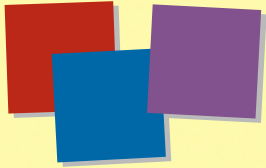


Teach Your Child Three Simple Phrases for Heaven's Sake



By Pam Galbraith

The first time I met Ruthie, she came to our home for dinner with her parents. The 19-year-old genuinely charmed our socks off. She made eye contact when she shook my hand and expressed pleasure in being able to come. She initiated conversation with, "I really like your house," "Thank you for supper," and "Let me give you a hug."

Pretentious? No way. Her warmth and appreciation were family traits. Ruthie's parents had given their children a priceless gift. A gift that would bless Ruthie's friends. A gift that would bless Ruthie as well.

We can give the same gift to our children. One way to do this is by teaching simple phrases that will improve their relationships with others and set the stage for greater intimacy with their heavenly Father.



Thank You

It's delightful to hear a child say "thank you" in response to a gift. Not only do these words honor the giver, they accept what's been given. Thankfulness doesn't just happen, however. It is taught and caught.

"Megan, please tell Grandma 'thank you' for the birthday present."

Almost always a child will comply—even though it may take time for sincere gratitude to accompany the expression of thanks. Reminding our children to express thanks for acts of kindness—gifts, favors, a meal, an opened door—helps them cultivate a spirit of gratitude.

Wouldn't it be nice if children were born with gratitude in their hearts? If they automatically picked up simple courtesies like "thank you"? Unfortunately, it doesn't happen like that. Parents are responsible for nurturing an attitude of gratitude in their children. King David expressed gratitude to God, but neglected to instill a grateful heart in his son Absalom (1 Kings 1:6; 2 Samuel 13:21-18:33).

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Absalom grew up with an entitled attitude that led him into hatred, murder, revenge, and an attempt to usurp his father's throne.

A thankful heart can be a spiritual blessing. Could it be that praise and worship come easier to someone who has learned to be thankful? Could we go so far as to say that a grateful heart is more likely to accept Jesus' death and resurrection with praise and adoration? Just as thankfulness honors and accepts what is given, so does a grateful heart honor and accept what God has given.

Many people find it hard to praise God. In some ways, praise is a discipline more than an outpouring of gratitude. But so is thankfulness before it becomes a habit. It's something our children practice that eventually becomes a habit and then part of their character.



I'm Sorry

"I'm sorry, Jacob. I was wrong to yell at you for spilling your milk. I know it was an accident."

Most of the time, a small child will say, "That's OK."

A sincere admission of wrongdoing is a powerful example for your child.

When a child hears "I'm sorry" from his mom or dad, he feels worthy of their respect. And he sees his parent's humility.

A parent's apology demonstrates a willingness to admit adults make mistakes, too. A parent's heart-felt apology shows a child what to do with his God-given conviction and guilt. It invites forgiveness and reconciliation, and leads to freedom from condemnation.

Apologies don't just happen. Like thankfulness, they must be taught and reinforced in the home. Apologies should be expected from each family member when they are due. If a child is in the habit of apologizing for his offenses, he will find it easier to reconcile than if he's never been held accountable for his actions.

Although it's hard for many of us to say "I'm sorry," the consequences for not learning how to apologize are

more devastating. Family members become estranged, marriages fail, friendships dissolve, and workplace relationships deteriorate when we refuse to say, "I'm sorry."

What about when it comes time to tell God, "I'm sorry?" Repentance is the key to freedom in the Christian life. Chains fall off when Satan can no longer hold us captive in our sin and we're right with God. Perhaps confession and reconciliation to God come more readily to those who learn the language of forgiveness at a young age.



How Are You?

It was a beautiful spring day when my five-year-old niece Leah and I went to the grocery store to purchase some potted flowers. As we shopped, we bumped into someone Leah knew. Without hesitating, Leah greeted this middle-aged woman with a cheery, "Hi, Mrs. Lewis." To which the woman replied "Hello, Leah. What are you doing today?"

Leah explained that we were looking for flowers to plant in my garden. But it was Leah's next statement that took me by surprise. She said, "How's Claire today?" I later learned that Claire was the woman's five-year-old daughter Leah knew from preschool.

At five years of age, Leah has begun to move outside herself and inquire about her friends. Some adults never learn to do this, and as a result lead very lonely lives.

Leah's mom, Sandy, admits she didn't teach Leah to ask about others. Still, Leah has learned from her mother's example. Sandy has taught her children to respond when someone they

know greets them or asks a question. They are learning to give and take in conversation with others.

At times, a question like "How are you?" can seem trite and superficial. Even so, it is a beginning.

When we ask, "How are you?" we deliberately take our minds off ourselves. We open the

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door to know another person on a deeper level. We invite that person to reciprocate with us.

Reciprocity is part of healthy interaction between two people. It's not just one person focused on himself the majority of the time. It involves give and take—a two-way communication—listening and speaking.

In the same way, a dynamic relationship with God is based on reciprocity. God is always ready to listen to us. He listens to our adoration, confession, supplication, and thanksgiving. Through his Word, he communicates his unending love for us. Do we listen to him? Listening is intentional, sacrificial, and requires discipline.

As we teach our children to step outside themselves to listen to others, we show them how to reciprocate with God. They will spend the rest of their lives sharpening this valuable skill that begins at home.

Priceless Attitudes

The three simple phrases, "Thank you," "I'm sorry," and "How are you?" serve a much greater purpose than acquiring a few manners. They are part of the necessary foundation for building relationships with others. Even more, they represent the priceless attitudes of gratitude, repentance, and unselfishness that we bring before our heavenly Father, allowing us to share intimately with the God of the universe. ■

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