

The Cozy Seasons: Fall at Home

by *Amy Maryon*

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Devotions, Stories, Activities, and Recipes for Simple Family Moments

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Chapter 1: A Season to Slow Down

*"To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter or purpose under heaven."
— Ecclesiastes 3:1 AMP*

Devotional Reflection:

I've always loved how fall makes me breathe differently. It's not just the weather — it's the way the sunlight softens, the way the evenings come sooner, and the way even nature seems to say, *"It's okay to let go."* The trees stop striving. They stop producing. They let their leaves drift down, not in panic, but in trust that God will bring them new life again when the time is right.

There's a lesson in that for us, isn't there?

So much of motherhood feels like endless summer — always producing, always moving, always growing something. We wake up to breakfasts and messes, spend our days teaching, driving, cooking, cleaning, and fall into bed already thinking about tomorrow's to-do list. If we're not careful, we can spend entire years in a rush and never once stop to notice the changing colors around us.

But Ecclesiastes reminds us: *"To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter or purpose under heaven"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1 AMP). Not all things at once. Not one endless push. Seasons are God's way of reminding us that life has rhythms. There is a time to plant, a time to harvest, and yes — a time to rest.

Slowing down doesn't come naturally for most of us. If you're like me, you might feel guilty the moment you sit still. There's always laundry waiting or crumbs under the table. But what if slowing down is part of obedience? What if rest is actually an act of trust?

Think about Jesus. He carried the greatest mission the world has ever known, and still, Luke 5:16 tells us: *"But Jesus*

Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray [in seclusion]." Even the Son of God didn't live at a frantic pace. He knew when to withdraw. He knew the value of quiet. He chose margin, not just motion.

And yet here we are, running circles in our own homes, sometimes afraid that if we stop moving, everything will fall apart. But mama, can I remind you? You are not the glue that holds the world together. God is. And when you choose to pause, you're not letting your family down — you're modeling faith. You're showing your children that life isn't only about doing, but about being.

I used to think slowing down meant doing nothing. But now I see it differently. Slowing down means paying attention. It means noticing the way the morning sun filters through the blinds while you sip your coffee. It means listening when your child is trying to tell you something silly, instead of rushing them to the next thing. It means lighting a candle and reading your Bible while the soup simmers on the stove.

There's a peace that comes when you embrace this truth: you don't have to keep everything alive all at once. The trees aren't frantic about their leaves. They don't tape them back on or cling desperately. They release them into the breeze, trusting that spring will come. Can you imagine if the trees refused to let go? They would break under the weight of all they were never meant to carry.

Psalms 46:10 (AMP) speaks right into this: "*Be still and know (recognize, understand) that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*" Being still isn't laziness — it's reverence. It's the holy recognition that God is God, and we are not.

The truth is, fall doesn't last forever. These moments in motherhood won't either. The babies who cling to you will someday grow tall and drive away. The teenagers who roll their eyes now will eventually sit at your table again, older and wiser. But right now — this is your season. And it's holy.

So as the leaves begin to turn, I want you to hear God's invitation: "*Slow down. Be still. Trust Me with the rest.*"

Because mama, you don't have to hold on to every leaf. You don't have to bloom in every season. You don't have to say yes to every opportunity. Sometimes, the most faithful thing you can do is simply sit at His feet and breathe.

Let this fall be more than pumpkin spice and pretty décor. Let it be a turning of your own heart toward rest, toward gratitude, toward presence. The God who made the seasons has you in His hands. And He isn't rushing you.

Reflection Questions

1. What areas of your life feel like "endless summer," where you've been striving without rest?
2. How might God be inviting you to let go of some "leaves" this season — things you don't need to carry anymore?
3. What's one simple way you can create margin for quiet with Him this week?



The Candle on the Table

The first cool morning of September always felt like a little holiday in our home, though nobody in the world seemed to notice it but me. After long months of humid air and sticky afternoons, of ceiling fans running full tilt and kids dripping popsicle juice across the porch, the change slipped in quietly. I noticed it before I even opened my eyes. The air felt different, crisp against my skin.

I padded across the wooden floor, tugging a cardigan around my shoulders. The house still held its summer hush — windows open, faint chirp of crickets still lingering, toys scattered on the rug. I walked into the kitchen and paused, breathing in that subtle difference. Summer's air is heavy, like honey. This was light, brisk, carrying with it the promise of turning leaves and soup simmering on the stove.

I reached into the cupboard for the mason jar candle. It wasn't expensive or elegant, just cinnamon wax poured into glass, its wick bent slightly from storage. But it was the candle I saved for the very first cool morning, year after year. A marker of the new season. I struck a match, held the flame steady, and watched as the wick caught with a soft flicker. At once, the house seemed to exhale. The scent of apples and cloves began to unfurl into the air, warm and spicy, as if whispering, *Yes, the season has turned.*

For a moment, I lingered in the silence, watching the glow. Around me were the signs of yesterday — notebooks stacked in uneven piles, a couple of dishes still waiting in the sink, crayons rolling near the edge of the dining table where they'd been abandoned mid-drawing. Ordinary mess. Ordinary life. But with that candle lit, the whole room seemed to shift, as if heaven had bent a little closer.

I set the oatmeal pot on the stove, poured in the oats, and began dicing apples. Their sweet scent filled the kitchen as I sprinkled them with cinnamon and stirred them into the bubbling pot. Soon the aroma of apple pie mingled with the candle, wrapping the house in comfort.

It wasn't long before the sound of small footsteps came thumping down the hall. My youngest appeared, hair wild in every direction, his blanket draped like a cape around his shoulders. He rubbed his eyes, sniffed the air, and blinked at me.

"Mama," he said, voice gravelly with sleep, "why does it smell like pie in here?"

I laughed, pulling him into a hug. "Because it's fall, sweetheart."

One by one, the rest of the children trickled in. The middle boys flopped into chairs, yawning, already asking what subjects we were covering for school. My daughters padded in with their journals, pencils tucked behind ears, ready to curl near the glow of the candle. Soon the table was alive — sleepy voices, spoons clinking against bowls of steaming oatmeal, the candle flame steady in the center like a beacon.

That morning, nobody rushed. We lingered. The children told me about the geese they had heard honking overhead the night before. They noticed the trees outside — still green, but promising to soon change. We talked about what we might read together that day, what experiments we wanted to try, and who was ready for handwriting practice. Nothing extraordinary. Just a candle, a pot of oatmeal, and the gift of being together.

When breakfast ended, we cleared the bowls and pulled the schoolbooks close. The candle still burned, casting a soft glow over math worksheets and history pages. I read aloud about pilgrims and harvests while the younger ones colored, crayons rolling again toward the edge of the table. Someone spilled milk. Someone else groaned about long division. The baby tugged at my sweater hem while I corrected spelling. It wasn't perfect. But it was holy.

Later, as the children scribbled in notebooks, I slipped outside with my second cup of coffee. The air met me with a crisp edge that cleared my mind. A handful of leaves — braver than the rest — had already let go and drifted across

the yard. I wrapped my sweater tighter and sat, coffee warm in my hands, steam curling upward like a prayer.

Homeschooling has its seasons, too, I thought. I remembered the baby years, when lessons were done in ten-minute bursts between naps. The toddler years, when coloring pages ended up taped to walls instead of tucked into binders. The elementary years, when I balanced teaching fractions while stirring a pot of soup. And now, here I was, with a house full of all the stages at once — littles crawling onto my lap, older ones tackling essays, teenagers questioning, stretching, rolling their eyes one minute and asking deep questions the next. My days full, my heart stretched wide.

And just like the trees, my motherhood was in a fall season — transition, change, a quiet letting go of expectations I once clung to, and holding closer what mattered most.

It was right there, sitting on the porch, that I sensed God's whisper: *You don't have to keep every leaf, Amy. It's okay to let some things fall. You don't have to do it all at once. Just be here. Be present.*

Tears stung my eyes. The pressure to do everything perfectly — every subject completed, every meal homemade, every chore finished — weighed heavy. But what if letting go was obedience? What if rest was trust?

The day unfolded like so many homeschool days do. Books stacked, lessons turning into conversations. A science experiment fizzled out in laughter instead of results. The youngest spelled "pumpkin" as "plump-kin," sending us all into giggles. Laundry was folded. Bread was set to rise. The house hummed with ordinary life.

By evening, the candle still glowed in the center of the table. Supper was simple — chicken soup and fresh bread. But around that table, voices rose in stories, laughter echoed, prayers were whispered. Hands wrapped around warm bowls, bread passed from one to another. It wasn't fancy. But it was everything.

When the dishes were washed and stacked, and the children scattered into evening games and reading, I returned to the table. The candle had burned low, wax pooling at the bottom of the jar. I leaned close, watching the flame dance and thought of the whole day it had marked — breakfast and books, spilled milk and soup, laughter and whispers.

“Lord,” I prayed softly, “help me to see You in the ordinary. Help me to trust You with the seasons. Help me slow down long enough to notice what You’re already doing.”

The house quieted. The cool air pressed in through the window. And when I finally blew out the candle, the thin ribbon of smoke rising heavenward, I carried with me the truth that slowing down isn’t laziness. It’s faithfulness. It’s choosing to rest in the God who holds every season — even the ones within my own home.



Activities & Traditions

Fall has a way of nudging us into family rhythms we often forget in the blur of summer. Maybe it's the shorter days, maybe it's the cooler air that makes us want to stay closer to home — whatever it is, I've learned that leaning into small traditions this time of year creates memories my children talk about long after the leaves are gone. They don't remember the math lesson we pushed through or the laundry I stayed up too late folding. They remember the candle on the table, the way the house smelled like apples, and the evenings when we laughed together over something silly.

Here are some of our family's simple, cozy traditions for the fall season. Each one is meant to be flexible — something a mom of littles can adapt, but also something that still works with teenagers (even if they pretend they're too old for it).

1. The Leaf Hunt Walk

One of the simplest things we do every fall is go for a walk with nothing but a basket and the instruction: "*Let's see who can find the most beautiful leaf.*" We don't rush it, and it's not a competition in the serious sense — but my kids love to hold up their treasures and compare colors.

When they were little, we taped the leaves into journals and wrote the date in the margin. Those notebooks became time capsules of sorts — pressed reds, oranges, and yellows from seasons past. Now that some of them are older, the leaf walks look different. My teens aren't taping leaves into books anymore, but they still come along. Sometimes we just walk, breathe in the cool air, and talk about things that might not have come up around the table. It's amazing how walking side by side loosens words that don't come out face-to-face.

2. The Gratitude Journal

Every year in the fall, we start a new family gratitude journal. It isn't fancy — just a spiral-bound notebook or a composition book from the dollar store. Each night after

supper, we take a few minutes to jot down something we're thankful for. Littles might draw a picture. Teens scribble a word or two. Sometimes mine write funny things like "*thankful for leftover pie,*" and other times they surprise me with notes that go deep.

By the time Thanksgiving rolls around, we have weeks of blessings recorded. On Thanksgiving Day, we flip through the pages together, laughing at some, tearing up at others. It's a habit that grounds us and shifts our perspective, even on days when gratitude feels hard to name.

3. Creating a Cozy Corner

This one is mostly for me, though the kids have adopted it too. In the fall, I pick one spot in the house — usually a chair by the window — and declare it my cozy corner. A blanket draped over the arm, a basket with my Bible, journal, and a good book or two, and always a candle nearby.

When my kids were younger, they knew if Mama was in her corner, it wasn't time to ask for snacks. Now that they're older, sometimes I find one of them curled up in my spot reading a novel or sketching in a notebook. It isn't about the chair itself, it's about what it represents: permission to pause. To breathe. To rest.

If you don't already have a cozy corner, I encourage you to create one this fall. It doesn't have to be pretty enough for a magazine spread. It just needs to be a place that whispers, "*slow down.*"

4. The Family Reading Hour

Homeschooling means books are a big part of our days, but in the fall, I like to shift our read-alouds into the evenings. There's something about dimming the lights, lighting a candle, and pulling everyone together under blankets while I read a story that makes the whole day settle.

When the children were little, we read picture books about pumpkins and animals preparing for winter. Now we've moved on to chapter books, and sometimes the older ones take turns reading aloud while I listen and sip coffee. Even

my teenagers, who roll their eyes at first, usually end up listening in. There's something about story that reaches across ages.

5. Soup & Bread Nights

Fall practically begs for soup simmering on the stove, and over the years we've made it a tradition. Once a week, we declare it "soup and bread night." Sometimes it's hearty chili with cornbread, other times it's creamy potato soup with homemade rolls. We gather around the table, bowls in hand, bread warm from the oven in the middle, and we linger longer than usual.

Food doesn't have to be elaborate to be memorable. Soup and bread carry with them the smell of home, the warmth of comfort, and the gift of slowing down to eat together.

6. Simmer Pots

On days when the house feels a little stale or the mood needs a reset, I fill a small pot with water, toss in apple peels, orange rinds, a few cinnamon sticks, and let it simmer on the stove. Within minutes, the whole house smells like fall.

It isn't just about fragrance. It's about atmosphere. It's a way of saying, "*This is a home, and it matters.*" Even if the sink is full of dishes and the laundry isn't folded, a simmer pot makes everything feel a little cozier.

7. The Thankful Tree

This tradition started years ago with construction paper leaves taped to the wall. Each day, the kids wrote one thing they were thankful for on a leaf and taped it to the branches I had drawn with a marker. Over time, it grew into a paper tree filled with blessings — messy handwriting, crooked leaves, and all.

Now that my kids are older, we use cardstock leaves on string and hang them from a few branches gathered in a vase. It looks prettier, but the heart is the same. Each leaf is

a reminder of God's goodness, a way of naming His faithfulness in ordinary life.

8. Evening Walks

In the fall, I like to end the day with a short walk. Sometimes all the kids come, sometimes only one or two. We talk, we kick at the leaves, we watch the sky fade to pink and orange. It doesn't take long, but it resets something in me after a long day.

One evening, I remember my son asked me a question about God as we walked. He probably wouldn't have brought it up at the table or during school hours, but the quiet and the motion made space for it. That's what these little traditions do — they create space. Space for God, space for conversations, space for hearts to open.

None of these traditions are complicated. They don't require a shopping trip or a Pinterest board. But woven together, they form the fabric of fall in our family. The candle, the walks, the journals, the soup nights — they become the things our children carry with them, long after the season has passed.

So, mama, don't underestimate the power of small traditions. Your children may not remember the lesson plan you wrote out or the spelling list they copied, but they will remember the way the house smelled like cinnamon, the warmth of the bread you pulled from the oven, and the evenings you lingered together by candlelight.

Comfort Foods for Fall

When the season changes, I find myself craving food that feels like home. Things that warm us from the inside, smell wonderful while they're cooking, and bring everyone to the table without me needing to call them. These are the recipes I lean on — simple, specific, and straight from my kitchen to yours.

Baked Apple Cinnamon Oatmeal Cups

Perfect for busy homeschool mornings when I don't want to stand at the stove stirring. They're soft, a little chewy, and taste like apple pie for breakfast. I usually double the recipe because they disappear fast.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 cups milk
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup maple syrup or honey
- 2 Tbsp melted butter
- 1 large apple, peeled and finely diced

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. In a bowl, mix oats, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt.
3. In another bowl, whisk milk, egg, syrup, and melted butter.
4. Combine wet and dry ingredients, then fold in diced apple.
5. Spoon into a greased muffin tin and bake 25–30 minutes, until set and golden.

Serve warm with a drizzle of cream or just plain — perfect for little hands or teens grabbing breakfast before lessons.

Quick Apple Cider (from Apple Juice)

I know most of us aren't going to boil whole apples for hours, and that's okay. This version uses apple juice but still makes the whole house smell like fall.

Ingredients:

- 1 gallon apple juice
- 1 orange, sliced
- 3–4 cinnamon sticks
- 6 whole cloves
- ¼ cup brown sugar (optional, depending on sweetness of juice)

Directions:

1. Pour apple juice into a slow cooker or stockpot.
2. Add orange slices, cinnamon sticks, cloves, and sugar if desired.
3. Simmer on low for at least an hour to let the flavors blend.
4. Strain before serving.

It's cozy, quick, and makes enough to share with neighbors if you want to fill a thermos and drop some off.



Pumpkin Spice Pancakes

These make even an ordinary Tuesday morning feel like a celebration. Soft, fluffy, and warmly spiced — they taste like autumn on a plate.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups flour
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ¼ tsp cloves
- 1 cup buttermilk (or milk + 1 tsp vinegar)
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup pumpkin purée
- 2 Tbsp melted butter

Directions:

1. Whisk dry ingredients in a bowl.
2. In another bowl, whisk buttermilk, egg, pumpkin, and melted butter.
3. Stir wet into dry just until combined.
4. Cook on a greased skillet until bubbles form; flip and cook until golden.

Serve stacked high with maple syrup, a sprinkle of powdered sugar, and sometimes a dollop of whipped cream for the kids.



Overnight Slow Cooker Oatmeal

A lifesaver on mornings when I know the next day will be full. You put it together at bedtime and wake up to a house that smells like someone's been cooking for you all night.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups steel-cut oats
- 8 cups water (or half water, half milk for creamier texture)
- 2 apples, peeled and diced
- ½ cup raisins or dried cranberries
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ¼ cup brown sugar or maple syrup

Directions:

1. Grease the inside of your slow cooker with butter or spray.
2. Add all ingredients, stir, and cook on low overnight (7–8 hours).
3. In the morning, stir and serve warm with cream or a drizzle of honey.

It's like waking up to a hug.



Caramel Apple French Toast Bake

A fall weekend tradition. You prep it the night before, then bake it in the morning while the coffee brews. The smell will bring your whole crew to the table without you saying a word.

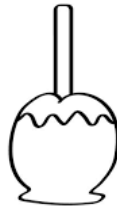
Ingredients:

- 1 loaf day-old bread, cubed
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 apples, peeled and diced
- ½ cup caramel sauce (store-bought or homemade)

Directions:

1. Grease a 9x13 baking dish. Layer half the bread cubes, then half the apples. Repeat.
2. Whisk eggs, milk, cream, brown sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon. Pour over bread and apples.
3. Drizzle caramel sauce on top. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
4. In the morning, bake at 350°F for 45–50 minutes, until golden and set.

Serve warm with an extra drizzle of caramel or powdered sugar. It feels like dessert for breakfast — and nobody complains about that.



Cinnamon-Sugar Popcorn

This one always disappears faster than I expect. We make it on evenings when we're curled up reading together, or sometimes in the afternoon when everyone needs a snack to tide them over.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup popcorn kernels
- 3 Tbsp butter, melted
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

1. Pop kernels in an air popper or stovetop pan.
2. While still hot, drizzle with melted butter.
3. Mix sugar, cinnamon, and salt in a small bowl, then toss with popcorn until coated.

It's inexpensive, easy, and perfect for sharing out of one big bowl.



Closing Thoughts

Mama, I know the days feel full. Some mornings you wake up already tired, with a list of lessons to teach, meals to cook, and messes to pick up. But don't miss this: in the middle of all the noise, there are holy moments waiting for you. The candle lit on the table. The soup simmering while you read aloud. The sound of pencils scratching across a page while the wind blows outside.

These are not small things. They are anchors. They are the rhythm of a home that tells your children: "Here, you are safe. Here, you are loved. Here, God is near."

Slowing down is not wasting time. Slowing down is noticing. It's making space to hear God's voice and to see the beauty He's woven into your everyday. The world will always urge you to rush, but the Spirit whispers: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" (Psalm 46:10 AMP).

This fall, let yourself breathe. Light the candle. Bake the bread. Take the walk. Write the blessing. Not because you need to add more to your plate, but because these simple things become the threads your family will remember long after the season has passed.

