

## session 3 study guide

# expressing appreciation

### starter

THANK THERAPY: It's easy to get caught up in "I wish" and "I want" and forget to remember the "I already have." Take three minutes and write down as many things as you can think of that you are thankful for right now in your life—big or small, extraordinary or everyday.

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## message

*Dictionary.com* defines “gratitude” as “the quality or feeling of being grateful or thankful.” Sometimes gratitude can overflow from us, such as when we experience the love of friends after we have had a bad day, or when someone gives us a gift out of the blue, or even when we realize the price Jesus paid on the cross for our sins. But most of the time, gratitude is a habit that develops through repetition. It develops in us as we make a conscious effort to always give thanks, express appreciation and look for the blessings in life.

Our society constantly tries to make us believe that what we have and what we are is not enough. But God’s message is different. In Hebrews 13:5, we are told to “be content with what [we] have.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul tells us to “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for [us] in Christ Jesus.” God wants us to express appreciation for what and whom we have in *all* situations—and this also applies to our parents and siblings.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells a well-known story about a young man’s struggle with being grateful for the people in his life. As you read this story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32, consider the following questions: (1) Which brother do you relate to more? (2) How do you think the father felt about the younger son’s actions?

*There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, “Father, give me my share of the estate.” So he divided his property between them.*

*Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.” So he got up and went to his father.*

*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*

*But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.*

*Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”*

*The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"*

*"My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*

### **dig**

1. What does this parable have to say about gratitude?

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2. What are some of the things the youngest son could have been grateful for?

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3. What are some of the things the oldest son could have been grateful for?

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4. How does showing gratitude impact a family?

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5. Why do you think the father didn't try to stop his youngest son from taking his inheritance and leaving?

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6. Put yourself into each person's shoes in the story for a moment. For each point in the story listed below, write the thoughts going through each of the characters' minds.

Event	Youngest Son	Oldest Son	Father
Youngest son asks for his share of the estate and then takes off.			
Youngest son finds himself out of money and food.			
Youngest son returns to his father's estate.			
Oldest son sees the feast that is thrown for his brother.			

### apply

Do you show appreciation for the members of your family? Whether you think your parents are awesome or can't figure out what planet they are from, always remember that God chose them to be *your* parents.

1. What are you thankful for about your family? Take a few minutes and come up with at least eight reasons why you are grateful for your family.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What can result from having a family full of gratitude?

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3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself as a thanks-giver?

\_\_\_\_\_

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

4. What are some ways that you show appreciation to your parents and siblings?

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5. How would your relationship with your family change if every day you made an effort to show more appreciation for them?

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6. Did you ever stop to think that people like to receive gratitude and appreciation in different ways? The following quiz will help you determine the ways in which you most like to receive gratitude from others. You can circle up to three answers for each question.

After a hard day, I'd probably feel better if someone:

- (a) gave me a compliment.
- (b) sat down and listened to me rant about my day.
- (c) brought me my favorite beverage or some ice cream.
- (d) offered to help me accomplish a task I needed to do.
- (e) gave me a massage or held my hand.

A really cool gift to receive from someone important in my life would be:

- (a) a letter or poem that he or she wrote for me.
- (b) a vacation, dinner out or tickets to an event where we got to spend time together.
- (c) a gift certificate to the mall.
- (d) an IOU for him or her to wash my car or let me borrow his or her car.
- (e) a hug.

I'd be happiest right now if:

- (a) someone who was important to me told me why he or she thought I was awesome.
- (b) I got to spend the afternoon with my favorite people.
- (c) someone delivered a package of warm chocolate chip cookies to me.
- (d) someone offered to do my chores or homework for a week.
- (e) my favorite person gave me a big hug and kiss.

For my birthday, I'd rather have a friend:

- (a) tell me he or she appreciates my friendship.
- (b) spend my birthday just hanging out with me, not doing anything in particular.
- (c) buy me a hat he or she knows I've been eyeing.
- (d) help me fix up my broken bike I keep meaning to fix.
- (e) give me a high five or a hug.

Add up the number of circled answers you have for each letter and list these below.

          
A
          
B
          
C
          
D
          
E

In his book *The Five Languages of Love*, author Gary Chapman describes the following “languages” that people use to express and accept love and appreciation. Circle the two categories in which you have the highest number of responses on your quiz:

- A. Words of Affirmation
- B. Quality Time
- C. Receiving Gifts
- D. Acts of Service
- E. Physical Touch

Chapman states that while people may enjoy many or even all of these forms of love and appreciation, most people have 1 to 2 dominant “love languages.”

7. While it can be interesting to discover your own language and beneficial to share your language with loved ones, it is even more important to discover the love language of those you care about. Chapman found that most people showed love and appreciation in the same way that they wanted to receive it . . . even if the other person had a totally different love language! Take a look at the love languages above and think about the people in your family. Which methods do you think would be the most appreciated by the people in your family?

Mom: \_\_\_\_\_

Dad: \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Try to find time today to talk with your family about how they like to feel appreciated. Knowing that your mom loves a “thanks!” and a hug or that your brother appreciates a quick email or text of gratitude can help you to demonstrate your appreciation more effectively to your family.



## reflect

Of course, while it is easy to point out the benefits of encouraging others in your family, it can be much harder to put that practice into effect on a consistent basis. So, how can you begin to make such a “ministry of encouragement” a natural part of your dealings with those in your family?

1. The first way is to *just start*. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “You don’t have to see the whole staircase; just take the first step.” You don’t need to wait for that perfect moment or that perfect reason to show your appreciation. You don’t need to become a thankful family overnight. What is one way you could show your appreciation for your parents today?

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What is one way you could show your appreciation for your siblings today?

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2. Another way to make encouraging others a part of your lifestyle is to *do it often*. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Habits are built on repetition. Make a habit of giving thanks and showing appreciation, and both the giver and the receiver will benefit. Of course, habits don’t form themselves—you need a plan. What are 2 to 3 ways you could start to develop a habit of appreciation for your family?

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Now choose one of these methods that you can apply to your life today.

3. A third item to remember is to *praise sincerely*. In Romans 12:9, Paul writes, “Love must be sincere.” False praise leads to mistrust. Have you ever received an insincere compliment? How did it make you feel?

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4. Finally, it is important to *be available*. Receiving encouragement in good times is to be treasured; in bad times it can be vital. In order to have a culture of encouragement in your family, you need to spend time together to have the opportunity to share words of thanks and see when others are in need of a word of encouragement. Think about your week. When do you have time to check in with family members?

Mom: \_\_\_\_\_

Dad: \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling: \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling: \_\_\_\_\_

How can you be more available to other family members?

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5. Now think about some of the ways that you and your family members relate to one another. How do your parents express appreciation to you?

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6. Do you find it difficult to express appreciation to your parents? Why is this often so difficult?

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7. What are some of the issues that block communication with your parents?

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8. What was one time when another family member made you feel loved?

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### meditation



Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,  
just as in fact you are doing.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11