



GRATITUDE CHANGES THE ATTITUDE

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By Linda Ranson Jacobs

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Over time many children of divorce have a change of attitude about things. Many will get bitter and some will have attitude problems. After the initial shock of their parents being divorced, having time to process the divorce, adjusting to two homes and when the stress dies down, some children actually find joy in life.

How do they do it? How can they find joy in the midst of trials and even tribulations? In the article, [The Grateful Brain](#) we read,

“Gratitude, particularly if practiced regularly, can keep you healthier and happier.”

The article goes onto talk about misconceptions we’ve had about gratitude.

One misguided effort they mention in the article, and one that I think many of us have tried to force on children of divorce, is to try and make them realize there are other kids worse off than they are. Research is showing this is not gratitude. This is feeling sorry for someone. It does nothing to make the child feel better about their situation. The article goes onto explain,

“You actually have to show appreciation for what you have, for it to have an effect.”

What can church leaders and children’s leaders in particular do to help the child of divorce develop gratitude. We can start by helping them look around them at things they can be thankful for.

Here is a partial list to help you get started

- Express your thankfulness for the church in your prayers. When kids hear this often enough they will begin to feel thankful too for the church building and the people in it.
- Verbally express thankfulness for the people who work with you in ministry. Tell your volunteers thank you out loud and tell them often. Kids will mimic what you model.
- Tell the kids thank you when you are grateful for something they have done. You may have to train yourself to look around to find those good deeds.
- Ask the children what they are thankful for and do it often not just at Thanksgiving. Sometimes children (and single parents) need to be shown what they have.
- Encourage kids to tell their stories at discussion time. Relate their stories of life situations to stories in the



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Bible. More than once I've said to a child, "I'm sorry you are experiencing this but you know what? Just like Esther in the Bible 'for such a time as this you have been called into the kingdom'. God has something special He wants you to do." This might apply to the child witnessing to the parent that left. Read or tell them the story in Esther 2-7.

- Every Sunday from Thanksgiving through Christmas have a place where children can write up post it notes of what they are thankful for. Call it the "Gratitude Changes Attitude" basket or think of some other catchy title. Have all the adults participate in this fun exercise.

There is brain research that shows feelings for gratitude can impact different regions in the brain connected with dopamine. Dopamine feels good. Many people think dopamine is the reward neurotransmitter. Being grateful releases dopamine and when dopamine increases you want to do whatever it was that made you feel good. Gratitude is powerful.

"So once you start seeing things to be grateful for, your brain starts looking for more things to be grateful for." [The Grateful Brain](#)

Gratitude will change attitudes. Many of these kids won't have the opportunity to learn about gratitude at home – not at the beginning of a divorce anyway. Don't we owe it to the kids in our ministries to introduce them being thankful and grateful? I think we do.

What about you? How can you teach gratefulness to children of divorce in your church?

Linda Ranson Jacobs is one of the forefront leaders in the area of children and divorce. She developed and created the DivorceCare for Kids programs. DC4K is an international program for churches to use to help children of divorced parents find healing within the arms of a loving church family. As a speaker, author, trainer, program developer and child care center owner, Linda has assisted countless families by modeling and acting on the healing love she has found in Jesus Christ. Linda offers support, encouragement and suggestions to help those working with the child of divorce. She serves as DC4K Ambassador (<http://www.dc4k.org>) and can be reached via email at ljacobs@dc4k.org. You can find additional articles from Linda on her blog at <http://blog.dc4k.org/>.

Free articles and devotions for single parent families in your church can be found at Linda's website Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids (<http://www.hlp4.com>).