And when you feel weary, remind yourself: God does not ask you to bloom in every season. He asks you to be faithful. Faithful to the little ones He's entrusted to you, faithful in the small moments of home, faithful in rest as much as in work. You are doing holy work, even when it looks ordinary.

Reflection Questions for Chapter 1

1. Where do you feel God inviting you to slow down in your current season?
 2. What's one small tradition or cozy habit you can begin with your family this fall?
 3. How can you create your own "candle on the table" moment this week — a memory wrapped in simplicity?
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Chapter 2: Gathering Around the Table

"Do not neglect to extend hospitality to strangers [especially among the family of believers — being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously], for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

— Hebrews 13:2 AMP

Devotional Reflection:

There's something sacred about the table. For centuries, families and communities have gathered around it — not just to eat, but to connect, to remember, to share life. The Bible is full of stories that happen around meals: Jesus eating with His disciples, breaking bread with tax collectors, feeding the multitudes with fish and loaves. Hospitality was never about having a perfect home; it was about opening what you had and letting God use it.

In my home, the table is where so much of life happens. It's where we spread out books and notebooks in the morning, where crayons roll across the wood, where I set down a cup of coffee in the middle of a math lesson. It's where we eat peanut butter sandwiches on busy days and soup and bread when I've managed to plan ahead. It's where my children have spilled juice, cried over long division, doodled in margins, prayed aloud, and shared laughter so contagious it made us forget the time.

Hospitality starts at home. And often, it begins right at the table. Not because everything looks Instagram-worthy, but because the table represents welcome. When we gather, we're saying, *"You belong here."* That's true whether it's your toddler in a booster seat, your teenager slouched with earbuds dangling, or a neighbor who happened to stop by at dinnertime.

Hebrews 13:2 (AMP) tells us: *"Do not neglect to extend hospitality to strangers [especially among the family of believers — being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously], for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."*

That verse reminds me that the heart of hospitality isn't about entertaining; it's about creating space. And sometimes that space begins with nothing more than a soup pot and a loaf of bread.

Hospitality doesn't have to mean hosting big parties or cooking extravagant meals. Sometimes it means making an extra loaf of bread and dropping it off at a friend's house. Sometimes it means adding one more chair at the table and stretching the soup a little thinner. Sometimes it's simply inviting your kids to help stir the pot, letting them be part of the meal instead of shooing them away.

And sometimes, hospitality looks like slowing down long enough to see the people already gathered around your table. The ones who live under your roof, who know your messy side, who sit across from you with mismatched cups and hands sticky from dessert. It can be easy to overlook them in the busyness of teaching, cooking, working, and cleaning. But mama, your table is not just a place to feed bodies — it's a place to feed souls.

When I think back to my own childhood, the moments that rise to the surface aren't grand vacations or elaborate meals. They are the times I sat at a table, eating something simple, listening to the hum of family conversation. It wasn't the food that mattered most — it was the belonging. That's what our children are craving too.

So much of our culture tells us we need more. A prettier table. A fancier spread. A cleaner home. But Jesus never set those requirements. He simply broke bread and gave thanks. In Luke 22:19 (AMP), we read: "*And when He had taken bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'*" Even the most ordinary bread, when placed in His hands, became holy.

That encourages me on the days when supper is nothing more than grilled cheese sandwiches or reheated leftovers. Because holiness doesn't depend on what's on the plate — it depends on the posture of our hearts.

This fall, I encourage you to look at your table with new eyes. See it as more than a surface for food and books. See it as an altar where your family connects, where your children feel safe, where God meets you in the ordinary. Every bowl of soup, every slice of bread, every prayer whispered before a meal — they're all part of the story He's writing in your home.

And mama, don't forget this: your children won't remember if the meal was Pinterest-perfect. They will remember if the table was a place of welcome. They will remember if you paused to listen, if you made room for their laughter, if you prayed with them before they left the table. They'll carry those ordinary moments as extraordinary treasures. So light the candle. Set out the mismatched plates. Stir the soup and pass the bread. Let your table be a place of grace, not perfection. Because when you open your table, you're really opening your heart. And God delights to fill both.

Reflection Questions

1. When you think about your own family table, what memories come to mind? Are they more about the food or the people who gathered?
2. How do you feel when you hear the word *hospitality*? Do you think of entertaining and perfection, or of welcome and belonging?
3. In what ways can you open your table this fall — to your children, to a neighbor, or even just to slow yourself down with God's presence?
4. What simple step could you take this week to make your table feel more like an altar — a place of connection, peace, and presence?



Gathering Around the Table

The table in our home has never been fancy. It's nicked along the edges where a toddler once banged a spoon, and there's a faint blue crescent from a marker cap that bled through years ago. The wood is worn smooth in some places, scarred in others, and yet it is the place where our family life has been planted, tended, and gathered, one day at a time.

That morning, I lit a candle in the middle—not the cinnamon jar candle, but a plain white taper in a chipped ceramic holder from my grandmother. As the flame steadied, I breathed a small prayer over the day. We had planned a soup-and-bread night, the first of the season. It wasn't anyone's birthday or holiday, just the kind of night you make on purpose, before life runs away with your best intentions.

By eight o'clock, the table was covered with books: math for one child, history for another, a nature journal waiting to be filled. I set down my coffee and read out the plan for the day. "Lessons until lunch, then bread and soup. Everyone gets a job."

My son's hand shot up. "Can I chop the carrots?"

"If you use the knife carefully," I smiled. "And only if you let me handle the onions."

The day rolled along in its familiar rhythm: schoolwork mixed with interruptions, laughter, and the never-ending hunt for a missing pencil. Between fractions and handwriting, I fed the yeast warm water and sugar and watched it bubble to life. Soon, flour dusted the counter, and little fists left dimples in the rising dough. Breadmaking has always felt like a family liturgy: a little messy, but full of hope.

By afternoon, the kitchen hummed with soup-making. Carrots and celery sizzled in butter. Potatoes were peeled and set into cool water. The house smelled like the kind of welcome that doesn't need words.

Then my phone buzzed. A text from Mrs. Green, our widowed neighbor: "*Forgive the question, but do you have*

room for one more tonight? My oven quit, and I can't face eating alone."

I didn't hesitate. "Of course. Six o'clock. We'd love to have you."

When I showed the kids, they immediately started planning. The youngest wanted to make her a paper place card. My daughter offered to pick basil from the garden. My teenager grated cheese for the potato soup without being asked. Hospitality has a way of softening hearts, even before the door opens.

As we finished lessons and turned fully to supper prep, the house shifted into that happy bustle that happens before guests arrive. Bread baked in the oven, filling every corner with warmth. Two pots of soup simmered on the stove—one creamy, one clear—because soup is easy to stretch when the table grows longer.

By evening, the leaves were in the table, mismatched chairs tucked in around the edges. Mrs. Green arrived first, cardigan wrapped around her shoulders, carrying a jar of pickled beets. "I didn't have much to bring," she said softly.

"You brought exactly the right thing," I told her, and she smiled with a relief that said she hadn't been sure of that in a long while.

Soon after, friends arrived—kids tumbling through the doorway, coats flung on hooks. The table filled with faces, chatter, and the holy clatter of a house alive. We ladled soup into bowls, passed bread still warm, and bowed our heads as my husband prayed, "Lord, thank You for food and friends and neighbors who become family. Multiply what we have, and make it enough. Amen."

The first few bites were quiet—the kind of silence that comes when soup is hot and bread is soft. Then conversation rose like music. Mrs. Green told stories of her childhood kitchen glowing pink with jars of beets. The kids laughed over a noodle blown across the table. Someone shared a story about a runaway chicken, which turned into a tale about the

goat that once ate my pansies. The room was full—not just of people, but of presence.

There was a moment I worried the potato soup wouldn't stretch far enough. But then my daughter cheerfully announced, "Round two—who wants the chicken soup this time? It's lemony and bright!" Half the table switched without complaint, and I breathed out gratitude. Hospitality always involves a little trust that God will fill the gaps.

When bowls were scraped clean, I brought out a pan of apple crisp, bubbling and golden. We scooped it into bowls with thick cream, and for a few minutes the table fell into that sweet silence again, the kind that comes only when mouths are full and hearts are content.

After dessert, someone began humming a hymn. My husband reached for the guitar, and soon voices joined together: "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus..." The candlelight flickered against faces young and old, some singing boldly, some just swaying. Mrs. Green's voice wavered, then steadied, and I thought, *this is the sound of heaven brushing close.*

When the night wound down, there were hugs by the door, promises of "next time," and a little boy proudly declaring that he had eaten not one but two pickled beets. The house quieted slowly, like a tide pulling back. Crumbs scattered the table. Wax dripped down the side of the candleholder, a chipped heirloom that had just witnessed another chapter of life.

Later, after the dishes were stacked and the children tucked in, I sat at the empty table. I ran my finger over the scratches in the wood, the same table that had held math books that morning and now bore the memory of laughter and prayer.

"Thank You," I whispered. "For enough. For more than enough. For the way You take our ordinary and make it holy."

The candle burned low. My husband reached for my hand across the crumbs, and together we let the quiet settle. Tomorrow the table would be filled with lessons again, but tonight it had been a sanctuary. And I carried that truth with me as I blew out the flame: the table doesn't need to be perfect to be holy. It only needs to be shared.



Activities & Traditions

The table is more than a piece of furniture. It's where life happens, where faith is practiced in the everyday, and where we teach our children the beauty of welcome. Hospitality doesn't need to be complicated. It doesn't start with gourmet meals or picture-perfect settings; it starts with simple, ordinary practices that make people feel loved.

Here are some of our family's favorite ways to practice hospitality at home, with ideas for both younger children and older ones.

1. Place Card Makers

Little hands love to feel important at the table. Give your younger children construction paper, crayons, or even leaves gathered from the yard, and let them make place cards for everyone in the family. The spelling might be creative, but their delight is real.

Older twist: Teens can add their own flair by trying calligraphy, sketching small designs, or even using the computer to create a set of "family place cards" that you reuse each week.

2. Bread-Baking Helpers

Bread and hospitality belong together. Younger children love to punch down dough, sprinkle flour, or brush butter across rising rolls.

Older twist: Teach your older kids to knead, shape loaves, or even care for a sourdough starter. Let them "own" one recipe and make it their specialty. It gives them confidence, and it gives you help in the kitchen.

3. Storytelling at the Table

Make one evening a week a family storytelling night. Go around the table sharing "highs and lows" from the day. Younger children can draw a quick picture of their high or low if words feel hard.

Older twist: Invite your teens to lead the conversation or record favorite family stories in a notebook. They may surprise you by noticing and capturing memories you might have overlooked.

4. Hospitality Basket Project

Gather simple items — a small loaf of bread, a jar of jam, or cookies — and fill a basket for a neighbor. Younger children can decorate the card or tuck in a drawing.

Older twist: Let your older ones help with the baking, or brainstorm together who could use encouragement this week. They can deliver it with you, practicing what it looks like to see and serve others.

5. Soup & Bread Night

Choose one evening a week to slow down, gather, and make it a tradition: soup and bread night. Little ones can help set the table, sprinkle cheese, or stir soup with supervision.

Older twist: Give teens a chance to cook their own “signature soup” one week. Even if it’s simple, they’ll take pride in feeding the family.

6. Hospitality Role-Play

Younger kids love to pretend. Let them take turns practicing how to greet guests — opening the door, saying, “Come in, we’re so glad you’re here!” or carrying a basket of rolls to the table.

Older twist: Have intentional conversations with older kids about biblical hospitality — how it’s more about welcome than perfection. Ask how they can show hospitality to friends at youth group, co-op, or even siblings at home.

7. The Evening Candle

Each night, let one child light a candle before supper. Littles can pray short, simple words of thanks.

Older twist: Older kids can read a scripture aloud or lead the family in a longer prayer. It's a small but powerful rhythm that shifts ordinary meals into moments of worship.

These traditions don't require much — just intention. A paper place card, a loaf of bread, a candle lit on a Tuesday night. But woven together, they form a rhythm of welcome that teaches your children the heart of God: that every person who comes to the table matters, and that the ordinary can be holy ground.



Comfort Foods for Hospitality

Hospitality doesn't need perfection — it needs presence. The meals I reach for when I invite people in aren't fancy; they're simple, filling, and stretch easily to welcome “just one more.” A pot of soup, a loaf of bread, something sweet to share — these are the foods that make a house feel like home.

Here are some of our favorites, straight from my kitchen to yours.

Amy's Everyday Bread

There's something grounding about mixing flour, water, and yeast into something that rises and fills the house with warmth. This is the bread I bake most often — the one I pull from the oven when friends are on their way and I need something familiar to place on the table.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ Tbsp yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 Tbsp oil
- 2 ½ cups flour

Directions:

- Dissolve yeast and sugar in warm water; let it stand until foamy (5–10 minutes).
- Stir in salt, oil, and flour. Knead until smooth (about 5–7 minutes).
- Place in a greased bowl, cover, and let rise until doubled (about 1 hour).
- Punch down, shape into a loaf, and place in a greased pan. Let rise again until doubled.
- Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes until golden brown.

This loaf pairs with everything — soup, butter, or simply torn apart with grateful hands.

Creamy Potato & Cheddar Soup

This is the soup that feels like a hug in a bowl. Thick, rich, and full of flavor, it's the one I make when I want people to linger around the table.

Ingredients:

- 6 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 cups milk (or half-and-half)
- 2 cups shredded cheddar
- 2 Tbsp butter
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Simmer potatoes, onion, carrots, and celery in broth until tender. In another pot, melt butter and stir in milk. Combine with vegetables. Stir in cheese until melted and creamy. Season well.



Chicken Noodle Soup with Lemon & Herbs

This one tastes like comfort and fresh air all at once — hearty but light, with a bright note of lemon at the end. It's the soup I make when I know someone needs encouragement.

Ingredients:

- 1 rotisserie chicken, shredded
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 3 carrots, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cups egg noodles
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Sauté onion, carrots, and celery in butter until softened. Add broth, chicken, noodles, and thyme. Simmer until noodles are tender. Squeeze in lemon just before serving.



Creamy Tomato Basil Soup

This is the one I pair with grilled cheese or breadsticks when I want to keep things simple but still beautiful. It tastes like autumn afternoons and pairs perfectly with candlelight.

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cans (28 oz) crushed tomatoes
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ½ cup fresh basil, chopped
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Sauté onion and garlic in butter. Add tomatoes and broth, simmer 20 minutes. Blend smooth with an immersion blender. Stir in cream and basil. Serve with warm bread.

Harvest Vegetable & Sausage Soup

This one is hearty and rustic, with plenty of color in the bowl. It stretches beautifully if extra guests arrive.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb Italian sausage
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 potatoes, cubed
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Brown sausage. Add vegetables, tomatoes, broth, and seasoning. Simmer until vegetables are tender.

Soft Dinner Rolls

When I want the table to feel extra special, I serve these along with the soup. They're fluffy, buttery, and worth the little extra time.

Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp yeast
- 1 cup warm milk
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 2 Tbsp butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 3 cups flour
- 1 tsp salt

Directions:

Dissolve yeast in warm milk with sugar. Add butter, egg, flour, and salt. Knead until smooth. Let rise 1 hour. Shape into rolls, rise 30 more minutes. Bake at 375°F for 15–18 minutes. Brush with butter before serving.

Classic Lasagna

Sometimes hospitality looks like a bubbling pan of lasagna — something that can feed a crowd, freeze well, and travel easily to someone who needs a meal.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef or sausage
- 1 jar marinara sauce
- 9 lasagna noodles, cooked
- 15 oz ricotta cheese
- 2 cups mozzarella, shredded
- ½ cup Parmesan, grated
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp Italian seasoning

Directions:

Brown meat and stir in sauce. Mix ricotta, egg, Parmesan, and seasoning. Layer sauce, noodles, ricotta mixture, and mozzarella — repeat. Finish with sauce and cheese. Bake at 375°F for 40–45 minutes. Rest before slicing.

Caramel Apple Dip Two Ways

Because sometimes dessert is best eaten with your fingers and laughter.

1. Cream Cheese Caramel Dip (Cold)

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup caramel sauce
- ½ cup chopped pecans

Mix cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Spread in a dish. Drizzle caramel sauce and sprinkle pecans. Serve with apple slices.

2. Warm Caramel Apple Dipping Sauce

- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp vanilla
- Pinch of salt

Melt butter, stir in sugar and cream. Simmer until thick (5 minutes). Stir in vanilla and salt. Keep warm in a slow cooker for dipping apple slices.



Closing Thoughts

Mama, the table in your home doesn't have to shine with perfection to shine with presence. God has always met His people around ordinary meals — bread broken, soup ladled, stories shared. When you open your table, whether to your children or to a neighbor who needs a seat, you are living the gospel in a way that words alone never could.

Hebrews reminds us: *"Do not neglect to extend hospitality to strangers [especially among the family of believers — being friendly, cordial, and gracious], for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it"* (Hebrews 13:2 AMP).

So light the candle. Pass the bread. Ladle the soup. Open your door wide — not because the meal is fancy, but because love multiplies when it's shared. Hospitality is not about what you serve, but about the Savior you reflect. And when you gather your family, when you welcome one more, you are reminding everyone at the table: *"Here, there is enough. Here, there is love. Here, God is near."*

Reflection Questions

1. How can you use your table this season as a place of welcome — for your family, friends, or even someone new?
 2. What keeps you from opening your home more often? Fear of not-enough? Perfectionism? How might God be asking you to trust Him in this area?
 3. Who is one person or family you could invite to share a meal with you this month?
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Chapter 3: Finding Joy in Simple Things

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." — 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

Devotional Reflection

Gratitude doesn't always shout; sometimes it whispers. It doesn't need grand vacations, magazine-worthy homes, or perfectly planned days. Gratitude is often found tucked into the small, ordinary corners of our lives — a child's laughter echoing down the hallway, the smell of bread baking in the oven, the warmth of a blanket pulled over sleepy shoulders at night. The truth is, God hides joy in places we often overlook, and He invites us to notice.

As homeschooling mamas, our days are layered with noise and tasks. Lessons pile up, dishes multiply, toddlers tug at skirts, and older kids roll their eyes while asking for help with algebra. We juggle housework, meal prep, and phonics lessons, often without pausing to breathe. And yet, Scripture calls us not just to survive these days but to give thanks *in* them. Not for the chaos itself, but for God's presence within it.

I've learned that joy isn't about everything being easy. It's about paying attention. Gratitude slows us down long enough to notice God's fingerprints: a rainbow after a storm, the golden hour of sunlight spilling through the kitchen window, the quiet hush of kids bent over books. When I choose to pause and whisper, "Thank You, Lord, even here," I begin to see the holy in what once felt ordinary.

Think about Jesus for a moment. He didn't spend His ministry in palaces or among the powerful. He walked dusty roads, sat at simple tables, and broke bread with people the world overlooked. He lifted His eyes to heaven and gave thanks for a few loaves and fish — not a banquet, but "just enough." And yet that simple meal became abundance in His hands. Gratitude transforms the ordinary. It multiplies.

As mothers, we often long to give our children big memories: trips to theme parks, elaborate holiday traditions, picture-perfect outings. And while those things can be good, I've noticed that the memories my children cling to most are surprisingly simple. They talk about the mornings when I let them stir the pancake batter, even though flour dusted the floor. They remember the nights we ate popcorn in a big bowl and read books by candlelight. They recall baking cookies on a rainy afternoon, or the sound of the hymns I hummed while folding laundry.

Those small things — the ones I often overlook — are the ones that stitch security and joy into their hearts. Gratitude isn't about having more; it's about seeing what's already here.

But practicing gratitude isn't always easy, is it? Some days feel too heavy, too messy. Maybe you wake up already weary, staring at a to-do list that feels impossible. Maybe the laundry pile mocks you, or the house feels loud and chaotic. Maybe loneliness presses in, and you wonder if anyone sees the effort you pour out day after day.

