

# 1

# Give Thanks

MATTHEW 14:13–21



## GOAL

Children practice giving thanks to God for all their favorite things in life and, through this practice, lay the foundation for a pattern of living fully celebrating communion.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



## PRAYER

Holy God, thank you for the opportunity to be grateful for the blessings you have given me anew with these young people today. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

*Celebrate Communion* is a cyclical practice that Jesus demonstrated for us in the Bible. It always begins with an offer of thanksgiving to God for the blessings God has bestowed upon us. In this session, we will build upon the quick thank-yous that children have been taught to offer, grounding gratitude as a spiritual practice, not a rote response.

## THE BIBLE STORY

All four Gospel writers include an account of Jesus feeding the multitudes (Matthew 14:1–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–13). In each of the three Synoptic Gospels (and to some extent, in John’s Gospel), we hear the language that has become the foundation for many traditions’ communion liturgy: Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to distribute to the people. This Bible story both introduces the full cycle of celebrating communion—giving thanks, sharing meals, being fed, and feeding others—and emphasizes the importance of giving thanks to God.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

On one hand, children are often quick to offer thanks for even the smallest of kindnesses and gifts in genuine gratitude. On the other hand, as service and kindness begin to become expected, parents and caregivers often find themselves reminding young children to “say thank you.” Giving thanks to God for what we have been given can be as natural as breathing in and out—receiving grace and returning gratitude—and starting as young children can set the foundation for a lifelong practice.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- “Taste and See” (p. 8): Review the American Sign Language signs so that you may lead the children in their response to the litany. Go to [www.signingsavvy.com](http://www.signingsavvy.com) and enter the key words, *taste*, *see*, *God*, and *good*, in the search bar to watch a video of each sign.

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Gratitude Rainbow” (p. 10): Obtain washable red, green, yellow, and blue fingerprint. Cut paper plates in half and then cut out the center to make a rainbow shape.
- “Giving Thanks at Mealtime” (p. 11): Obtain blank index cards, seven for each child, and binder rings, yarn, or cording.



## GETTING STARTED

- Construction paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils

### THANK-YOU PICTURES

A

Greet the children as they arrive. Provide construction paper and coloring supplies. Wonder about someone they would want to say “thank you” to and for what they are thanking them. Invite the children to make a picture of the person and what they are thanking them for. Encourage the children to tell the group about their pictures.

### TASTE AND SEE

QC

Invite the children to join you in the litany below with their response: “Taste and see that God is good.” Teach the American Sign Language signs below for the children to use for each of the key words in the response. Practice the response so that it flows with the signs.

- Taste: *touch the tip of middle finger to lips*
- See: *“V”-hand moving pointer and middle finger from eyes outward*
- God: *move right palm facing left from slightly above head down toward chin*
- Good: *touch fingers of right hand to mouth, then move back of right hand to palm of left hand*

Receive God’s good gifts.

**Taste and see that God is good.**

Give thanks for all things.

**Taste and see that God is good.**

Be fed by the bread of life.

**Taste and see that God is good.**

Share God’s love with all.

**Taste and see that God is good.**



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE



### Prompts:

- My friend gives me a piece of candy.
- Someone lets me take their seat on the bus when there are no seats.
- A friend gives me a birthday present.
- My sibling helps me wash the dog.
- A neighbor makes me a nice meal.
- Someone says that my hair looks nice today.

### PROMPTING THANKS

C G

Ask the children if their parents or caretaker has ever said to them, “What do you say?” after they have received a gift, or someone has done something for them. Wonder why they think that is said to them and what response the adult is looking for.

Play a simple game with the children using the prompts in the sidebar. Encourage the children to take turns, or in unison, responding to you by saying, “What do you say?” You can respond, “Thank you!” offering a simple role reversal of this everyday exchange. Invite them to come up with a few of their own prompts as well, thinking about what someone would say thank you for.



## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

### REFLECTING AND CONNECTING

C

Resource Page 1

Tell the children that over the next four sessions they will be learning about the practice of celebrating communion. Wonder what the children know about communion, the Lord's Supper, or what it is called in your congregation. Explain that followers of Jesus throughout the years have followed his instructions to remember him as he shared his last supper with his disciples. Comment that Jesus modeled four things that we do when we celebrate communion: give thanks, share meals, be fed, and feed others. Tell them that today they will focus on giving thanks.

