. Thanksgiving culture often defaults to the easy blessings—health, family, jobs—things that, if you're honest, you don't have in the same uncomplicated way as others. For special needs parents, November can feel like a month of pressure to perform a thanksgiving they don't fully feel, surrounded by people who don't fully understand.

Psalm 34 was written by David while he was pretending to be insane to escape from a king who wanted him dead. "I will extol the LORD at all times" is not written from comfort. It is a decision made in the middle of chaos and fear. This is the nature of biblical gratitude: not the natural overflow of easy circumstances, but a chosen posture in difficult ones.

Psalm 100 invites us into God's presence through thanksgiving—not because things are all good, but because God is good. Gratitude rooted in God's character—His goodness, His enduring love, His faithfulness across generations—can survive any storm. For Mia, that kind of thanksgiving isn't naive or performative. It's the most courageous thing she could do at the table.

Discussion Qs

Couples

1. How do you navigate the cultural pressure to perform easy thanksgiving when your reality is complicated?
2. What are you genuinely grateful for this year, even if it's smaller or harder-won than what others might list?
3. How does gratitude—chosen rather than felt—function differently in your marriage than gratitude that comes naturally?
4. How do you help each other find genuine reasons for thanksgiving when one of you is struggling to see them?
5. What would it look like to build a Thanksgiving tradition that honestly reflects your family's journey?

Dads

1. When gratitude doesn't come naturally, what helps you choose it anyway—and is that something you actually practice?
2. What specific things about your child's life or your family's journey are you genuinely grateful for this year?
3. How do you handle seasons when gratitude feels dishonest—when "counting your blessings" seems to minimize real pain?
4. How does your gratitude to God hold up when prayers you've prayed for years haven't been answered?
5. What is one unexpected gift that has come from walking this road that you would not have had otherwise?

Moms

1. How do you protect yourself from the pressure of performing gratitude while still cultivating real thankfulness inside?
2. What moments of genuine beauty or grace have you experienced this year that might be easy to overlook?
3. How does the truth that God's love "endures forever" land for you when you're in a season of pain?
4. When you compare your life to others who seem to have it easier, what helps you return to genuine gratitude?
5. What would you want to say at a Thanksgiving table where everyone truly understood your family's story?

Application: Write down five things you are genuinely grateful for—not the ones you feel pressure to list, but the ones that are truly yours. Pray over each one specifically.