On those days, gratitude can feel out of reach. But here's the truth: gratitude is not a feeling — it's a practice. It's a choice to name God's goodness, even when emotions lag behind. Gratitude shifts our gaze from what's missing to what's present, from what's hard to Who is with us.

In *Philippians 4:6–7*, Paul writes, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" Did you notice that little phrase? *With thanksgiving*. Peace comes when we lace even our prayers with gratitude.

So how do we begin? We start small. A gratitude journal where each day we write down three blessings — even if they're as simple as "hot coffee," "a child's hug," or "the sound of rain." A whispered thank You before supper, even if the meal is just leftovers. A sticky note on the fridge with

reminders of God's faithfulness. Gratitude doesn't need grandeur. It needs intention.

And something beautiful happens when we model this for our children. When they hear us say, "I'm so thankful for this ordinary Tuesday," they begin to see their world differently. When we stop mid-mess and say, "Thank You, Lord, for healthy kids who make noise," they learn that joy doesn't wait for perfection. Gratitude teaches them resilience. It roots their hearts in God's goodness, not in circumstances.

Mama, I know it's easy to look around and feel like you're falling short. But can I gently remind you? Joy is not hiding in the things you haven't done yet. It's here. In the stack of books on the table. In the half-eaten apple your toddler left by the couch. In the candle flickering beside you while you read this. Gratitude doesn't erase the hard, but it reframes it. It reminds us that even here, even now, God is faithful.

This fall, I invite you to practice looking for joy in the simple things. Maybe it's the first sip of cocoa after coming in from the cold. Maybe it's the way your child sounds out a word for the first time. Maybe it's a verse scribbled on a scrap of paper taped above the sink. Every one of these moments is a chance to give thanks. Every one is a seed of joy that grows when noticed.

Let's not wait for life to be easy before we thank God. Let's thank Him in the middle of it. Because the table with mismatched chairs, the bread that didn't rise perfectly, the laughter that erupts over a spilled cup of milk — those are the very places where God shows us His presence.

And when we choose gratitude in the small things, we find that joy has been waiting for us all along.

Reflection Questions

1. What are three “small things” in your life right now that you often overlook but could thank God for today?
2. How can you model gratitude for your children in ordinary moments (not just on special occasions)?
3. When life feels overwhelming, what simple practice (like journaling, whispering a prayer, or lighting a candle) could help you pause and remember God’s goodness?
4. How does remembering that gratitude is a *choice* — not just a feeling — change the way you approach hard days?



Baking Day with Children

The morning began with the sound of rain tapping on the windows. Not the stormy, pounding kind of rain, but the steady, soft drizzle that makes the whole world seem hushed and wrapped in gray. I could feel the damp chill the moment I stepped out of bed, so I reached for a cardigan and tugged it close as I padded toward the kitchen.

There was something in the air that morning that whispered, *slow down*. Maybe it was the rhythm of the rain, maybe it was the candle still sitting on the table from the night before, or maybe it was the way I had gone to bed with a prayer of thankfulness and woke up still wrapped in it. Whatever it was, I knew this was not the day for rushing. This was the day for flour on little noses, the smell of cinnamon and sugar, and the warm hum of the oven filling every corner of the house.

I lit the candle and stood for a moment, letting the little flame glow against the grayness outside. "Baking day," I whispered to myself, and already I could feel the joy of it beginning to rise.

The children tumbled in one by one, still sleepy but curious about why the kitchen already smelled faintly of yeast. I had measured it out first thing, stirred it with warm water and a bit of sugar, and set the bowl aside so the yeast could bloom while the house woke up.

"What are we making today?" one of the boys asked, hair sticking in every direction.

I smiled. "Everything," I said with a grin. "Pumpkin bread, muffins, rolls, maybe even cookies if we still have energy. Today is a baking day."

Cheers went up around the kitchen, louder than the rain against the windows. Even my teenager, who sometimes rolls her eyes at family traditions, perked up at the mention of pumpkin chocolate chip muffins. She won't admit it out loud, but she loves them as much as anyone.

The little ones were already dragging stools toward the counter, eager to “help” — which usually meant spilling flour and cracking eggs in ways that left me fishing out bits of shell. But that was okay. Baking day wasn’t about perfection. It was about togetherness. It was about letting my kids’ hands shape the memories they would carry into their own homes someday.

The kitchen filled quickly with the sound of work. Flour sifted into bowls, sugar poured in little mountains that spread across the counter, eggs cracked (some clean, some messy). I stood at the center of it all, directing traffic like a conductor with an orchestra.

“Okay, you stir the dry ingredients. You butter the pans. You measure out the chocolate chips — no, not a handful in your mouth yet, let’s save those for the muffins.”

Giggles rang out. One child began humming a hymn under her breath, and soon another joined in. Before long, the kitchen sounded like a blend of clanging spoons, humming voices, and the occasional squeal of delight when someone’s bowl puffed up with flour dust.

The pumpkin bread came first. I guided little hands as they measured flour, sugar, baking soda, and all the warm spices — cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves. The moment we opened the pumpkin purée, the smell of autumn seemed to double in the room. Together we stirred until the batter glowed orange, thick and fragrant.

While that baked, the older children helped me with the yeast dough. There is something grounding about kneading bread. The push and pull, the stretch and fold — it’s physical work, but it’s also holy in a way. My teenager leaned into it with strength, pressing and folding, while the littler ones each took turns “punching it down” once it had risen. Their giggles turned into squeals when the soft dough sighed under their fists.

"This is the best part," one of them said, eyes shining.

I had to agree.

As the morning stretched on, the counters filled with trays and bowls and pans. The pumpkin bread cooled on a rack, its crackly top promising slices soft and sweet beneath. The muffins baked next, little domes that filled the house with chocolate and spice. Rolls sat under a towel, rising patiently while we stirred cinnamon-sugar butter for the caramel frosting we'd spread over warm cinnamon rolls later in the afternoon.

It was messy. Flour coated the floor, sticky batter clung to spoons, and I found a trail of chocolate chips leading toward the living room. But I didn't mind. Baking day was never tidy. Baking day was memory-making, and memories are always a little messy.

At one point, I paused, wooden spoon in hand, and just watched. My children crowded around the table, working side by side. One was rolling out dough with too much enthusiasm, another carefully lining up muffin cups, another sneaking raisins into his mouth when he thought I wasn't looking. The teenager, without being asked, was reading instructions to the younger ones, helping them measure, showing them how to hold the spoon steady.

And I thought: *This is it. This is the blessing.*

Not the perfect recipes or the flawless loaves, but the gathering. The working together. The way our home could hold both chaos and peace at the very same time.

By lunchtime, the rain was still falling, steady and soft, like a backdrop to our little domestic symphony. We sat down to soup and slices of fresh bread still warm from the oven. Butter melted into each piece, dripping down fingers that licked it up happily. The table felt alive with chatter, bowls being passed, someone asking for seconds before I had even finished sitting down.

After we prayed, I looked around the table and thought about the verse that had anchored me that morning: "*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). And I realized that this — this noisy, ordinary, flour-dusted afternoon — was the very picture of gratitude in motion. We weren't just baking bread; we were building a family story woven with thanks.

The afternoon unfolded with more baking, more laughter, and the kind of tired joy that only comes after working with your hands. We made cinnamon roll cookies, which the kids insisted on drizzling with extra glaze. We pulled the cinnamon roll monkey bread from the oven, gooey and golden, and everyone crowded around to watch the caramel drip down the sides.

By the time the sun began to set, the counters were lined with rows of cooling baked goods, the table wore a light dusting of flour, and my heart felt full in a way no spotless kitchen could ever make it.

As I washed the last mixing bowl, my youngest tugged on my sleeve. "Mama, today felt like a holiday," he said, eyes wide with sincerity.

I bent down, kissed his forehead, and whispered, "That's because joy is in the little things, sweetheart. God hides it right in plain sight."

And I knew he was right. Baking day had been a holiday of the heart. A reminder that joy doesn't need grandeur. Sometimes it only needs yeast, pumpkin, sugar, and the sound of your children laughing under the steady rhythm of rain.

Activities & Traditions

Fall is the perfect time to practice gratitude in ways our children can see, touch, and carry with them. These simple activities weave thankfulness into the rhythm of home, turning ordinary afternoons into memory-making moments.

1. Family Thankful Jar

This tradition is as simple as it is powerful. Place a jar in the center of your table with slips of paper and pens nearby. Each day, every family member writes one thing they are thankful for.

- **Younger Kids:** Encourage littles to draw pictures of their blessings — a favorite toy, the family pet, even a stick figure of mom or dad. Their simple drawings will become treasures to look back on.
- **Older Kids:** Challenge teens to go deeper. Instead of “food” or “friends,” ask them to write specific moments — “the way the house smelled when the bread came out of the oven” or “laughing with my brother during history.”

At the end of the month, gather around the table, pour hot cocoa, and read them aloud. The jar will be full, but so will your hearts.

2. Kids’ Gratitude Art Display

Turn your wall or hallway into a gallery of thanksgiving.

- **Younger Kids:** Trace their hands on paper, cut them out, and let them write (or dictate) one thing they’re thankful for on each handprint. Arrange them into a “Gratitude Garden” or “Tree of Thanks” on the wall.
- **Older Kids:** Give them blank cardstock and challenge them to design their own “thankfulness posters” using watercolors, calligraphy, or collage. Encourage them to illustrate verses about gratitude, like Psalm 107:1 — *“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”*

This becomes not only a family project but a living reminder to walk past each day.

3. Tissue Paper Thankful Tree

This one is tactile, colorful, and fun for all ages.

- **Younger Kids:** Draw or print a bare tree outline on poster board. Cut squares of tissue paper in fall colors (orange, red, yellow, brown). Show them how to twist the tissue into “leaves” and glue them on with a cotton swab dabbed in glue. The more they twist, the fuller the tree becomes.
- **Older Kids:** Create a more detailed version. Encourage them to draw or paint their own tree, then use bingo dabbers or fine-tip markers to create pointillism-style leaves. Each leaf can have a word of thanks written inside.

By the end, you’ll have a vibrant piece of art — gratitude literally blooming before your eyes.

4. Gratitude Bingo (Great for Mixed Ages)

Make a simple 5x5 bingo board with prompts in each square: *helped someone, gave thanks before bed, wrote a kind note, prayed for a friend, shared without being asked.*

- **Younger Kids:** Help them notice the little blessings they’ve received (“Mama read me an extra story”) and the little ways they can give thanks.
- **Older Kids:** Encourage them to practice active gratitude — not just noticing, but showing thanks through action.

When someone gets five in a row, the whole family celebrates — maybe with cinnamon-sugar popcorn or a hot cocoa night.

5. Evening Gratitude Round

This one takes no supplies — only a few minutes. At supper or bedtime, go around the table and share one blessing from the day.

- **Younger Kids:** Prompt with simple questions: “What made you smile today?” “What was the yummiest thing you ate?”
- **Older Kids:** Encourage them to name something that wasn’t easy but still brought growth or perspective. Gratitude in challenges is where their faith roots grow deep.

This small ritual, practiced daily, becomes the background music of your home.

These aren’t big projects that require perfect planning. They’re simply doorways into gratitude. Little hands gluing tissue leaves, older kids journaling thanks, voices naming blessings aloud — each one becomes part of the story God is writing in your family.

Comfort Foods for Fall

Fall is the season for baking days — when the oven warms the house, the counters are dusted with flour, and little hands “help” by sneaking chocolate chips or licking frosting off the spoon. These recipes aren’t just about filling bellies — they’re about creating memories, about filling your home with smells that whisper, *you’re safe here, you’re loved here.*

Classic Pumpkin Bread

Pumpkin bread is one of those recipes that feels like home. Moist, warmly spiced, and perfect for sharing with neighbors.

Ingredients:

- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp cloves
- 1 cup pumpkin purée
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x5 loaf pan. In one bowl, whisk dry ingredients. In another, whisk pumpkin, oil, eggs, sugar, and vanilla. Combine wet and dry, stirring until just mixed. Pour into pan, bake 55–65 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool before slicing.

Serve warm with butter — or even better, with cream cheese spread.

Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Muffins (*from Plain and Not So Plain*)

These muffins are moist, sweet, and filled with melty chocolate — perfect for breakfast, snack, or dessert.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup pumpkin purée
- ½ cup oil
- 1 cup chocolate chips

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line muffin tin. Mix dry ingredients. In another bowl, whisk eggs, pumpkin, and oil. Combine wet and dry, then fold in chocolate chips. Spoon into muffin tin, bake 20–22 minutes.

The kids will beg for these — double the batch!



Caramel Frosted Cinnamon Rolls

Nothing says “slow down and savor” like homemade cinnamon rolls. These are extra special with sweet caramel frosting.

Dough:

- 1 packet (2 ¼ tsp) yeast
- 1 cup warm milk
- ¼ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup butter, melted
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 eggs
- 4 cups flour

Filling:

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp cinnamon

Frosting:

- ½ cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 cups powdered sugar

Directions:

Dissolve yeast in warm milk with sugar. Add butter, salt, eggs, flour. Knead until smooth, let rise until doubled. Roll dough into rectangle, spread butter, sprinkle sugar + cinnamon. Roll, slice, place in greased pan. Let rise again. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes.

For frosting: melt butter, whisk in brown sugar + milk, boil 1 min. Remove, cool slightly, whisk in powdered sugar. Spread over warm rolls.

Sticky, gooey, heavenly.

Cinnamon Roll Monkey Bread

This is a fun pull-apart treat, perfect for sharing on cozy evenings.

Ingredients:

- 2 cans refrigerated cinnamon rolls (or homemade dough if you prefer)
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup butter, melted
- ½ cup brown sugar

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut cinnamon rolls into quarters. Toss in sugar + cinnamon. Place in greased Bundt pan. Mix melted butter + brown sugar, pour over dough. Bake 35–40 minutes. Cool slightly, then drizzle with included icing (or caramel).

It's like dessert + breakfast + fun all in one.



Cinnamon Roll Cookies

Crispy edges, soft centers, and a swirl of cinnamon sugar — these cookies taste like cinnamon rolls in a hand-held version.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 3 cups flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ cup sugar + 2 tsp cinnamon (filling)
- Icing: 1 cup powdered sugar + 2 Tbsp milk

Directions:

Cream butter + sugar. Add egg + vanilla. Mix in dry ingredients. Chill dough 30 min. Roll into rectangle, sprinkle cinnamon sugar, roll up like cinnamon rolls. Slice, bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes. Drizzle with icing.

Perfect for cookie jars — or dunking in hot cocoa.

Creamy Hot Cocoa

Nothing completes a fall baking day like mugs of steaming cocoa, topped with marshmallows or whipped cream.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ½ cup chocolate chips
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

Heat milk and cream in saucepan. Whisk in cocoa, sugar, chocolate chips until smooth. Remove from heat, stir in vanilla. Serve in mugs with marshmallows, whipped cream, or a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Rich, comforting, and perfect for sipping while you admire the kids' gratitude trees drying on the wall.

Closing Thoughts

“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above; it comes down from the Father of lights [the Creator and Sustainer of the heavens], in whom there is no variation [no rising or setting] or shadow cast by His turning [for He is perfect and never changes].”

— James 1:17 AMP

Mama, joy doesn't always come in big, glittering packages. Most often, it comes tucked into the small things — the scent of pumpkin bread in the oven, the sticky fingers of your little one helping roll cinnamon sugar, the quiet hum of your teenager reading aloud while cookies bake. These simple things are not interruptions to your “real” life; they *are* your real life. And in them, God is near.

The world tells us to look for happiness in accomplishments, in getting more done, in checking everything off the list. But the Spirit whispers something different: *Joy is here, already. It's in the gifts I've placed in your hands today.*

Finding joy in the simple things is really about practicing gratitude. Gratitude turns ordinary moments into holy ones. Gratitude takes a baking day — flour on the counters, children laughing, dishes piled high — and makes it sacred ground. Because it's not just about bread and cocoa. It's about teaching your children that God is generous, and His goodness shows up in buttered rolls, in mugs of cocoa, in the warmth of a family gathered close.

So, light the candle. Preheat the oven. Let the kids stir and spill and giggle. Write down the blessings in your gratitude jar. Hang their tissue paper leaves proudly on the wall. And when the day winds down and the kitchen is finally quiet, look back with a full heart and remember: *This was worship, too.*

God is not asking you to do everything perfectly — He's inviting you to see Him in everything. And when you do, even flour-dusted counters and sticky pans of monkey bread become offerings of praise.

Reflection Questions for Chapter 3

1. What small, everyday blessings have you overlooked lately that God may be inviting you to notice with gratitude?
2. How can you use baking, cooking, or other home tasks as opportunities to worship and teach your children about God's goodness?
3. What's one simple tradition (like cocoa nights, gratitude jars, or baking days) you can start this fall to help your family practice joy together?



Chapter 4: Creating Family Traditions

"We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done."

— Psalm 78:4 NIV

Devotional Reflection

Tradition is more than repeating something year after year. It's how we weave memory into faith, how we take ordinary nights and mark them with meaning. Think about your own childhood for a moment. What do you remember most clearly? It's probably not the new shoes or the school worksheets. It's the smell of your grandmother's chili on a chilly night. The board game your family always played when the first frost came. The sound of a favorite hymn at Thanksgiving. Tradition isn't just about what we do — it's about what we *carry with us*.

I've come to see tradition as one of God's sweetest tools for passing on faith. The Israelites knew this well. Over and over in Scripture, God told His people to *remember* — to build altars, to celebrate feasts, to tell their children the story of His faithfulness. These traditions were more than rituals. They were reminders. They rooted each new generation in the truth: *God has been faithful before, and He will be faithful again*.

In our homes, tradition doesn't have to be elaborate. It doesn't even have to look "religious" to become holy. A fall movie night where you pull out the same blankets, pop the same caramel popcorn, and laugh at the same scenes year after year? That's a tradition. And when you pray before pressing play, or when you pause to remind your children, "Isn't it good that God gives us times to rest and enjoy each other?" — suddenly, that simple act becomes a thread tying their memories back to Him.

The truth is, not every child will always embrace tradition right away. Especially as they grow older, it's easy for teens to roll their eyes or claim they're "too old" for family nights. I've seen it myself — the reluctant posture, the half-hearted

sigh when I announce our plans. And yet, time and again, those same children end up laughing the loudest, lingering the longest, or even becoming the ones who insist we keep the tradition going the next year. Because deep down, tradition answers a longing we all carry: to belong, to be rooted, to be remembered.

Psalm 145:4 says, *"One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."* Tradition is one way we do this. We don't just tell our children God is good; we show them through rhythms and memories stitched into our lives. Chili simmering while a bonfire crackles outside. The way hands reach for marshmallows and graham crackers. The laughter when someone drops a marshmallow into the fire and calls it "charcoal dessert." These are the moments that stay. And with each one, we're whispering: *God gave us this gift. God is here with us.*

I've realized that what my kids will take with them into adulthood isn't a perfect record of family devotions or flawlessly executed lesson plans. It's the memory of togetherness. It's the warmth of being gathered. It's the way faith was woven quietly into food, fun, and ordinary nights. Because someday, when they light their own candles or build their own bonfires, I hope they'll remember — not just the taste of chili, but the truth that God provided. Not just the glow of firelight, but the glow of His presence among us.

Mama, don't underestimate the sacred power of simple traditions. Your family bonfire, your Friday board games, your scavenger hunt through crunchy leaves — these are not "just for fun." They are faith in practice. They are altars in everyday clothes. And every time you gather your family for these things, you are preaching a sermon without words: *This is what it looks like to live in God's joy. This is what it looks like to rest in His goodness together.*

So light the fire. Set out the popcorn. Invite the eye-rolling teen and the wide-eyed toddler. Even if it feels small, even if it feels ordinary, know that heaven bends close to watch when a family gathers in love. And trust that God will take

your little traditions and turn them into lifelong faith markers for your children.