Tell the children that you will read a Bible story about a time when there was a large crowd of hungry people and Jesus did something amazing. Ask them to raise their hands when anyone gives thanks in the story. Read aloud the adapted Bible story from Matthew 14:13–21 on Resource Page 1.

Reflect on the story with the children. Use the following questions to help spur some conversation about the story.

- ✦ What part of the story did you like the best?
- ✦ What surprised you in this story?
- ✦ Why do you think the disciples wanted to send the crowd away?
- ✦ When did someone say “thank you” in this story? Do you think anyone else might have given thanks in this story? Who?
- ✦ Who does Jesus thank?
- ✦ What's one part of this story you want to always remember?



There's a lot of wonder in this miraculous story. You don't need to have answers. Take time to sit with the unanswerable questions that miracles fuel. Let the children wonder, and wonder with them!



## FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

### GIVE THANKS IN WORSHIP

M AM T

Internet-connected device

Tell the children that one of the places that we can offer our thanks to God is in worship, and one of the ways people worship is through singing together. Tell the children they will watch a video with the song “Give Thanks.” Explain that, as the children in the video sing the song, they use their hands to make American Sign Language signs for the “Give thanks” lines of the song and then they do more of a dance movement for the part of the song about the poor and the rich. Invite the children to sing along with the video, following the signs and movements as the song becomes familiar. Show the YouTube video “Give Thanks HD” ([bit.ly/FMGiveThanks](https://bit.ly/FMGiveThanks), 2:25). You may want to show the video several times.

After singing and moving together, ask the children the following questions:

- ✦ How did it feel in your body to give thanks to God by singing today?
- ✦ How did it feel in your heart to give thanks to God by singing today?

- Internet-connected device (optional)
- Mural paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils

## THANK YOU DAYS!

A QC T

Tell the children that many special days throughout the year are designated to give thanks to different people in our lives. Wonder together how many they can name. If necessary, prompt the children by mentioning days such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Grandparent’s Day, and Siblings Day. Tell the children that there are even special days to show appreciation for teachers, bosses, pastors, nurses, dentists, custodians, receptionists, librarians, bus drivers, waste and recycling collectors, firefighters, police officers, mail carriers, zookeepers, and more! If the children are curious about certain professions or appreciation days, do an internet search for “national [name] day,” such as “national librarians day” and you will find that it is celebrated on April 16. Comment that these days are reminders to thank people who provide services and care for individuals and communities.

Place the mural paper in the middle of the floor or a large table. Invite the children to gather around it, each with a spot where they can draw. Have them choose a person that they would like to give thanks for, commenting that the person may be someone they know or someone they don’t know personally but appreciate what they do.

After the pictures are completed, offer the prayer below, inviting the children to take turns naming the person or job that they are giving thanks for. Somewhere on the mural, title it, “We Give Thanks for . . .” and display it in your space or church.

Dear God, thank you for the many people in our lives who care for us, sometimes in ways we can see and sometimes behind the scene.

Today we give thanks for the following people. . . . Help us each day to remember to give thanks! Amen.



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Paint smocks or shirts
- Table coverings
- Prepared paper plates in a rainbow shape, cut in half with the center cut out
- Paper plates with washable red, green, yellow, and blue fingerpaint
- Disposable hand wipes
- Paintbrushes
- Single-hole punch
- Yarn
- Scissors

## GRATITUDE RAINBOW

G A C X

Play four rounds of I Spy with the children using the color prompts below. After each color round, invite the children to take turns naming who or what they are thankful for, using the instructions following the color prompt.

- Something red on a person or article of clothing—a person they are thankful for
- Something green from nature—something in nature they are thankful for
- Something yellow in the space you are in—a place they are thankful for
- Something blue that is an object—a thing they are thankful for

Then invite the children to make a rainbow using the four colors: red, green, yellow, and blue to remember people, places, and things that they want to thank God for when they see those colors throughout their week.

Have the children put on paint smocks or shirts to protect their clothing and cover the table(s). Provide prepared paper plates in a rainbow shape and paper plates with washable red, green, yellow, and blue fingerpaints. Invite the children to use the fingerpaints to make a rainbow on their rainbow-shaped plate. You may want to demonstrate, but allow the children

to create their rainbows in whatever pattern they choose. Encourage the children to wipe their hands between colors to prevent muddy rainbows. If some children do not wish to use fingerpaints, provide paintbrushes.