Because someday, when they look back, they won't just remember the chili or the s'mores. They'll remember the God who was always invited to sit at the table, stand by the fire, and dwell in the center of it all.

Reflection Questions

1. When you look back on your own childhood, which traditions or small family rhythms shaped your faith most deeply?
2. In what ways might God be inviting you to use family traditions this fall as a way of weaving His truth into your children's hearts?
3. How can you balance fun, cozy traditions with intentional spiritual habits so your children see both joy and Jesus in your home?
4. What's one new or renewed tradition you want to begin this season that could become a lasting memory for your family?



The Night of the Movie

The idea started on a Thursday afternoon when the air smelled like woodsmoke from someone's fireplace down the street. The younger kids had just finished math lessons and were sprawled on the floor with crayons, their pages filled with crooked pumpkins and turkeys with too many feathers. The older ones hovered near the kitchen, sniffing hopefully at the apple crisp cooling on the counter.

"Can we eat it now, Mama?" my son asked for the third time, his nose practically pressed against the pan.

"Not yet," I told him with a smile. "That's for tonight. We're going to do something different—something cozy."

I could see the curiosity flicker in their faces. I had been feeling a little tug all week, the sense that we needed to slow down and mark the moment before it slipped away. Fall has a way of rushing by if you don't pay attention. So I declared it: "Tonight is Family Fall Movie Night."

The little ones cheered. The middle kids whooped. But my teenager? She rolled her eyes so hard I thought they might get stuck.

"Really, Mom?" she said. "Like, a *family* movie night?"

"Yes," I said, refusing to be rattled. "With blankets and popcorn and maybe a fire outside first if your dad gets home in time."

"That's so... little kid," she muttered, crossing her arms. She had been drifting lately—hovering between wanting to belong and wanting to be grown. I recognized the look on her face; it was the same one I wore when I was her age, embarrassed by anything that smelled of family ritual.

But I also knew better now. Sometimes the things we resist as teens become the things we treasure when we're older.

By late afternoon, the house buzzed with preparation. The younger kids hauled out every blanket we owned, draping them across couches and piling them into a lopsided mountain. Someone dragged pillows from the bedrooms. Someone else started scribbling “reserved” on scrap paper and taping it to the best seats like we were a real theater.

In the kitchen, I worked on the food. Popcorn popped in big kettles, filling bowls one after another. I melted butter and tossed it with cinnamon and sugar, because I knew sweet popcorn had a way of keeping peace among siblings. A second pot bubbled on the stove—taco chili, thick with beans and tomatoes, ready for scooping into mugs later. Beside it sat a tray of hot dogs skewered on sticks, waiting to be roasted over the fire if the evening stayed clear.

My husband came home earlier than usual, his arms full of wood. “For the fire,” he said with a grin, shaking leaves out of his hair. The younger ones swarmed him, asking when we’d start.

“After supper,” I told them, stirring the chili. “First we eat, then we bundle up.”

Supper was quick but cozy. Chili steaming in mugs, cornbread cut into uneven squares, laughter spilling across the table. Even the teenager couldn’t help but smile when her little brother told a dramatic story about the squirrel who had apparently chased him around the yard earlier that day.

After the dishes were stacked in the sink, we bundled up—sweaters tugged over heads, scarves hastily tied, mismatched mittens pulled from the basket by the door. My husband lit the fire in the backyard ring, and soon the flames leapt high enough to cast flickering light on the kids’ faces.

We roasted hot dogs on sticks, laughing when one slid into the fire and sizzled away. Someone held a marshmallow too close, and it burst into flames. “Blow it out! Blow it out!” the others shouted, and he did, laughing through the smoke as he declared it perfect.

The teenager hovered at the edge, phone in hand, pretending not to care. I caught her smiling, though, when her younger sister handed her a marshmallow already toasted golden on the outside. She took it reluctantly at first, then licked the sticky sweetness from her fingers and stayed closer to the fire after that.

When the stars had begun to prick the sky, we carried our bowls of popcorn inside and dimmed the lights. The living room glowed with candles, the kind that smell faintly of vanilla and spice. Quilts were draped across laps, and the younger kids wriggled into spots beside older siblings.

The teenager sighed dramatically when I announced the movie—an old family favorite we'd watched every year since they were little. "Ugh, not this again," she muttered.

But halfway through, when the little ones gasped at a funny scene, I saw her bite back a smile. When the familiar song played, her foot tapped in rhythm under the blanket. By the end, she was leaning into her sister, laughing along with the rest of us.

That's the thing about traditions. They sneak past the walls we build. They remind us of belonging, even when we pretend we don't want it.

The movie ended, but no one moved. The room was warm with candlelight and the smell of popcorn. My husband strummed the guitar softly, almost absentmindedly, and the sound filled the quiet. One of the littles asked for hot cocoa, and soon we were all sipping from mismatched mugs, steam curling into the lamplight.

The teenager, still pretending to be unimpressed, whispered something to her brother that made him snort with laughter. Then she stretched her legs across the ottoman and sighed. "We should do this again," she said, so softly I almost missed it.

My heart swelled. I didn't say anything, didn't point it out, didn't break the fragile beauty of the moment. But I tucked it away, knowing this was what I'd been praying for—that she would feel the pull of home even as she leaned toward independence.

Later, after the little ones had been tucked into bed and the house had quieted, I found her in the kitchen rinsing her mug. She looked at me sideways.

"It wasn't... bad," she said finally.

I smiled. "That's high praise coming from you."

She shrugged, but I saw the corners of her mouth twitch. "I mean... I kind of liked it."

I didn't push. I just nodded, drying my hands on a towel. "I'm glad."

And in that small exchange, I felt God's whisper again—the reminder that traditions matter, not because they're perfect or flashy, but because they plant roots. Roots our children can lean on when life feels unsteady. Roots that remind them: you belong, you're loved, you're home.

The next morning, I found scraps of paper scattered across the coffee table, the "reserved" signs the kids had made. One of them had doodled hearts in the corner. Another had written, "Best seat in the house." I smiled as I tucked them into a drawer, a little time capsule of a night that seemed ordinary but had been holy in its own way.

Because sometimes the holiest moments are the ones wrapped in blankets, sticky with marshmallows, echoing with laughter, and glowing with the light of a fire—inside or out.

Activities & Traditions

Fall traditions don't have to be complicated to be meaningful. In fact, the simplest ones are often the ones that last. They give our children anchors — something steady and warm they can look back on when the world feels uncertain. Here are a few of our favorite fall traditions that work with both littles and big kids (even when they pretend they're "too old" for it).

1. Family Bonfire

If you have a backyard fire pit (or even a small, safe metal ring), a bonfire night can become the highlight of fall.

- **With little ones:** let them roast hot dogs or marshmallows, and teach them how to wrap apples in foil with a sprinkle of cinnamon and sugar to bake in the coals.
- **With older kids/teens:** give them more responsibility — starting the fire safely with Dad, choosing the playlist, or organizing a round of "favorites" questions while you sit around the flames. You'll be surprised how much they open up when their faces are turned toward the fire instead of eye-to-eye at the table.

If outdoor fires aren't possible, try creating the same cozy atmosphere indoors with candles, lanterns, and an "indoor s'mores night" (see below).

2. Board Game Night

Games are one of the simplest ways to gather everyone in one spot.

- **For younger kids:** keep it simple — Candy Land, Uno, or a fall-themed matching game.
 - **For teens:** break out strategy games like Catan, Ticket to Ride, or even a family round of Pictionary. Sometimes we let the older ones team up with a younger sibling to even the playing field.
-

To make it feel special, set out bowls of caramel popcorn, apple slices with dip, or mugs of hot cocoa. The food says, “This isn’t just a game — it’s an event.”

3. Fall Scavenger Hunt

Head outside with a simple list of treasures: a red leaf, an acorn, something round, something that smells good, something God made.

- **For little ones:** keep the list short and use pictures instead of words.
- **For older kids:** make it creative — find a leaf bigger than your hand, snap a picture of the most unusual tree you see, or write down three sounds you notice on the walk.

You can make it a family contest with a silly prize (like picking dessert), or just an excuse to get everyone outside together before the evenings get too chilly.

4. Indoor “Campfire” & S’mores Night

Sometimes weather doesn’t cooperate, or fire pits aren’t an option. That doesn’t mean you have to skip the fun.

- Set up an indoor “campfire” with a pile of blankets, flashlights, and maybe a YouTube fireplace crackling on the TV.
- Make **oven s’mores**: layer graham crackers, chocolate, and marshmallows on a baking sheet, then broil for just a minute until the marshmallows puff and brown. (Keep a close eye—they go fast!)

You’ll be surprised how magical it feels to dim the lights, sit in a blanket fort, and enjoy gooey s’mores without ever stepping outside.

5. Passing Down Traditions

One of the sweetest ways to weave faith and memory together is to let kids carry on small pieces of tradition themselves.

- Teach your children an old family recipe (like grandma’s chili or cornbread).
- Pass on a favorite hymn or campfire song.
- Write down a few family stories to share by the fire.

Older kids may roll their eyes at first, but often, they end up cherishing the role of “keeper” of these small legacies. These moments remind them that traditions aren’t just about food or games — they’re about belonging to a story bigger than themselves.

None of these activities require a Pinterest-perfect setup. What matters most is the atmosphere of welcome: blankets piled high, food passed around, and laughter filling the air. That’s what your children will remember.



Comfort Foods for Traditions

When it comes to family traditions, food has a way of anchoring the memory. You don't just remember the movie you watched or the game you played — you remember the chili bubbling on the stove, the smell of caramel popcorn, and the sticky fingers from roasting marshmallows. These recipes are simple, shareable, and flexible for families with both littles and teens.

Taco Chili (Family Favorite)

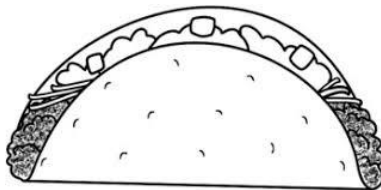
This one is hearty, cozy, and full of flavor — perfect for a fall night when you've got a house full of kids or guests.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 2 cans diced tomatoes (with juice)
- 1 can tomato sauce
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 can kidney beans, drained
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 1 packet taco seasoning (or homemade)
- 1 packet ranch seasoning
- 1 cup water or broth

Directions:

1. Brown meat with onion and bell pepper. Drain excess fat.
2. Stir in tomatoes, tomato sauce, beans, corn, seasoning, and water.
3. Simmer 30–40 minutes on low, stirring occasionally.
4. Serve with shredded cheese, sour cream, and tortilla chips.



White Chicken Chili

A creamy, lighter twist that still feels cozy.

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cans white beans, drained
- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1 can diced green chiles
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp oregano
- ½ tsp chili powder
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

Directions:

- In a pot, sauté onion and garlic in olive oil until soft.
- Add beans, chicken, chiles, broth, and seasonings. Simmer 20 minutes.
- Stir in sour cream and cheese until creamy.
- Serve with tortilla chips or warm rolls.

Hot Dogs Over the Fire (or Indoors)

Sometimes the simplest meals are the most fun.

Campfire Method: Skewer hot dogs on long sticks and roast over the fire until browned to your liking.

Indoor Oven Method: Place hot dogs on a foil-lined baking sheet, bake at 400°F for 10–12 minutes, turning once. For that roasted flavor, broil for 1–2 minutes at the end.

Serve with buns and classic toppings — mustard, ketchup, relish, or chili.

Build-Your-Own S'mores Bar (Two Ways)

Because fall traditions aren't complete without sticky marshmallow fingers.

Classic Campfire or Indoor Oven (Broil Method):

- Marshmallows
- Graham crackers

Fun Swaps & Extras:

- Cookies: Vanilla wafers, Oreos, chocolate chip cookies, or peanut butter sandwich cookies
- Candy Bars: Kit Kats, peanut butter cups, Hershey's cookies & cream, Ghirardelli squares, caramel-filled chocolate
- Spreads: Peanut butter, Nutella, cookie butter, or caramel sauce
- Add-ins: Thin slices of banana or strawberries for a fruity twist

Oven S'mores Directions:

- Lay graham crackers (or cookies) on a baking sheet.
- Place chocolate and marshmallow on top.
- Broil 1–2 minutes until marshmallows are golden.
- Sandwich with a second cracker or cookie.

Kids (and teens) love experimenting with different combinations, and it turns dessert into an activity.

Caramel Popcorn

Sweet, crunchy, and perfect for movie nights.

Ingredients:

- 10 cups popped popcorn
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter
- ¼ cup corn syrup
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

- Place popcorn in a large greased bowl.
 - In saucepan, combine sugar, butter, and corn syrup. Boil 4–5 minutes.
 - Remove from heat, stir in baking soda and vanilla. Mixture will foam.
 - Pour over popcorn, stirring to coat. Spread on parchment to cool.
-

Build-Your-Own Nacho Platter

A great option for teens who love customizing their own plates.

Base Ingredients:

- Tortilla chips

Topping Options:

- Meat: taco beef, shredded chicken, or pork
- Beans: black beans or refried beans
- Cheese: shredded cheddar/Monterey Jack *or* canned nacho cheese sauce for a movie-night feel
- Veggies: jalapeños, diced tomatoes, onions, corn
- Extras: salsa, guacamole, sour cream, olives

Directions:

1. Spread chips on a baking sheet. Top with meat, beans, and shredded cheese.
 2. Bake at 400°F until cheese melts (8–10 minutes).
 3. Set out toppings buffet-style so everyone can customize their plate.
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Walking Tacos

Fun, portable, and kid-approved.

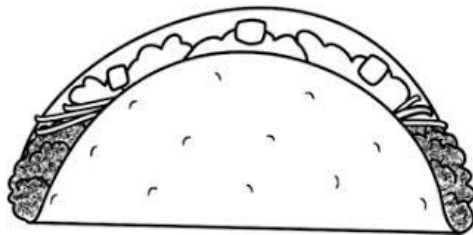
Ingredients:

- Small individual bags of Doritos or Fritos
- Taco meat
- Shredded lettuce
- Diced tomatoes
- Cheese
- Sour cream, salsa, or guacamole

Directions:

- Heat taco meat and set out toppings buffet-style.
- Open chip bags, lightly crush chips inside.
- Scoop meat and toppings straight into the bag.
- Eat with a fork — no plates required!

The beauty of these meals is that they invite participation. Everyone has a hand in building, topping, stirring, or roasting. And when the night is over, the food lingers in memory right alongside the laughter. Mama, remember this: your family won't remember whether the chairs matched or the table was Pinterest-worthy. They will remember the smell of chili, the warmth of bread, and the way you made space for joy at your table.



Closing Thoughts

Mama, don't underestimate the quiet power of traditions. They may look simple — a bowl of chili, a movie night with blankets, marshmallows roasted until they nearly catch fire — but these are the threads that weave faith into your children's hearts. Traditions are anchors. They remind your family who they are and whose they are.

Psalm 78:4 (NLT) says: *"We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about His power and His mighty wonders."*

Every time you gather your family for a meal, a game, or a night around the fire, you are doing exactly that. You're teaching — not just with words, but with the rhythm of life. You're saying: *"This is how we belong. This is how we remember God's goodness. This is how we pass faith from one heart to another."*

Your teen may roll their eyes at first, your little ones may spill popcorn across the floor, but don't lose heart. The Spirit is working in ways you cannot always see. Years from now, when your children light their own candles, stir their own pots of chili, or roast marshmallows with friends, they will remember that faith isn't only preached — it's lived.

Tradition is how ordinary nights become holy ground. And Mama, every time you choose to gather your people — however imperfectly — you're planting seeds that will bear fruit for generations.

Reflection Questions for Chapter 4

1. What tradition from your own childhood do you still remember vividly — and how might you weave it into your family life today?
 2. How do you see God at work in your ordinary family moments — around the table, the fire, or a game?
 3. What's one new fall tradition you'd like to begin this year that could carry your family's faith forward into the future?
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Chapter 5: Cozy Days at Home

"Not that I speak from [any personal] need, for I have learned to be content [and self-sufficient through Christ, satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or uneasy] regardless of my circumstances. I know how to get along and live humbly [in difficult times], and I also know how to enjoy abundance and live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret [of facing life], whether well-fed or going hungry, whether having an abundance or being in need." Philippians 4:11–12 (AMP)

Devotional Reflection

Some days don't look like much. The sky is gray, the house feels too small, and the walls seem to echo with the sound of restless children. Dishes pile up, socks scatter under couches, and the laundry refuses to shrink no matter how many loads you've folded. It's tempting to call a day like that wasted, unremarkable, or just something to survive until bedtime.

But I think those days are holy ground.

God doesn't only meet us in mountaintop experiences, big vacations, or grand family traditions. He shows up in the hum of the dishwasher, in the rhythm of rain on the windows, in the quiet moment when everyone is finally curled up under a blanket with a book. It is here — in the ordinary — that He invites us to discover contentment.

Paul wrote that he had learned to be content in every circumstance. Notice that word: *learned*. Contentment isn't automatic. It's a discipline, something that grows in us with practice. And one of the best classrooms for learning it is an ordinary day at home.

For me, a cozy day at home often begins with resistance. My children feel it first. A rainy morning with canceled plans? "There's nothing to do!" A teenager sighing over boredom. A

little one tugging at my sleeve, needing me to invent entertainment. And if I'm honest, I feel it too. My mind spins with the idea that we should be "doing something productive." That I'm falling behind if the day doesn't hold measurable progress.

But then the Spirit whispers: *Slow down. Be here. This is enough.*

There is a kind of grace in letting the day be small. A grace in lighting a candle, turning on soft music, and saying, "This is a gift." When I choose to stop fighting the ordinary, I begin to see its beauty. The way the house smells when something is baking in the oven. The sound of my kids sprawled out on the rug, piecing together a puzzle or reading by lamplight. The warmth of soup ladled into bowls. The stillness that settles over the room when rain patters steadily outside.

And here's the miracle: when I choose contentment, my children notice. They mirror it back. The sighs of boredom give way to laughter. The teen who didn't want to join us at first ends up pulling a sibling into a card game. The littlest one proudly brings me a crayon drawing to tape to the wall. The atmosphere shifts, not because circumstances changed, but because hearts did.

Psalm 16:11 (NLT) says: *"You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of Your presence and the pleasures of living with You forever."* Joy isn't something we wait for when circumstances finally improve. It's the byproduct of His presence, right here in the living room, right here in the messy kitchen, right here on the rainy Tuesday that nobody thought was special.

And mama, your children are learning from you. They are watching how you respond to the unremarkable days. If they see you frantic and discontent, they will learn that joy only lives in the "big moments." But if they see you light a candle, stir a pot of soup, and say, "What a good day to be home," they will learn that joy lives in the ordinary too.

Sometimes I imagine what they will remember when they are grown. Will they recall every lesson I taught them in math or grammar? Probably not. But they will remember rainy days when the whole house smelled like pumpkin pie bars. They'll remember blanket forts in the living room, cocoa mustaches, and how mama sat still long enough to read another chapter aloud. They'll remember that even on the smallest days, home was a safe, happy place.

This kind of contentment doesn't come naturally in our busy world. Everything around us screams that we need more: more experiences, more stuff, more opportunities, more hustle. But God's whisper is different. He says, "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" (Psalm 46:10, AMP). He says, "*Come to Me... and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28, AMP).

So when the calendar is blank, when the sky is gray, when you find yourself home all day with your little (or not-so-little) ones — don't despise it. Receive it. Light the candle. Bake the bread. Pull out the game nobody's played in months. Read the book. Nap on the couch. Let the rain remind you that slowing down is not falling behind — it's moving at the pace of grace.