After the rainbows are made, have the children punch a hole in the top of the arc, cut a piece of yarn (about the length of their forearm), and thread it through the hole to hang their rainbow. Set aside the rainbows to dry.

Encourage the children to hang their rainbow in a place they will see it each day and be reminded to give thanks. Invite the children to recall what each color will remind them of: red for people, green for nature, yellow for places, and blue for things.

## GIVING THANKS AT MEALTIME



Wonder together what are different times that the children may give thanks to God throughout the week. Affirm all answers, commenting that any time is a good time to give thanks to God. Suggest that mealtime prayers are a good time to pause with family members, caregivers, and/or friends to thank God for the gift of food. Tell the children that they will each make a set of mealtime prayers to take home and use with others.

Provide copies of Resource Page 2 and coloring supplies. Invite the children to decorate the prayer cards and cut them out. While they are coloring, read aloud the prayers. Wonder if any of these are familiar to the children or what other mealtime prayers they might know.

Give each child seven blank 3" x 5" index cards and a glue stick. Have them glue one prayer card to each index card. On the extra index card, suggest they draw a picture of food they like to eat. Have the children punch a hole in the top left corner of each card and place a binder ring, yarn, or cording through the hole. If using yarn or cording, help the children loosely tie the ends together. Encourage the children to take their set of prayer cards home and use them at mealtimes to practice giving thanks.

- Copies of Resource Page 2
- Crayons, colored pencils
- Scissors
- Seven blank 3" x 5" index cards for each child
- Glue sticks
- Single-hole punch
- Binder rings, yarn, or cording



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### BLESS AND SEND



As you close your time together, invite the children to gather in a circle. Thank them for your time together. Remember together that Jesus first thanked God for the five loaves of bread and two fish that he used to feed more than five thousand people and that giving thanks to God is the first practice in celebrating communion.

Invite the children to close their eyes and pretend that they are sending all the thanks in their whole bodies to God. Wonder together what that might look like for each child. It could look like sitting quietly like a frog and thinking all your thanks. It could look like stretching out to give God a hug or a high five. Encourage the children to do what feels right to them and then invite them to do this same action each night before bed this week.

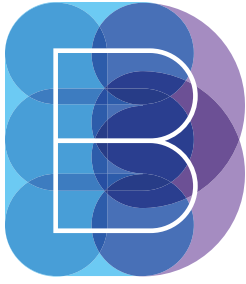
Close with the echo prayer in the sidebar, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray.



#### Echo Prayer:

Thank you, God, /  
for all of the blessings /  
you have given us. /  
We love you. /  
Amen. /





## BIBLE STORY

### BASED ON MATTHEW 14:13–21

Jesus and his disciples traveled around telling people about God’s love. People were interested in what Jesus was teaching and how he was helping people. More and more people followed him. One day, Jesus had been teaching and helping people all day long. It was getting late. A couple of his disciples came to him and said, “Jesus, it is dinner time. You need to send these people away so they can buy themselves dinner.”

Jesus told them, “They don’t need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

The disciples didn’t know what to do. The crowd was very big, more than five thousand people. They told Jesus that feeding all these people would be very expensive, and they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. That was definitely not enough food.

Jesus said, “Bring the loaves of bread and fish to me.”

He looked out at the crowd and invited them to sit down. Then he took the five loaves of bread and two fish, and he looked up to heaven. He blessed the food, giving thanks to God, and broke the food into pieces to share. The disciples passed out the food, and something amazing happened. Everyone ate until they were full, and there was *still* food left. So much food was leftover that the disciples filled twelve baskets with leftovers. More than five thousand people ate from those five loaves of bread and two fish.

Thank you, God, for the food before us.  
Thank you, God, for the friends beside us.  
Thank you, God, for the love between us.  
Amen.

For food to eat, (*raise hands to mouth*)  
and friends to share, (*hold hands out*)  
for those we love everywhere, (*place hands over heart*)  
we thank you, God. (*put hands together in prayer*)

God is great and God is good,  
and we thank God for our food.  
By God's hand we must be fed,  
give us Lord, our daily bread.  
Amen.

Thank you, God, for this food,  
for rest and home and all things good.  
For trees and birds and skies above,  
but most of all, for those we love.

Dear God, thank you for the meal before us.  
Give food to those who are hungry,  
and to us who have food,  
give a hunger for kindness and justice  
that all may be fed.  
Amen.

For all food yummy  
that fills my tummy,  
thank you, God!  
Amen!