The secret to joy in motherhood is not a perfect house or perfect plan. It's contentment. And contentment is found not in having more, but in noticing what we already have — the blessings tucked into the ordinary corners of home.

So today, take a breath and look around your kitchen, your living room, your homeschool table. These little faces, these small moments, this quiet day — it is not "less." It is the very place where God is teaching you, like Paul, the secret of being content.

And when bedtime comes and you tuck blankets around tired bodies, you may just find yourself whispering, "This was enough."

Reflection Questions

1. On an ordinary day at home, what are the moments that bring you the most peace — even if they seem small?
 2. How do you usually respond when plans are canceled or the day feels “unproductive”? What might God be teaching you in those moments?
 3. Philippians 4:11–12 reminds us that contentment is *learned*. What’s one way you can begin practicing contentment in your home this week?
 4. How can you model joy in the ordinary for your children so they learn to see everyday life as a gift?
 5. What’s one cozy, simple tradition (like lighting a candle, baking something, or reading together) that you can add to your “rainy day” rhythm?
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A Rainy Day to Remember

The rain began before dawn, a soft patter on the roof that worked its way into my dreams until I stirred awake. By the time I opened my eyes, the world outside was draped in gray. The sky hung low and heavy, and rivulets of water traced lazy paths down the glass of our bedroom window.

I pulled the quilt tighter around my shoulders, listening for a moment. The steady drum of rain, the occasional rush as it slid from the gutters, the hush that seemed to blanket the world outside — it was the kind of morning that begged us not to rush, not to go anywhere, not to do more than stay close to home.

When I tiptoed into the kitchen, I lit the little lamp on the counter, the one with the yellow shade that always makes the room feel like sunrise, even on days when the sun refuses to show. The air felt cooler, damp with the kind of chill that sinks into the house during a storm. I filled the kettle with water and set it on the stove, then reached for the candle on the windowsill — pumpkin and vanilla — and struck a match.

The soft flame flickered, and with it came a sense of peace. Rainy days can do that. They take away the option to rush and give us the gift of slowing down.

Before long, the sound of feet padding down the hallway announced the children. My youngest appeared first, dragging his blanket behind him like a cape, hair sticking up in every direction. He rubbed his eyes, yawned, and climbed into my lap while I poured my tea. "It's raining," he whispered, as if I hadn't noticed.

"Yes," I smiled. "It's the kind of day for staying in."

The others followed soon after, drawn by the smell of toast popping up and butter melting into it. We gathered at the table, listening to the rain beat softly against the windows. No one was in a hurry to start schoolwork. The books sat stacked and waiting, but I felt no guilt in letting the morning stretch a little.

"Can we build a fort today?" one of them asked between bites of toast.

"Maybe we could bake cookies too," another chimed in.

I sipped my tea and nodded. "I think this is a perfect day for both."

The plan for the day was born right there: no rushing, no elaborate projects, just cozy things to fill the hours while the rain kept falling.

After breakfast, the children went straight to the living room, gathering every blanket they could find. Quilts from the bedrooms, throws from the couches, even a tablecloth or two — all piled into the middle of the room. Soon chairs were dragged from the dining table, couch cushions stacked like towers, and a long string of clothespins unearthed from the junk drawer.

Together, they engineered a sprawling fort that wound its way from the couch to the armchair, a tunnel that opened into a wide "room" where pillows lined the floor.

"Come see, Mama!" they called.

I crawled inside with them, the fabric sagging overhead and the soft light of a lantern casting shadows on the walls. Rain tapped steadily on the roof outside, but inside, it was hushed and cozy. They had lined up their favorite books, and my youngest held out *Goodnight Moon* as if it were treasure.

"Will you read to us in here?" he asked.

So I did. My voice mingled with the patter of rain, the children leaning against me, their hair tickling my arms. It was cramped and silly and altogether perfect.

By midmorning, the fort had collapsed twice, and the children were ready for a new adventure. I suggested baking, and their eyes lit up.

We tied aprons around little waists and pulled stools up to the counter. "What should we make first?" I asked.

"Cookies!" came the unanimous reply.

So cookies it was. Flour dusted the counter, sugar spilled across the floor, and little fingers dipped eagerly into the chocolate chips. The house filled with the smell of butter and vanilla, sweet and rich, and soon the oven gave off waves of warmth.

While the cookies baked, we moved on to pumpkin bread. I measured the flour and sugar while one child cracked eggs with varying degrees of success. Another stirred the pumpkin purée with cinnamon and nutmeg, inhaling deeply. "It smells like fall already," she said.

When the loaves finally went into the oven beside the cookies, the house became an orchestra of cozy smells: rain, pumpkin, sugar, and bread.

"Can we lick the bowl?" asked my middle son, holding up the mixing spoon with a grin.

I laughed. "Of course. Just don't fight over it."

By lunchtime, we were all full of cookies — because who waits until dessert on a rainy day? — so we settled on bowls of soup leftover from the night before and thick slices of bread. The rain outside picked up, drumming harder on the roof. The children pressed their noses to the glass, watching rivulets race each other down the pane.

After lunch, the house grew quiet. One child curled up in the fort with a book, another stretched out on the couch with a blanket, and the youngest climbed into my lap. His head rested against my chest, his breathing slowing as he drifted toward sleep.

I didn't move. The kettle whistled softly in the kitchen, the candle flickered low, but I stayed still, savoring the weight of him against me. Rainy days give permission for naps, and this one felt like a gift.

By late afternoon, the sky had grown darker, though it was still early. We pulled a puzzle from the shelf — a thousand tiny pieces scattered across the table. At first, the children groaned at the sight of so many, but soon the rhythm took over. Edges were found, corners fitted, little victories celebrated.

We lit another candle near the table, its glow soft against the gray outside. The rain continued, steady and faithful.

"This is kind of nice," my teenager admitted, sliding a piece into place. "It feels... peaceful."

I smiled, because I had thought the same thing all day.

As evening crept in, I set a casserole of chicken and rice in the oven — comfort food that fills the belly and warms the soul. The children set the table with mismatched napkins, and when we sat down together, the candle flickered once more in the middle.

The meal wasn't fancy, but it was enough. We lingered long after the plates were cleared, laughter echoing against the windows as the rain finally began to ease.

For dessert, we cut into the pumpkin bread, still warm, and poured mugs of hot cocoa topped with whipped cream. The children's faces glowed as they cupped their mugs, steam curling up like ribbons.

"Best rainy day ever," one of them declared.

I had to agree.

When bedtime came, the children begged to sleep in the fort. We reinforced the blankets with a few extra chairs and

tucked them in with pillows and quilts. The lantern cast its soft glow, their faces peaceful as they whispered stories to one another.

I stood in the doorway for a long time, watching them drift toward sleep. The rain had slowed to a drizzle, the air cool and sweet through the cracked window.

It struck me then: this day, so ordinary and unplanned, had become one of those memories that would linger. Not because we did something grand, but because we let ourselves rest in the gift of home.

Later, as I washed the last of the dishes and blew out the candle, I whispered a prayer:

“Thank You, Lord, for rain that keeps us close. For children who laugh in forts, for cookies and puzzles and pumpkin bread. For the reminder that joy isn’t in doing more, but in seeing You in the small and ordinary.”

The house was quiet at last, the fort glowing faintly down the hall, and I slipped into bed with the sound of rain still whispering on the roof.

And I knew — the ordinary had been holy all along.



Activities & Traditions

Rainy fall days or chilly afternoons are perfect for leaning into simple, cozy activities that draw everyone together. These ideas work well with younger children and can also be adapted for older ones who sometimes need a nudge to join in but end up loving it too.

1. Blanket Fort & Storytime

Younger kids: Gather blankets, sheets, chairs, and pillows to build a fort. Bring in a flashlight or lantern and read picture books aloud while rain taps the windows. Add a plate of cookies or mugs of cocoa, and it becomes magical.

Older kids: Let them help engineer a more elaborate fort — complete with string lights, extra quilts, and space for reading chapter books or journaling inside.

2. Candle Making

Younger kids: Use simple kits or even make “crayon candles” with leftover crayon pieces melted into jars with wicks. The colors mix into fun patterns, and kids love watching them cool and harden.

Older kids: Try beeswax sheets for rolling tapers or explore making jar candles with added essential oils. This can double as a lesson in measurement and science, while also creating gifts for grandparents or neighbors.

3. Family Puzzle Time

Younger kids: Choose large-piece puzzles with bright pictures, and let them work together on a small table.

Older kids: Bring out a big 500–1000 piece puzzle and spread it over the dining table for the whole family to chip away at during the day. Add background music, and it becomes a peaceful group project that encourages conversation.

4. Baking Together

Younger kids: Give them small jobs like stirring, pouring pre-measured ingredients, or decorating with sprinkles.

Older kids: Let them take the lead on a recipe, reading

instructions and measuring out ingredients themselves. Baking becomes more than food — it's teaching, teamwork, and tradition rolled into one.

5. Cozy Movie Afternoon

Younger kids: Choose a classic animated film, pile up with pillows and quilts, and make popcorn.

Older kids: Create a themed movie marathon — like a series of cozy fall family films. Add a "movie snack bar" with popcorn mix-ins or hot cocoa for a fun twist.

6. Indoor "Camp Out"

Younger kids: Spread sleeping bags in the living room, tell stories by lantern light, and play simple games.

Older kids: Make it silly by letting them be the "camp counselors" in charge of activities. Add board games or card games to make it feel like a retreat.

7. Gratitude Journals

Younger kids: Let them draw a picture of something they're thankful for each day.

Older kids: Encourage them to write short reflections — even just one sentence. Later, gather as a family and read them aloud.

These kinds of activities don't require leaving the house or spending much money, but they weave together the threads of connection that make ordinary days memorable.

Comfort Foods for Cozy Days

There's something about a rainy day that begs for food straight from the oven or simmering on the stove. These recipes are simple, comforting, and perfect for the kinds of days when your family is gathered close inside.

Pressed Sandwiches

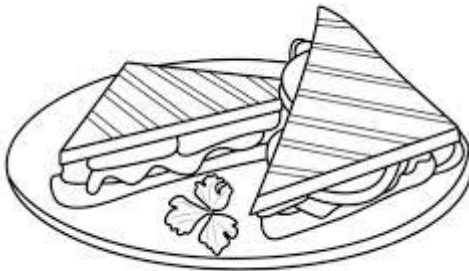
Warm, melty, and customizable — these are perfect for lunch or a light supper on a cozy day.

Ingredients:

- Loaf of Italian bread or ciabatta
- Deli meats (turkey, ham, roast beef — your choice)
- Cheese slices (provolone, Swiss, cheddar)
- Optional add-ins: roasted peppers, spinach, pesto, or mustard
- Olive oil or butter for brushing

Directions:

Slice bread lengthwise. Layer meats, cheeses, and extras of your choice. Place top half of bread back on and brush the outside with olive oil or butter. Wrap tightly in foil. Bake at 375°F for 15–20 minutes, pressing lightly with a baking sheet on top if you want it extra pressed. Slice into wedges and serve warm.



Ham & Cheese Sliders

These are family favorites — soft, buttery, and great for sharing.

Ingredients:

- 12-pack Hawaiian rolls
- 1 lb sliced ham
- 12 slices Swiss cheese
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 Tbsp poppy seeds (optional)

Directions:

Slice rolls in half as a sheet, place bottoms in greased 9x13 dish. Layer ham and cheese, then replace tops. Mix melted butter, mustard, and poppy seeds; brush over rolls. Cover with foil and bake at 350°F for 15 minutes, then uncover and bake 5–7 minutes more until golden.

Chicken & Rice Bake

The ultimate comfort casserole — hearty, filling, and budget-friendly.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup frozen mixed vegetables
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix all ingredients except half the cheese in a large bowl. Spread into greased 9x13 dish. Sprinkle remaining cheese on top. Bake 25–30 minutes until bubbly and golden.

Pumpkin Pie Bars

All the flavor of pumpkin pie, none of the fuss of rolling crust.

Ingredients:

- 1 box yellow cake mix (divided)
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups pumpkin purée
- 1 cup sugar
- ⅔ cup evaporated milk
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ½ tsp cloves

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix half the cake mix with melted butter and 1 egg; press into greased 9x13 pan. In a bowl, mix pumpkin, sugar, milk, spices, and remaining 3 eggs. Pour over crust. Sprinkle remaining cake mix over top. Bake 45–50 minutes. Cool before cutting into bars.



Cheesy Broccoli Soup

A perfect rainy-day meal paired with sandwiches or sliders.

Ingredients:

- 4 Tbsp butter
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup flour
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups milk
- 4 cups chopped broccoli (fresh or frozen)
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

Melt butter in a pot. Add onion and garlic; sauté until soft. Stir in flour, cooking 1 minute. Slowly whisk in broth and milk until smooth. Add broccoli and simmer until tender (10–12 minutes). Remove from heat, stir in cheese until melted. Season to taste.



Apple Crisp with Oat Topping

Warm, sweet, and perfect with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Ingredients:

- 6 apples, peeled and sliced
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp lemon juice

Topping:

- 1 cup oats
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter, softened
- ½ tsp cinnamon

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Toss apples with sugar, cinnamon, and lemon juice; spread in greased 9x13 dish. Combine topping ingredients until crumbly, sprinkle over apples. Bake 35–40 minutes until bubbly and golden. Serve warm with whipped cream or ice cream.

Closing Thoughts

Mama, these cozy days may feel ordinary, but they are holy ground. A rainy afternoon, a loaf of bread rising, children laughing under a blanket fort — none of it is wasted. These are the quiet moments God uses to root peace deep in your home. The world tells us joy is found in big events or perfect plans, but the Spirit whispers that joy can be found in puzzles around the table, soup simmering on the stove, and the warmth of family gathered close.

When you choose to embrace contentment in the ordinary, you're showing your children that God is present not only in the extraordinary but in the everyday. They'll remember the smell of apple crisp more than the piles of laundry. They'll remember how you paused to read with them while the rain tapped on the windows. They'll remember the love woven into small traditions — the kind that make a house feel like a home.

So light the candle. Pour the cocoa. Pull out the board game. Rest in the truth that cozy days are not interruptions to real life. They are real life — the kind of days that echo with laughter and faith long after the rain has stopped.

Reflection Questions

1. How can you create more “cozy moments” in your home this season — ones that remind your children of safety and love?
2. What simple traditions from your own childhood do you want to pass on during these quiet days?
3. How can you use a rainy or stay-at-home day to point your family's hearts toward gratitude and contentment?

Chapter 6: Serving Others in This Season

"Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." (Philippians 2:4 NLT)

Devotional Reflection:

Fall has always felt like a season of gathering. We bring in the harvest, we gather around the table, we gather with friends and family as the days grow shorter. But there's another kind of gathering God calls us to in this season — gathering what we have so we can give it away.

Hospitality is not just about welcoming people into our homes; it's also about carrying the love of Christ outside of them. It's in the simple acts of kindness that remind someone else, "You're not forgotten. You matter."

As mamas, we have an incredible opportunity to model this for our children. Every time we pack a plate of cookies for a neighbor or write a card to someone in need of encouragement, we're teaching our kids that generosity isn't about having extra — it's about sharing what you have.

I've noticed something beautiful about children: they *love* to give when you let them. Their joy isn't in perfection; it's in participation. They don't worry if the bread isn't shaped evenly or if the handwriting on the card is crooked. They just want to be part of loving someone else. And honestly, isn't that what God asks of us, too? Not polished, not perfect — just willing.

Paul's letter to the Philippians reminds us not to live with blinders on, focused only on our own needs and schedules. Instead, he calls us to look outward — to "take an interest in others, too." (Philippians 2:4 NLT). That doesn't always mean big, elaborate gestures. More often, it looks like small, ordinary offerings: a loaf of bread delivered to an elderly neighbor, a batch of muffins dropped off for a tired new mama, a note of encouragement slipped into the mailbox of someone walking through grief.

Jesus Himself modeled this in His ministry. He didn't only preach from the mountaintop; He sat at tables, walked dusty roads, and noticed the people others overlooked. He stopped for the woman at the well, the blind man by the roadside, the children who came running to Him. His way of serving was rooted in noticing.

And that's something we can teach our children: serving begins with seeing.

Maybe that means pausing to notice the widow who sits alone at church and inviting her over for soup. Maybe it means noticing the classmate your teen knows doesn't have much, and baking cookies together to quietly slip into their locker with a note. Maybe it's noticing that your pastor's wife looks tired and bringing her a meal, unasked, just to say, "We see you."

Serving doesn't have to be complicated — in fact, it often speaks loudest when it's simple.

In our home, we've made serving others part of our fall rhythm. We bake extra loaves of banana bread, not because we need more carbs in the house, but because wrapping them in foil and tying them with twine gives us a reason to knock on a neighbor's door. We set up a card-making afternoon with the kids, where crayons and markers scatter across the table, and at the end of the day we have a stack of bright, child-colored encouragements ready for the nursing home. We keep a basket by the door where we drop in canned goods each week, and when it's full, we carry it together to the church pantry.

The kids don't see these as chores — they see them as opportunities. Why? Because we frame them that way. We say, "Today, we get to love someone else." And over time, it becomes second nature.

But here's the honest truth: sometimes I resist. Sometimes I think, "I don't have time. I don't have the energy. I barely managed to keep my own family fed today." And that's when God whispers gently, "It's not about perfection. It's about participation. Just show up, and I'll do the rest."

Because isn't that the gospel? God doesn't ask us to be enough. He asks us to bring our little — our loaves and fish — and trust Him to multiply it.

So mama, let this season be one where you and your children practice generosity together. Show them that serving is less about having everything together, and more about offering what you have. Teach them that a plate of cookies can be holy, that a loaf of bread can preach the gospel, that a handwritten note can be a lifeline.

And as you do, remember this: you're not just serving others, you're planting seeds in your children. Seeds that say, "Faith is meant to be lived out loud." Seeds that will grow into habits of kindness and rhythms of generosity they'll carry into adulthood.

This fall, let your home be a sending place — a place where the table is full, the oven is warm, and the love of Christ spills out of your door into the world around you. You don't need to do it perfectly. You just need to begin.

Because the truth is, when we give, we don't lose — we gain. We gain perspective, we gain joy, we gain the blessing of watching God take our little and make it more than enough. And our children gain the gift of seeing faith in action, lived not only in Bible lessons but in sticky fingers wrapping cookies for a neighbor.

Generosity isn't just about the person receiving. It shapes the giver, too.

So let's light a candle, tie the twine around the bread, slip a note into an envelope, and remind ourselves and our children: this is worship, too.

Reflection Questions

1. What small ways can you invite your children to serve with you this season?
2. Who in your community might need encouragement right now — and how could your family show up for them?
3. How can you reframe “serving” as an opportunity instead of a burden in your daily life?



The Bread on Maple Lane

The smell of bread always seemed to transform our home. It wasn't just the yeasty fragrance rising from the oven, or the golden tops turning crisp under heat — it was the way the scent wrapped around us like a blanket, drawing the children close, making the ordinary Tuesday afternoon feel a little more like Sunday.

That particular Tuesday in October had been full from the start. Math pages scattered across the table, the baby fussing for more milk, crayons rolling into the cracks in the floorboards. Outside, the trees had finally given themselves over to color, red and gold carpeting the yard. The wind swept them into spirals, piling leaves in corners where the dog bounded happily.

I had started the bread before lessons — feeding the yeast, kneading the dough while I recited spelling words aloud, setting the bowl under a damp cloth so it could rise while we worked through history. My children had learned, over years of practice, that bread-making is a rhythm as natural as brushing teeth or lighting a candle. The littles pressed their fingers into the dough when it puffed, squealing at how it sighed back at them like a pillow. The older ones hovered nearby, less dramatic but just as eager to shape their rolls.

But this day, I had something different in mind.

"Kids," I said as we pushed back chairs after finishing handwriting practice, "I think we're going to make extra bread today."

My youngest perked up instantly. "For us?"

"For someone else," I smiled, brushing flour across the counter. "I was thinking about Mrs. Johnson down the road."

Their faces lit up at the name. Mrs. Johnson lived three houses away, a widow who had turned eighty this past spring. She used to sit on her porch and wave when we passed, her little dog curled at her feet, but lately she'd been quieter. Since her husband passed, she had stopped

gardening, and sometimes I caught her staring across her yard as if she were waiting for someone.

"We could bring her some bread," I said. "And maybe make a card to go with it."

The littles shouted their approval. The older ones exchanged a look, that mix of teenager resistance and genuine soft-heartedness that they never quite managed to hide. I pretended not to notice and simply said, "Let's make it beautiful, then."

We turned the kitchen into a little workshop of generosity. One child buttered loaf pans while another carefully shaped the dough into smooth rounds. Someone suggested sprinkling cinnamon sugar on top of one, "because maybe she likes sweet bread," and another insisted we braid a loaf, "because it looks special." I agreed to both.

At the table, the younger ones dug out construction paper and markers, scribbling hearts and "We love you" in crooked letters. My middle boy wrote "God bless you" in big block print, misspelling "bless" with two e's until I gently corrected him. My oldest daughter sighed at the mess of glue sticks and cut-up paper, but she joined in anyway, sketching a tiny bouquet of flowers on the front of her card.

By late afternoon, the bread was golden and cooling on racks, and the kitchen smelled like heaven itself. The kids crowded around, jostling to see which loaf we'd take. I wrapped the braided one in a clean towel, tied it with twine, and slipped the card on top.

"Alright," I said, tucking the bundle into a basket, "let's go bless our neighbor."

The walk to Mrs. Johnson's was short but sweet. The littles crunched through the leaves, holding hands, pretending to be giants stomping through forests of color. My teenager walked slower, pretending she wasn't invested, but I noticed how carefully she balanced the basket in her arms. The sun hung low in the sky, throwing gold across the maples that lined the lane.

When we reached her porch, the kids suddenly grew shy. They clustered around me as I knocked gently. After a moment, the door opened, and there stood Mrs. Johnson, wrapped in a cardigan, her silver hair caught in the late light. Her eyes widened when she saw us.

"Well, my goodness," she said, her voice catching a little. "What brings this parade to my porch?"

My middle son stepped forward bravely, thrusting the basket out. "We made you bread."

Her hand flew to her chest. "You... you made this for me?"

"Yes," I said softly. "We thought you might like something warm for supper. And the kids wanted to make you a card."

She took the basket as though it were treasure. Her eyes filled with tears as she set it carefully on the table beside the door, then reached out to squeeze each child's hand. "You don't know," she whispered, "how much this means. It's been... a lonely week."

The littlest tugged at her sleeve. "We can stay a little if you want."

Mrs. Johnson laughed through her tears. "Oh, sweetheart, you've already given me more than you know." She invited us in for just a few minutes, and the kids perched politely on her floral sofa while she fussed with the basket. She sliced the bread right there, buttering it thick, insisting each child take a piece. "Best bread I've ever tasted," she declared, though I knew it was the company that made it so.

We stayed only half an hour, but when we left, her whole face looked brighter. The kids skipped down the porch steps, glowing with the joy of giving. My teenager, walking quietly at the back, leaned in close to me and whispered, "I think we should do this again."

That night, as we gathered back around our own table with soup and rolls from the extra batch, I thought about what had happened. We hadn't done anything spectacular. We hadn't solved her loneliness or fixed the ache of missing her

husband. We had simply shown up with bread, with presence, with love. But maybe that's the point. God doesn't ask us to change the whole world in one sweep — He asks us to love our neighbor in small, faithful ways.

The next week, when we baked bread again, the kids didn't wait for me to suggest it. "Can we make an extra loaf?" they asked before I'd even measured the flour. They didn't debate whether it was worth the effort. They didn't complain that we'd be walking in the chilly air again. They just wanted to give.

This time, they decorated two cards — one for Mrs. Johnson, and one "just in case." As the loaves cooled, my teenager pulled me aside. "What if we dropped some off at Mr. Patel's, too? He always gives us tomatoes in the summer."

So we did. And the week after that, we baked muffins for the family who had just welcomed a new baby. The week after, cookies for the pastor's wife. Each delivery was simple, and yet each one seemed to knit something unseen — between us, between our neighbors, between heaven and earth.

It became our rhythm. Flour dust in the air. Little fingers sticky with dough. Cards covered in crayon and hearts. A basket passed from hand to hand. A knock on the door. Smiles that cracked open tired faces. Gratitude that overflowed and returned to us tenfold.

One evening, after another delivery, the older kids sprawled in the living room, books and phones and chatter around them, and I overheard my daughter tell her brother, "You know, I kind of love this. I thought it would be lame, but... it makes me feel good." He nodded, trying to act nonchalant, but his grin gave him away.

I tucked that moment into my heart like treasure. Because isn't that what we long for as mothers? For them to taste the joy of giving, to learn without a lecture that kindness multiplies, that generosity changes us as much as it changes those we bless?

And the truth is — it changed me, too.

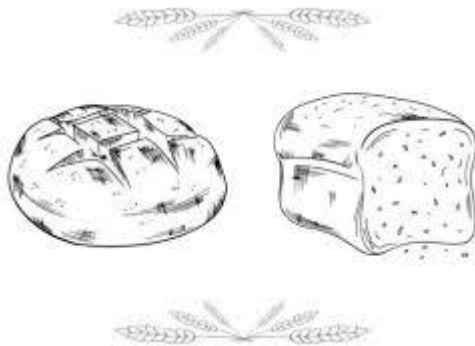
One cold evening in November, I lit a candle at our own table, soup steaming, bread basket warm in the center. I thought of the loaves that had left our kitchen, the doors that had opened, the smiles we'd seen. I thought of how God had taken one simple act — baking bread — and turned it into a lesson of abundance and connection.

I realized then that bread doesn't just feed stomachs. It feeds souls. It binds us together. It says, "You are remembered. You are loved. You are not alone."

And as the candle flickered low, I whispered a prayer that my children would carry this lesson with them always — that they would keep baking, keep giving, keep serving in small, faithful ways that ripple into eternity.

Because sometimes, the holiest moments are not in the grand gestures, but in the quiet knock at a neighbor's door, with warm bread in hand and love in the basket.

And maybe — just maybe — heaven leans close every time.



Activities & Traditions – Serving Others in This Season

Generosity doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, some of the most meaningful lessons for our kids come from small, simple acts of kindness that we repeat over time. These activities are easy to adapt for different ages and can become traditions your family looks forward to each fall.

1. Handmade Cards for Nursing Homes

Younger children can draw bright pictures with crayons, stickers, or watercolor paints. Older kids can write Scripture verses or encouraging notes. Collect the cards and deliver them to a local nursing home or assisted-living facility.

Tip: Call ahead and ask how many residents there are — sometimes they'll share a list so every person gets a card!

2. Canned Food or Pantry Drive

Involve your children in choosing items at the store (let littles pick canned fruit or pasta, while teens calculate totals and help load boxes). Deliver the food as a family, letting kids carry bags so they see themselves as part of the blessing.

Variation: Make it fun by setting a family goal — "Let's see if we can collect 50 cans by Thanksgiving!"

3. Secret Service Acts

Choose one person in your neighborhood, church, or homeschool group each week and do something kind without telling them it was you. This could be raking leaves, leaving cookies on their porch, or taping an encouraging note to their door.

Kids love the "secret agent" feel — especially teens who might roll their eyes at first but secretly enjoy the mystery.

4. Bake-and-Deliver Day

Set aside one afternoon each week to bake something as a family (bread, muffins, cookies) and deliver it together. Younger ones can stir or measure, older kids can handle oven work or packaging. It becomes both a service and a cozy family tradition.

5. Thankfulness Banner for Your Community

On strips of paper, have each family member write something they're thankful for. Tape them together into a long paper chain and hang it across your porch, fence, or window. Invite neighbors to add to it when they stop by.

For older kids: Have them design a large poster board with "What are you thankful for?" at the top and leave it near your mailbox with markers for neighbors to join in.

6. Adopt-a-Neighbor

If you know of someone elderly, single, or struggling, "adopt" them for the season. Deliver soup once a week, shovel their walkway, or invite them over for a family dinner. Teach your children that generosity isn't random — it's commitment.

Comfort Foods for Sharing

One of the sweetest ways to teach generosity is right in the kitchen. When children stir, scoop, and wrap food with their own hands, they begin to understand how love can be tangible. These recipes are chosen because they're cozy, easy to make in batches, and perfect for giving away.

Classic Banana Bread

Moist, comforting, and always welcome — this is the loaf that gets requested again and again.

Ingredients:

- 3 ripe bananas, mashed
- ½ cup melted butter
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 tsp baking soda
- Pinch of salt
- 1 ½ cups flour

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a loaf pan.
2. Mix bananas and butter in a bowl. Stir in sugar, egg, and vanilla.
3. Add baking soda, salt, and flour. Stir until just combined.
4. Pour into pan and bake 55–60 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean.
5. Cool slightly before slicing.

Wrap in parchment, tie with twine, and add a note — perfect for a neighbor or teacher.

Mini Muffins for Sharing

Make a batch of blueberry, pumpkin, or chocolate chip — they're portable and kid-friendly.

Base Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- ¼ cup oil or melted butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup add-ins (blueberries, pumpkin purée with spices, or mini chocolate chips)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Grease or line mini muffin tin.
2. Mix dry ingredients in one bowl, wet in another.
3. Stir together until just combined, fold in add-ins.
4. Bake 10–12 minutes, until golden.

Pack in paper bakery bags and let kids decorate the outside.

Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

Chewy, hearty, and nostalgic — they travel well and keep beautifully.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 ½ cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup raisins

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cream butter and sugars until fluffy.
2. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Stir in dry ingredients.
3. Fold in oats and raisins.
4. Drop by spoonfuls onto greased cookie sheet. Bake 10–12 minutes.

Stack in clear bags and tie with ribbon — perfect for kids to hand-deliver.

Homemade Chai Tea Mix

This one's wonderful for teachers, pastors, or moms who need a cozy moment.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup powdered milk
- 1 cup powdered non-dairy creamer (vanilla or plain)
- 1 cup instant tea
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ginger
- 1 tsp cloves
- ½ tsp cardamom
- ½ tsp nutmeg

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients in a large bowl.
2. Blend in batches in a food processor until fine powder.
3. To serve: Stir 2 heaping tablespoons into 1 cup hot water or milk.

Package in mason jars with a fabric lid and handwritten instructions.

5. Sweet & Salty Ranch Pretzels

Addictive and perfect for portioning into little bags.

Ingredients:

- 1 bag mini pretzels
- ½ cup oil
- 1 packet ranch seasoning
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp garlic powder

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 250°F.
2. Toss pretzels with oil, ranch mix, sugar, and garlic.
3. Spread on baking sheet. Bake 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes.
4. Cool completely before bagging.

Divide into cellophane bags — they keep well and make easy gifts.

Spiced Candied Nuts

Elegant and cozy, these make wonderful gifts for neighbors or holiday baskets.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups mixed nuts (pecans, almonds, walnuts)
- 1 egg white
- 1 Tbsp water
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp salt

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 300°F. Grease baking sheet.
2. Whisk egg white and water until frothy. Toss nuts to coat.
3. Mix sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Toss with nuts.
4. Spread evenly on baking sheet. Bake 30 minutes, stirring halfway.
5. Cool before storing.

Package in jars or tins — they smell heavenly and look beautiful too.



Closing Thoughts

Mama, serving others doesn't always look grand. Sometimes it's a loaf of banana bread wrapped in parchment, or a plate of cookies left on a doorstep. Sometimes it's a card tucked into an envelope, written in a child's careful scrawl. These little offerings may seem ordinary, but in God's economy, nothing given in love is ever small.

When we bake with our children, when we teach them to think of others first, when we carry food across the street or prayers across the table — we are planting seeds. Seeds of kindness, seeds of generosity, seeds of faith. Our kids are learning, without a lecture, that love looks like hands in flour and feet on a neighbor's porch.

Galatians reminds us: *"So then, while we [as individual believers] have the opportunity, let us do good to all people [not only being helpful, but also doing that which promotes their spiritual well-being]"* (Galatians 6:10 AMP). Every muffin, every note, every gift becomes a way of saying, *"You are seen. You are loved. God cares for you."*

You don't have to do it all. You don't have to serve in every way or meet every need. Just start with one small act, one loaf, one note, one neighbor. Let your children see, let them join in, and trust God to multiply it in ways you may never know.

Hospitality and service are not about perfection — they're about presence. And when we open our homes and our hearts, when we stretch what we have and offer it to God, He makes it holy.

So go ahead — bake the bread, stir the soup, tie the ribbon on the bag of pretzels. Then deliver it with joy. You may never know just how much that simple gift means to the one who receives it. But heaven sees, and God smiles.

Reflection Questions

1. What small act of kindness could you and your children do this week for someone outside your home?
2. How can you invite your children into the process of serving others — not just the end result, but the preparation and prayer behind it?
3. Who in your neighborhood, church, or community might be blessed by a simple gift of food, a note, or a visit?
4. What's one tradition of service you'd like to begin with your family this season that could be repeated year after year?

Chapter 7: Embracing Outdoor Moments

*"For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God."
(Romans 1:20 NLT)*

Devotional Reflection:

There's something about stepping outside that resets the soul. The walls of our homes hold so much — the noise of children, the clatter of dishes, the endless lists of things to do. But when you walk outside and breathe deep, the sky stretches wide and suddenly everything feels a little lighter. God built creation to be a sanctuary, and in every season, He whispers His glory through what He made.

I often think of how Jesus Himself slipped away to quiet places, into the hills and along the seashore. He didn't always teach in synagogues or at tables — sometimes He taught from the mountaintop, from a boat rocking gently on the waves, from a field where lilies swayed in the breeze. Scripture reminds us again and again: the earth is full of His presence. Psalm 19:1 (AMP) says, *"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And the expanse [of heaven] is declaring the work of His hands."*

When I step onto a trail lined with trees blazing in fall color, I see His creativity. When I hear the crunch of leaves under little feet, I hear His joy. When I watch my children bend low to pick up acorns or stop still to marvel at a hawk gliding above, I see His invitation: *Look, I made this for you to enjoy.*

It's easy, especially in the busy homeschool rhythm, to forget that learning doesn't only happen at a table. Some of the best lessons come when we lace up our shoes, grab thermoses of cider, and head outside. The changing leaves become a science lesson. The rhythm of walking side by side becomes a chance for conversations that might never happen indoors. The hush of the woods becomes a reminder

that God's voice is often quiet, waiting for us to slow down and listen.

I've noticed something: when I take my kids outdoors, even for just twenty minutes, our home feels different afterward. The bickering lessens. The restlessness quiets. My own heart softens. There's a connection between being outside in God's creation and being reminded of our smallness — and His greatness.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) tells us: "*Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*" The beauty around us isn't just for decoration; it's a reflection of His eternal nature. The leaves that flame red and gold and then fall to the ground remind us that endings are part of His design — and so are beginnings. The chill in the air tells us that seasons shift, but His faithfulness never does.

And here's the truth, mama: your children don't need an expensive vacation or a grand trip to see His creation. They just need you, present, pointing out the little wonders. The spider weaving a web on the porch railing. The squirrel darting across the fence. The sound of wind rattling through dry cornstalks. Each one is a chance to say: *God made this. Isn't He wonderful?*

This fall, I want to invite you to step outside with fresh eyes. Don't think of it as one more thing to add to your list — think of it as a gift. A chance to breathe deeper. A chance to let your children see God's handprints all around them. A chance to reset your soul in the beauty He freely gives.

Maybe it's a hike through the woods, a walk around the block, or just sitting on the porch wrapped in a blanket with your Bible open and a mug of something warm in your hands. Whatever it looks like, let it be worship. Let it be gratitude. Let it be a reminder that this big, beautiful world belongs to Him — and so do you.

Creation doesn't just point us to God's beauty; it pulls us into praise. So step outside, mama. Lift your eyes. Let the trees, the sky, the crisp air remind you: He is near.

Reflection Questions

1. When was the last time you slowed down enough to notice God's presence in creation? What did you see, hear, or feel that reminded you of Him?
2. How can you make space in your family's weekly rhythm to step outside together — whether it's a short walk, sitting on the porch, or a full hike?
3. What conversations or moments with your children might naturally open up when you spend time outdoors instead of indoors?
4. How does being in nature help you shift your perspective from busyness to gratitude?



A Walk Through the Woods

The sky was the clearest blue that morning, the kind of blue that only seems to arrive in October, when the humidity has burned off and the air feels both sharp and kind at the same time. The children were already buzzing before breakfast, pulling jackets from the closet and searching for the thermoses I had promised to fill with cider. They knew what it meant when I said we were taking the day “to the woods.”

I had packed lunches the night before—sandwiches wrapped in parchment, a bag of apples, some trail mix heavy on the chocolate chips because I knew that would keep morale up when little legs got tired. Into the old canvas backpack I tucked a folded quilt, a Bible, and the small spiral-bound nature journals that had become our companions on walks like this.

After breakfast, while the children pulled on shoes and argued over who had misplaced the second water bottle, I warmed apple cider on the stove, stirring in cinnamon sticks until the kitchen smelled like comfort itself. I poured it into metal thermoses, each one clanking as I lined them up on the counter. I had learned the hard way that no matter how young or old, each child wanted their own—sharing caused more trouble than it solved.

By mid-morning we were in the van, bouncing down the gravel road toward the trailhead. The trees arched overhead, gold and crimson and orange, a canopy of flame. Even the youngest noticed. “It looks like the sky is on fire,” he said, pressing his nose to the glass.

When we finally arrived, the woods greeted us with a hush that seemed older than time. There were other cars in the lot, but the path stretched long enough that soon it felt like the world had been set aside for us alone. The crunch of leaves underfoot became the rhythm of our morning.

The little ones darted ahead, chasing each other from tree to tree, calling back every few feet to announce a treasure—a yellow leaf shaped like a star, a stick that looked like a sword, a pinecone still sticky with sap. My older children

walked more slowly, carrying the journals and pencils, sometimes pausing to sketch the curve of a branch or write down the sound of the wind in their own words.

We weren't far in when we came to a clearing where sunlight spilled like honey through the trees. "This is it," I said, and we spread the quilt across the ground. The thermoses came out first. There's something about unscrewing the top of a thermos in cool weather that feels like unwrapping a gift. The steam rose in little curls, and the scent of spiced cider drifted between us.

"Careful," I warned as I passed the cups around. "It's hot."

They blew on the rims, faces glowing with anticipation, and soon there were satisfied sighs all around. Even the teenager, who had been reluctant to leave her book at home, closed her eyes and admitted, "This was worth coming for."

We sat there a long time, sipping, passing trail mix, and listening to the forest speak in rustles and birdcalls. The younger ones lay on their stomachs, propping their chins in their hands, watching ants crawl over the edge of the blanket. The older ones sketched leaves, pressing them flat under their notebooks before drawing the veins with quick strokes of pencil. I pulled out the Bible, and without any formality, I read Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

The words seemed to settle in the clearing, joining the song of the trees. For a few moments, nobody spoke. We just listened.

Afterward, we packed up the quilt and walked on. The trail grew steeper, and soon little legs began to drag. "My feet hurt," one said. "How much longer?" another asked. I pointed to a bend up ahead and promised a rest. Along the way, I reminded them of the sandwiches waiting, of the thermoses still half-full, of the reward of sitting at the top where the view stretched far enough to remind us how small and how loved we are.

It took some coaxing, but we made it. At the top, the world opened wide. Hills rolled into the distance, each one a patchwork of red, orange, green, and gold. "It looks like a quilt," my daughter whispered. She was right. God had sewn the colors together and laid them gently over the land.

We found a fallen log and made it our table. Sandwiches disappeared quickly, as food always does when eaten outdoors. Apples crunched, trail mix dwindled, and the cider was finished to the last drop. The youngest, with juice on his chin, sighed, "This is the best picnic ever."

When the food was gone, the children scattered a little. One climbed onto a rock and declared himself king of the mountain. Another lay on her back, staring up at the branches. My teenager pulled out her journal and wrote quietly, lips moving as if tasting each word. I watched them all, and for once, nobody argued, nobody asked for screens or snacks or the next thing. They were present. And so was I.

After a while, we gathered again. "Before we go," I said, "let's write down something we're thankful for." Each child scribbled or drew. Some wrote about the cider. Some wrote about the colors. One wrote, "I'm thankful God made trees because they give us shade and climbing." Simple, true. I tucked those journals back in the bag, knowing these pages would hold more than drawings—they would hold the memory of this day.

The walk back was quieter. The little ones tired, the older ones lost in their thoughts. The sun had shifted lower, and the air grew cooler. I carried the smallest for a stretch, his head heavy on my shoulder, his breath warm against my cheek. The others took turns holding his hand, pointing out leaves or balancing on logs to keep him entertained.

By the time we reached the van, shoes were muddy, pockets were stuffed with acorns and stones, and cheeks were pink with wind. Everyone was tired, but it was the good kind of tired, the kind that comes after a day lived well.

Back home, I unpacked the empty thermoses and set them in the sink, their insides sticky with cider. The children drifted into corners of the house—one curled up with a book, another sprawled on the rug with blocks, the teenager stretched out across her bed, headphones in but journal still open. I made a pot of soup for supper, and as I stirred, I thought about the day.

It had not been perfect—there were complaints, and one scraped knee, and a few sibling spats along the trail. But it had been good. It had been holy in the ordinary way that only time spent together, outdoors and unhurried, can be.

Later that night, as I tucked the youngest into bed, he whispered, “Mama, can we do it again next week?”

I smiled, brushing hair back from his forehead. “Yes,” I said. “As long as the leaves are here, we’ll keep walking.”

And in my heart, I prayed that long after the leaves were gone, long after the thermoses were tucked away and the journals filled, my children would remember the lesson hidden in the woods: that God meets us in His creation, that His presence is written in the sky and the trees, and that joy can always be found when we walk slowly enough to notice.

Activities for Embracing Outdoor Moments

1. Nature Walk & Journaling

- **Younger Kids:** Give them small spiral notebooks or clipboards with paper. Encourage them to collect leaves, draw bugs, or make simple sketches of trees. Ask them to describe colors or sounds they hear in their own words.
- **Older Kids:** Challenge them to write a paragraph or poem about what they notice, sketch more detailed drawings, or identify different tree species and write the names beside their sketches. You can even add scripture references about creation for them to copy.

2. Leaf Pressing

- **Younger Kids:** Collect colorful leaves on a walk and press them between sheets of wax paper with a warm iron (with adult help). They can hang these in windows as “stained glass.”
- **Older Kids:** Have them press leaves between heavy books, then use them later for scrapbooking, nature journals, or homemade greeting cards for grandparents or neighbors.

3. Leaf Rubbing with Crayons

- **Younger Kids:** Place leaves under plain paper and let them use the side of a crayon to rub the shape and veins onto the page. They’ll love the “magical” reveal.
- **Older Kids:** Create more advanced rubbings and then cut the leaves out to make a collage or a garland. Encourage them to label the type of leaf (oak, maple, etc.) to make it educational.

4. Campfire Storytelling

- **Younger Kids:** Keep it light and cozy. Tell silly stories, share favorite family memories, or ask each child to make up a “once upon a time” story.

- **Older Kids:** Invite them to tell more thoughtful stories—maybe share a personal testimony, or a story about God’s faithfulness. They might also enjoy reading aloud from a favorite book or poem by the fire.



Comfort Foods for the Outdoors

There's something about eating outside that makes food taste better. Maybe it's the fresh air, maybe it's the laughter around the fire, maybe it's the way simple meals feel like a feast when everyone helps make them. These are our favorite recipes for outdoor evenings — easy to prep, fun for kids to assemble, and cozy enough to become traditions.

Classic Foil Pack Chicken & Veggies

Ingredients:

- 2 chicken breasts, cubed
- 2 medium potatoes, diced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp paprika
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

Toss all ingredients in a bowl. Divide between two sheets of heavy-duty foil. Seal tightly. Cook over hot coals or on a grill for 25–30 minutes, turning halfway. Check that chicken is cooked through before serving.

Sausage & Pepper Foil Packs

Ingredients:

- 1 lb smoked sausage, sliced
- 2 bell peppers, sliced
- 1 onion, sliced
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Mix all ingredients together. Divide into foil packs and seal. Cook 20 minutes over coals or grill, flipping once. Serve with crusty bread for dipping.

Tex-Mex Beef Foil Pack

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef (or ground turkey)
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 cup corn (fresh or frozen)
- 1 cup salsa
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (added after cooking)
- Tortilla chips for serving

Directions:

Brown beef lightly in a skillet (optional, for faster cook time). Mix with beans, corn, and salsa. Place in foil packs. Cook 20–25 minutes until hot and bubbly. Open carefully, sprinkle with cheese, and serve with tortilla chips.

4. Veggie & Herb Foil Pack (Meat-Free Option)

Ingredients:

- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 yellow squash, sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 cup mushrooms, halved
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Salt & pepper

Directions:

Place vegetables on foil, dot with butter, and sprinkle with seasonings. Fold tightly. Cook over coals 15–20 minutes until tender.

Campfire Dessert Cones

Ingredients:

- Sugar cones
- Mini marshmallows
- Chocolate chips
- Peanut butter chips
- Sliced bananas
- Crushed graham crackers
- Peanut butter (optional)

Directions:

Fill cones with a mix of marshmallows, chocolate, and add-ins like banana slices or peanut butter. Wrap each cone in foil. Heat near coals (not directly in flames) for 5–7 minutes until gooey. Unwrap and enjoy with spoons (or messy hands).

Fun twist: Provide a topping station with extras like crushed cookies, sprinkles, or chopped candy bars so everyone can make their own creation.

Warm Apple Crisp Skillet (Campfire or Oven)

Ingredients:

- 4 apples, peeled and sliced
- 2 Tbsp butter
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup oats
- ¼ cup flour
- ¼ cup cold butter, cubed

Directions:

In a cast-iron skillet, sauté apples with 2 Tbsp butter, half the sugar, and cinnamon until softened. In a bowl, mix oats, flour, remaining sugar, and cold butter until crumbly. Sprinkle over apples. Cover with foil and cook over campfire (or bake at 350°F) until topping is golden and crisp. Serve warm.

Closing Thoughts

When we step outside and breathe in the crisp fall air, it's as if creation itself is inviting us to pause and worship. The trees raise their arms in golden praise, the wind whispers of God's presence, and the crunch of leaves under our feet reminds us that life is meant to be lived step by step, moment by moment.

Outdoor moments don't have to be elaborate. It might be a family walk, a backyard fire, or just sitting together under a blanket watching the stars. These simple experiences knit our families closer and root us in gratitude for the beauty God has given us. They remind us that joy isn't found in constant busyness, but in noticing.

Psalm 19:1 (AMP) says, "*The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And the expanse [of heaven] is declaring the work of His hands.*" When we choose to step outside and soak in His creation, we are choosing to see His fingerprints in every detail — in the fiery leaves, the migrating geese, the glowing embers of a campfire, and the laughter of children under the open sky.

So, mama, don't underestimate these little adventures. They are memory-makers, faith-builders, and soul-refreshers. Take the cider in a thermos, light the fire, roast the marshmallows, and let God meet you under His wide, beautiful heavens.

Reflection Questions

1. When was the last time you slowed down enough outside to notice God's creation? What did you see, hear, or feel?
 2. How could you weave more outdoor family traditions into this season — something simple but meaningful?
 3. In what ways do you want your children to remember "outdoor moments" from their childhood?
 4. What might God be teaching you about His presence through the changing beauty of fall?
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Chapter 8: Gratitude in the Everyday

“In every situation [no matter what the circumstances] be thankful and continually give thanks to God; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (AMP)

Devotional Reflection:

Gratitude doesn't come naturally. At least, not the deep kind that roots itself in the soul and flourishes even when life feels messy. Our children might easily rattle off things like “I'm thankful for my toys” or “for pizza night,” and honestly, that's a start. But true thankfulness—thankfulness that remains when the dishes pile up, when lessons drag on, when a child is sick, when money feels thin—that's something we must intentionally cultivate, both in ourselves and in our families.

As moms, it's tempting to live with our eyes always scanning for what still needs to be done. The laundry that multiplies like rabbits, the never-ending math worksheets, the crumbs under the table that make a mockery of yesterday's sweeping. But when we live always scanning for lack, our hearts learn to crave more instead of recognizing enough. Gratitude shifts the lens. It trains our hearts to see what is present, not what is missing.

I think of the ten lepers in Luke 17: they all were healed by Jesus, but only one returned to say thank you. Ten were made clean, but only one received the joy of acknowledging the Giver. Isn't that like us? We receive daily mercies, hundreds of them, and still forget to come back and thank Him. Cultivating thankfulness is about being the “one” in a world of ten. It's about noticing the little mercies in our days—the warm loaf of bread, the giggle of a child during spelling, the sound of rain against the window—and naming them as gifts.

I've noticed that when I intentionally model gratitude, my children pick it up too. They watch the way I respond when dinner burns or when the car battery dies. They notice if I

sigh with frustration or if I take a breath and whisper, “Thank You, Lord, for another way to grow.” And slowly, gratitude grows in them too.

But let me be clear: cultivating gratitude is not about pretending everything is perfect. It’s about practicing presence with God, even when things are far from perfect. Psalm 107:1 (NLT) reminds us: *“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever.”* Gratitude is anchored in who God is, not in whether my day runs smoothly. His goodness is steady, and so my thanksgiving can be too.

Practical gratitude is simple, but powerful. It might look like writing blessings on scraps of paper and slipping them into a jar. It might be pausing at bedtime to name three things from the day you’re thankful for, even silly ones like “I’m glad we had clean socks” or “I’m thankful the dog didn’t eat my sandwich today.” Gratitude isn’t about grandeur; it’s about rhythm. A steady practice that reshapes how we see the world.

And mama, gratitude doesn’t just shift your children’s hearts. It changes yours. On the days when I feel weighed down, gratitude becomes my lifeline. Instead of spiraling into “I can’t do all this,” I breathe and list the gifts: “I have children to teach. I have food to cook. I have a home to tend. I have a God who never leaves me.” Naming blessings breaks the grip of discontent.

There’s also something contagious about gratitude. A thankful home feels different. It hums with peace, even when it’s noisy. It smells like stew simmering and cornbread baking, even if the floor hasn’t been mopped in a week. It feels like a safe place to land, because gratitude shifts the focus from what’s lacking to what’s been given.

So, in this season, let’s cultivate gratitude—not just as a holiday theme, but as a daily posture. Let’s choose to be the “one” who returns to thank Him. Let’s train our eyes to see blessings tucked into the ordinary. And let’s raise children who know that gratitude isn’t just for the good days, but for every day, because every day is held in God’s faithful hands.

Reflection Questions

1. In what everyday areas of your life do you find it hardest to practice gratitude?
2. How might choosing to “be the one” who gives thanks, like the leper in Luke 17, reshape your perspective this season?
3. What small gratitude practice could you start with your children this week (a jar, bedtime thanks, notes on the fridge, etc.)?
4. How does remembering God’s unchanging goodness (Psalm 107:1) help you give thanks even on difficult days?



Naming Blessings at Bedtime

The house had that end-of-day hum — not loud, not exactly quiet either. Dinner dishes were stacked in the sink, the dishwasher humming faithfully, and the faint smell of roasted vegetables still lingered in the air. A basket of unfolded laundry sat at the end of the couch, daring me to deal with it, but I ignored it for now. It was bedtime, and bedtime in our home had grown into its own kind of liturgy — predictable, messy, ordinary, and somehow holy.

I padded down the hallway with a stack of storybooks under my arm, listening to the sounds of children settling into their rooms. The younger ones giggled as they raced to claim spots under their quilts. My middle daughter had already arranged her stuffed animals into a precise row along the pillow, a nightly ritual that somehow soothed her. My teenager sat cross-legged on her bed, pretending not to care about bedtime at all, but her book lay open on her lap, and I knew she'd be listening when the rest of us began.

Bedtime used to be a battle when the children were little — teeth to brush, cups of water requested, one more story begged for. But over the years, I discovered something that shifted everything: ending the day with gratitude. It wasn't a magic trick, but it turned bedtime from chaos into a kind of gentle exhale. And so now, every night, before lights went out, we named our blessings.

That night, as I stepped into the girls' room with the stack of books, I saw the familiar glow of the small lamp we kept on the dresser. Its light cast golden halos on the wall, the kind of cozy glow that made the whole room feel smaller, closer, safe.

"All right," I said, lowering myself onto the rug between their beds. "Books first or blessings first?"

"Blessings!" the little ones chorused.

I smiled. It hadn't always been that way. In the beginning, they grumbled when I asked them to name things they were thankful for. "I don't know," they'd whine, as if gratitude

were a homework assignment. But I stayed with it, gently pressing, modeling it myself. "I'm thankful for warm socks tonight," I'd say. Or, "I'm thankful for the way you laughed at supper." Slowly, they caught on. And now, they beat me to it.

"Okay," I said, pulling the blanket up around my youngest, who was already bouncing in anticipation. "You go first."

"I'm thankful for grilled cheese and tomato soup," he said without hesitation. "And that Daddy read us the funny book about the bear. And... I'm thankful for my stuffed bunny because he never makes me share."

We laughed, and I kissed the top of his head. "Those are good blessings," I said. "Your turn," I nodded to his sister.

She squirmed a little, then said, "I'm thankful for drawing time this afternoon. And for hot chocolate, even though mine spilled a little. And... for the new markers that smell like fruit."

Her sister across the room wrinkled her nose. "Those are weird. I'm thankful for finishing my essay, because I thought I'd never get it done. And... I'm thankful we get to do a puzzle tomorrow, right?"

"Yes," I said, my voice soft. "We'll make time."

The teenager stayed quiet, eyes down on her book. I waited a moment before prompting gently, "And what about you?"

She shrugged. "I don't know."

Her little brother piped up, "You have to say something! That's the rules!"

She shot him a look, but I caught the corner of her mouth twitching. "Fine," she said. "I'm thankful... that I don't have to share a room."

There was a beat of silence before the whole room erupted in laughter, even from the siblings she teased. The ice was broken, and she added, a little softer this time, "And I guess

I'm thankful for the candle Mom lit at dinner. It smelled nice."

I tucked the blanket tighter around her. "That's a good one," I whispered.

One by one, the blessings kept coming. Some were silly — like being thankful that the dog hadn't stolen anyone's sandwich that day. Some were sweet — like being thankful for the way Daddy hugged them after work. Some were simple — like warm socks, clean sheets, or the rain tapping against the window. And as they spoke, I felt the room shift, the day's little stresses loosening their grip.

After everyone had named at least three, I added mine. "Tonight, I'm thankful for each of you. For the way you notice little things, like soup and markers and rain. I'm thankful that God gave me this family. And I'm thankful that His mercies are new every morning, which means tomorrow is already held."

Their faces softened, and the room hushed for a moment. Gratitude always seemed to do that — to settle us, to lift our eyes from what was lacking to what was already here.

We prayed, voices tumbling over each other in a mixture of silly and serious requests, and then I opened the first storybook. My voice carried through the lamplight as they leaned in, blankets pulled up to noses, eyelids heavy but determined not to miss the ending. The teenager pretended not to listen, but I saw her shoulders relax, her book slipping a little lower on her lap.

By the time I closed the cover, two were asleep already, breathing slow and even. Another was half-asleep, murmuring something about toast in her dreams. I kissed each forehead, whispered "I love you" into each set of curls and braids, and turned out the light.

I lingered a moment in the hallway, listening to the creak of the house, the sigh of the dishwasher, the hum of bedtime silence. And I thought about what those little lists of blessings were doing in our home. They weren't just cute

traditions. They were bricks in the foundation of my children's faith. They were teaching them, night after night, that God's gifts aren't just grand and far-off but close and ordinary. That grilled cheese and warm socks and puzzles and even fruit-scented markers were worth thanking Him for. That His goodness meets us not only in miracles but in the smallest, silliest corners of the day.

And maybe most of all, those bedtime blessings were teaching me too. Because motherhood often tempts me to focus on what's unfinished — the messy kitchen, the pile of laundry, the lessons we didn't get through. But sitting there, hearing my children count gifts I might have missed, I remembered again that contentment isn't found in a perfect day. It's found in naming what God has already given, right here, right now.

That night, before heading to bed myself, I jotted a few of our blessings into a notebook I'd been keeping — not polished, not for anyone else's eyes, just a record of gratitude. I smiled at the list: grilled cheese, markers, candles, rain. Tomorrow, there would be more. Different ones, maybe stranger ones. But together, they would weave a tapestry of ordinary grace.

And long after the children were grown, I hoped they'd remember these nights. Not every story read or every argument about toothpaste, but the way we ended each day with thanks. I hoped they'd carry that practice into their own homes, whispering blessings with their children, teaching them what I was still learning myself: that gratitude doesn't wait for life to be perfect. Gratitude grows right in the middle of the messy, the ordinary, the everyday.

And that, I realized, was its own kind of miracle.

Activities & Traditions

Gratitude is like a muscle — the more we use it, the stronger it grows. As moms, we can gently guide our children to see God’s goodness in the everyday, not just on holidays. These simple activities can help your family build a rhythm of thankfulness that lasts all season (and beyond).

1. The Thankful Tree

This is one of the simplest, yet most powerful, family traditions we’ve done. Start with either a large poster board tree taped to the wall or a bundle of branches arranged in a vase. Cut out paper leaves in fall colors (or buy pre-cut leaves at a craft store). Each day, invite every family member to write down one thing they’re thankful for on a leaf and add it to the tree. By the end of the month, your tree will be covered with gratitude.

For littles: let them draw their “thankful” items — a pet, a favorite toy, or even a stick figure of their sibling.

For older kids: challenge them to name something specific each day, not repeating the same blessings.

2. Gratitude Chains

Cut strips of construction paper and keep them in a basket on the table. Every evening after dinner, have each person write down one thing they’re thankful for on a strip and staple or tape them into a chain. By Thanksgiving, you’ll have a long, colorful chain that visually represents God’s faithfulness.

You can hang it along a window, across a doorway, or around the tree in December as a reminder that gratitude doesn’t end with the season.

3. Bedtime Blessings Jar

Keep a jar and a stack of notecards near your children’s beds. At bedtime, invite them to write (or tell you, if they’re not writing yet) one thing from the day they’re thankful for. Slip it into the jar. On hard days, pull out a few cards and

read them together — a tangible reminder that God’s goodness is constant.

4. Journaling Pages

Older kids might enjoy keeping their own gratitude journals. Give them simple prompts like:

- *“Today I saw God’s goodness when...”*
- *“One little thing that made me smile today...”*
- *“A blessing I didn’t notice at first...”*

Younger kids can have “thankful journals” with space to draw pictures. Over time, these journals become beautiful keepsakes — snapshots of God’s blessings through their eyes.

5. Gratitude Art Display

Choose one wall or corkboard in your home to serve as a rotating “gratitude gallery.” Let each child create artwork showing something they’re thankful for — a crayon drawing of pancakes, a watercolor of the family pet, a collage of magazine clippings. Display them proudly, showing that thankfulness is worth celebrating.

Comfort Foods for Gratitude Season

When the air turns crisp and gratitude becomes the theme of our days, I love leaning on hearty, simple meals that bring everyone together around the table. These are dishes that invite you to slow down, linger, and remember just how much there is to be thankful for.

Harvest Stew in a Pumpkin

This one feels special — and it's simpler than it looks. Cooking the stew inside a pumpkin adds flavor and makes for a beautiful centerpiece.

Ingredients:

- 1 medium sugar pumpkin (about 6–8 lbs)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 lb ground beef or sausage
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 potatoes, cubed
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 tsp paprika
- 3 cups beef broth
- ½ cup cooked rice or barley (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut a lid from the pumpkin and scoop out seeds/strings. Rub the inside with olive oil and sprinkle lightly with salt.
 2. In a skillet, cook meat and onion until browned. Add carrots, potatoes, celery, garlic, and spices. Cook 5 minutes.
 3. Stir in broth and rice/barley. Simmer 10 minutes.
 4. Carefully ladle stew into the pumpkin. Place on a baking sheet and bake 1–1 ½ hours, until pumpkin flesh is tender.
 5. Serve stew in bowls, scooping some pumpkin into each serving.
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Classic Harvest Stew (Stovetop)

A quicker version if you don't want to bake inside the pumpkin.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb beef stew meat, cubed
- 2 Tbsp oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 carrots, sliced
- 3 potatoes, cubed
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1 tsp rosemary
- 1 tsp thyme
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Brown beef in oil in a large pot. Add onion and garlic; cook until softened.
2. Add carrots, potatoes, celery, broth, and spices.
3. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 1 ½–2 hours until meat is tender.



Cornbread

This cornbread is moist, just sweet enough, and perfect with stew.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1 cup flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup oil or melted butter

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease a 9x9 pan.
 2. Mix dry ingredients. In another bowl, whisk milk, eggs, and oil.
 3. Stir wet into dry until just combined.
 4. Bake 20–25 minutes, until golden and toothpick comes out clean.
-

Cheddar Cornbread Muffins

A little twist — cheesy, portable, and kid-friendly.

Ingredients:

- Same base as cornbread above
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar
- 1 jalapeño, finely diced (optional)

Directions:

1. Prepare cornbread batter. Stir in cheese (and jalapeño, if using).
 2. Divide into greased muffin tins. Bake 15–18 minutes at 400°F.
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Pumpkin Cheesecake Cups

A creamy little dessert in individual portions.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup pumpkin purée
- 1 tsp pumpkin pie spice
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 egg
- 12 vanilla wafers
- Whipped cream for topping

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Line muffin tin with paper liners. Place a vanilla wafer in each cup.
2. Beat cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Add pumpkin, spice, vanilla, and egg; beat until blended.
3. Divide among cups and bake 20–25 minutes until set.
4. Cool, then chill before serving. Top with whipped cream.

Blueberry Cobbler

Sweet berries baked under a buttery, golden topping — a comfort dish that feels like a hug.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp cornstarch

Topping:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 stick butter, melted
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 baking dish.
 2. In a saucepan, combine blueberries, sugar, lemon juice, and cornstarch. Cook over medium heat until bubbly and slightly thickened. Pour into prepared dish.
 3. For topping, whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add melted butter, milk, and vanilla. Stir until smooth.
 4. Pour topping evenly over berries.
 5. Bake 40–45 minutes until golden and set. Serve warm with whipped cream or ice cream.
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Closing Thoughts

Gratitude is not just a practice for Thanksgiving Day — it's a posture of the heart, one that shapes the way we see God in our everyday lives. When we take time to notice blessings — big or small — we remind ourselves and our children that He is present in all things. Gratitude shifts the ordinary into sacred. It teaches us to lean on His provision instead of our own striving, and it anchors our families in joy no matter what season we're in.

Mama, your children are watching. When you pause to whisper thanks over a simple supper, when you delight in silly blessings at bedtime, when you write down the gifts that would otherwise slip by unnoticed — you're passing on more than words. You're passing on a legacy. Gratitude becomes a thread woven into the fabric of your home, strong enough to hold your children when they're grown and facing their own seasons.

This fall, may gratitude rise up in your heart like a steady fire, warming your home and pointing every eye — young and old — back to the Giver of all good things.

Reflection Questions

1. What small blessings have you overlooked this week that you can pause to thank God for right now?
2. How can you lead your children in practicing gratitude in a way that feels natural for your family?
3. Think about a difficult or tiring area of your life — what's one hidden gift within it that you can give thanks for today?

Chapter 9: Preparing for Thanksgiving

*"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."
— 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)*

Devotional Reflection:

Thanksgiving has a way of stirring something deep in us. It's not just the smell of roasting turkey or the sight of pies cooling on the counter, though those things are certainly lovely. Thanksgiving draws us to pause, to reflect, and to remember. It slows our hurried steps, if only for a few days, and calls us back to gratitude.

But here's the truth I've had to wrestle with: gratitude isn't always easy. Some seasons of life feel so full of loss or so heavy with burdens that the very idea of "giving thanks in all circumstances" can feel impossible. How do you give thanks when your house feels too small, your budget too tight, or your energy too drained? How do you lift a voice of gratitude when your heart is aching or your plans seem to unravel daily?

And yet, Scripture doesn't present gratitude as optional. It is God's will for us. Not because He's demanding something that feels unfair, but because He knows gratitude transforms us. Gratitude is not just a polite "thank you" to God for the good things—it is a radical act of faith that reshapes how we see everything.

When I read 1 Thessalonians 5:18, I notice it doesn't say "be thankful for all circumstances," but "in all circumstances." There is a difference. God doesn't expect us to call pain good, but He does invite us to call Him good in the middle of it. Gratitude shifts our eyes off what we lack and onto Who holds us. It reminds us that even when life feels thin, God's presence is thick with mercy.

Thanksgiving, then, becomes more than a holiday. It becomes a practice of noticing. It's the quiet breath before the table fills with noise, when you whisper, "Thank You, Lord, for the gift of today." It's the ordinary moment when a

child's laughter breaks the tension in the room, and you tuck it into your heart as evidence of God's kindness. It's even the ache of missing someone at the table, transformed into gratitude for the years you had with them.

I think about Jesus, breaking bread at the Last Supper. He knew the cross was ahead, yet He gave thanks. Can you imagine? Gratitude wasn't tied to the comfort of His circumstances—it was anchored to the Father's faithfulness. That's the kind of gratitude I long to cultivate in my own heart, and to pass on to my children.

Thanksgiving in our home doesn't look picture-perfect. The kids squabble over who gets to stir, the rolls sometimes burn on the bottom, and we almost always forget at least one dish in the fridge until the meal is nearly over. But if you lean in close, you'll find something holy happening. Gratitude is taking root in small, messy ways. It's in the prayer my husband prays over the meal, thanking God not just for food, but for the gift of being together. It's in the chorus of voices when we go around the table and each child—some shy, some bold—names what they're thankful for. Sometimes it's silly ("I'm thankful for pumpkin pie and Wi-Fi"), and sometimes it's profound ("I'm thankful God never leaves us"). But every word matters. Every word is a seed planted.

The heart of true thankfulness is not found in abundance but in awareness. It is choosing to see what God is doing right now, right here, even in the ordinary or the hard. It's training our eyes to look not only at what's in front of us but Who is with us. Gratitude doesn't deny hardship—it declares God's presence in it.

So this year, as we prepare for Thanksgiving, maybe the invitation is simple: to slow down and notice. To pause between stirring and setting the table and whisper, "Thank You, Lord." To teach our children not just to list blessings once a year, but to cultivate thankful hearts every day. Gratitude turns our tables into sanctuaries, our homes into places of worship, and our hearts into vessels that can hold joy even in difficult seasons.

This Thanksgiving, don't worry if the turkey is dry or the house is noisy. Don't let the pursuit of perfect rob you of the presence of holy. Instead, light a candle, bow your head, and let gratitude shape the way you see it all. Because the heart of true thankfulness isn't found in flawless meals or picture-worthy tables—it's found in the faithful God who sits with us in every circumstance.

Reflection Questions for Chapter 9

1. When you think about "giving thanks in all circumstances," what area of your life feels most challenging to apply this truth?
 2. What small, ordinary moments in your home lately could become reminders of God's presence if you paused to give thanks?
 3. How can you involve your children in practicing gratitude—not just on Thanksgiving Day, but throughout the everyday rhythm of your home?
 4. What is one tradition you can begin this year that helps your family focus on gratitude as much as the meal?
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A Thanksgiving to Remember

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving always felt like the real beginning of the holiday in our house. Not the polished version you see in magazines, but the kind of beginning that smells like onions and celery sizzling in butter, and sounds like a house bursting at the seams with too many voices talking at once.

By mid-morning, the kitchen looked like a battlefield. Flour dusted the counters like fresh snow. Mixing bowls were stacked high in the sink. Two sticks of butter, set out to soften hours before, had already been poked by curious little fingers. And yet, in the middle of the chaos, there was a kind of joy I wouldn't trade for anything.

The kids tumbled in and out of the kitchen like tides. One minute, someone was peeling apples at the table, their peeler leaving long curls that fell like ribbons to the floor. The next, someone else was loudly insisting that he *should* be the one to mash the sweet potatoes, while his older sister rolled her eyes and explained that it wasn't even time for that yet.

"Everybody gets a turn," I called over the noise, brandishing my wooden spoon like a conductor of a very unruly orchestra. "But right now, I need someone to set aside these crusts for the apple pie, and someone else to keep an eye on the cranberry sauce before it boils over."

The cranberry sauce hissed and popped on the stove, bright red bubbles bursting like tiny fireworks. It smelled tangy and sweet, with the faintest zing of orange zest. My middle daughter stood on tiptoe, stirring carefully with a wooden spoon.

"Can I taste it?" she asked, hopeful eyes fixed on the steaming pot.

"Not yet—it's like lava right now," I warned. But I dipped the spoon and blew gently before holding it out. She tasted, lips pursing thoughtfully.

"Mmm. Needs more sugar."

I laughed. "That's because your sweet tooth does all the talking."

Behind us, the oven timer dinged, and my oldest son pulled open the door with the caution of someone retrieving treasure. The cornbread, baked ahead of time for stuffing, came out golden, the top cracked and fragrant. He set it on the counter and gave a little satisfied nod, like he was personally responsible for its success.

"That's going to make the best stuffing," I said, brushing his hair back with flour-dusted fingers. He grinned and shrugged like it was no big deal, but I could tell he felt proud.

By lunchtime, the house smelled like a dozen different things at once. Cinnamon from the pies, sage from the stuffing, sugar from the candied sweet potatoes. The younger kids grew restless, sneaking bits of pie dough and running off to build blanket forts in the living room while the older ones stayed close, helping chop vegetables or measure spices. My teenager, who'd initially acted "too cool" for all the prep, sat on a stool carefully stringing cranberries and popcorn into a garland.

"I thought you said this was boring," I teased gently.

She shrugged. "It's kind of relaxing, actually." Her hands moved quickly, red berries stacking one by one on the thread. A younger sibling plopped down next to her, watching in awe, and she sighed before handing him a needle. "Here. Don't stab yourself."

By late afternoon, we were knee-deep in the kind of mess that only happens once or twice a year—the best kind. My husband came home early, shaking the cold air off his coat and stepping straight into the kitchen with a grin.

"Smells like Thanksgiving in here already," he said, kissing the top of my head before pulling a chair up beside our youngest. "What's my job?"

"Mashed potatoes," I answered without hesitation. He made the best ones—fluffy, buttery, always with just enough salt.

He rolled up his sleeves and took the bowl like it was a mission from God Himself.

The table in the dining room slowly transformed under little hands. A paper tablecloth with scribbled turkeys and stick-figure pilgrims stretched across it. Construction-paper leaves taped themselves along the edges. My middle boy, who had been restless most of the day, took it upon himself to make place cards for everyone, complete with doodles—my name surrounded by hearts, his sister’s name with a dramatic dragon beside it, and his dad’s with a stick figure lifting weights.

When the evening settled, we gathered in the kitchen again, everyone pitching in to clean just enough to make space for the pies. The apple pie went in first, its top crust latticed by my oldest daughter’s careful hands. The pumpkin pies followed, filling the oven with a scent so rich it almost hummed. And when at last the last dish was stacked, the last spoon licked, the last pot set aside to soak overnight, we all stood back and took in the scene.

The kitchen was wrecked—truly wrecked. Dishes everywhere, counters sticky, crumbs scattered like confetti. But the kids were flushed with pride, their eyes shining. They had made this. Together.

That night, after the little ones had finally fallen asleep and the house had quieted to a hum, I sat at the table with a cup of tea. The candle in the center burned low, its wax spilling down the side like melted grace. My husband joined me, settling into the chair across from mine.

“We did good today,” he said, looking around at the chaos like it was beauty. And in a way, it was.

The next morning, Thanksgiving Day itself, began with the same chaos, only louder. Kids racing through the hallways, bumping into each other. The oven already full. Pots and pans clanging like cymbals. At one point, two kids nearly collided—one carrying a pitcher of cider, the other a stack of napkins—and cider sloshed across the floor.

“Grab towels!” I shouted, laughing despite myself. Because honestly, wasn’t this what Thanksgiving was meant to be? Messy, noisy, bursting with life.

Finally, finally, we sat down at the table. Candles lit. Plates full. The food was good, but the company was better. The kids told silly jokes, passed rolls, and sometimes argued about who got the last spoonful of sweet potatoes. My husband prayed, his voice steady with gratitude, thanking God for His faithfulness, for His provision, for His presence among us.

And when we went around the table to say what we were thankful for, the answers were as varied as the people giving them. One child was thankful for pie. Another for friends. My daughter, for music. My husband, for family.

When it came to me, I hesitated. My heart was so full I could hardly choose just one thing. So I said the truest thing I could think of:

“I’m thankful for this. All of this. The mess, the noise, the laughter, the food, the little ways God shows up in the middle of it.”

Everyone nodded, and for a moment, the room was hushed. The candle flickered, and I thought—this is it. This is the heart of Thanksgiving. Not perfection. Presence. Not a flawless table, but a faithful God who joins us at it.

That night, when the leftovers were packed away and the house grew quiet again, I walked back into the kitchen. Crumbs dotted the table. Wax dripped down the side of the candle. A single place card, slightly bent, still sat at my plate. I smiled, whispered a quiet “thank You,” and turned out the light.

Because gratitude, I realized, isn’t something we practice only once a year. It’s something we carry with us, day by day, meal by meal, through all the ordinary chaos of family life.

And maybe, just maybe, that’s the real Thanksgiving we’re meant to keep.

Activities & Traditions for Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving isn't just about one meal on one day. It's about the moments we weave together in the days leading up to it — the little traditions that shape the holiday into something our kids will remember long after they're grown. Here are some simple, meaningful activities that bring the whole family into the spirit of gratitude and celebration.

1. Pinecone Turkeys

A timeless craft that works for all ages.

- **Younger kids:** Glue colorful construction paper or felt feathers onto pinecones, adding googly eyes and a little beak.
- **Older kids/teens:** Take it up a notch by painting the pinecones, adding handwritten "gratitude feathers" with things they're thankful for. These can double as place settings for the Thanksgiving table.

2. Family Gratitude Book

Instead of just going around the table naming blessings once a year, keep a running family gratitude journal. Each person writes or draws in it daily during November.

- **Younger kids:** Scribble or draw what they're thankful for.
- **Older kids:** Write longer reflections, short prayers, or even little poems.
On Thanksgiving Day, read through the book together as part of your celebration. Over the years, you'll build a treasure trove of family gratitude memories.

3. Kids' Table Traditions

Turn the "kids' table" into more than just a place to contain the younger ones.

- Cover the table with butcher paper or a plain tablecloth and set out crayons, so kids can draw and write during the meal.

- Add a small basket of conversation starters (silly questions and gratitude prompts alike).
- Older kids can be “hosts” of the kids’ table — leading prayers, serving rolls, or helping little ones cut up food. This gives them a sense of responsibility and connection.

4. DIY Place Cards (with a twist)

We’ve already talked about simple construction-paper leaves or name cards, but here’s a variation:

- Write each person’s name on a card, then have every family member sneak a short note of gratitude *about that person* underneath it before the meal. When you sit down, everyone gets a little pile of encouragement along with their dinner.

5. Thanksgiving Eve Candle Time

The night before Thanksgiving, gather the family and light a candle together at the table. Go around and let each person share one thing they’re thankful for from the past year. This creates a quiet, reflective rhythm before the busy day. For younger children, keep it short and sweet — for older kids, invite them to pray or read a short Scripture of gratitude.

6. Pinecone Turkey Hunt

If your kids need to burn energy, hide pinecones (decorated or plain) around the yard or house and turn it into a Thanksgiving version of an Easter egg hunt. Each found pinecone can represent something to be thankful for.

Thanksgiving Recipes to Share

Thanksgiving is one of those holidays where food is more than just food — it's memory, tradition, and love piled onto one table. These recipes are simple, homey, and special enough to bring new variety to your holiday spread while keeping the heart of the meal intact.

Classic Herb Stuffing

The backbone of a Thanksgiving table. Soft in the middle, crisp on the edges, fragrant with herbs.

Ingredients:

- 1 loaf day-old bread, cubed (about 10 cups)
- 1 stick butter
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp poultry seasoning
- 1 tsp dried sage
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- 3–4 cups chicken or turkey broth
- 2 eggs, beaten

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spread bread cubes on a baking sheet and toast until lightly golden.
2. In a skillet, melt butter. Add onion, celery, and garlic; cook until soft. Stir in seasonings.
3. In a large bowl, toss bread with vegetable mixture. Add broth a cup at a time until moist but not soggy. Stir in eggs.
4. Transfer to a greased 9x13 dish and bake 40–45 minutes, until golden on top.

Sweet Potato Casserole (with Crunchy Topping)

That irresistible balance of sweet and savory, with a buttery pecan-like topping (or substitute crushed graham crackers for a nut-free version).

Ingredients:

- 4 cups mashed sweet potatoes (about 4 large)
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup milk
- ½ stick butter, melted
- 1 tsp vanilla

Topping:

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ⅓ cup flour
- 3 Tbsp butter, melted
- ½ cup chopped pecans *or graham crackers*

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a bowl, mash sweet potatoes with sugar, eggs, milk, butter, and vanilla. Spread into greased 9x13 dish.
2. Mix topping ingredients and sprinkle over top.
3. Bake 25–30 minutes until topping is golden.

Cranberry-Orange Relish

Bright, fresh, and better than anything from a can.

Ingredients:

- 12 oz fresh cranberries
- 1 large orange, peeled and sectioned
- ½ cup sugar (more to taste)

Directions:

1. In a food processor, pulse cranberries and orange until finely chopped.
 2. Stir in sugar and let sit at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend. Chill before serving.
-

Cranberry Walnut Bread

Perfect for slicing alongside butter or toasting the next morning.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ Tbsp yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 Tbsp oil
- 2 ½ cups flour
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- ½ cup chopped walnuts (optional)

Directions:

1. Dissolve yeast in warm water with sugar; let sit until foamy. Stir in salt, oil, and flour.
2. Knead until smooth. Fold in cranberries and walnuts.
3. Let rise until doubled, then shape into loaf. Place in greased pan.
4. Bake at 375°F for 30–35 minutes until golden and hollow-sounding when tapped.



Maple Pecan Pie Bars

Easier than pie but with the same rich flavor.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp flour
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 ½ cups chopped pecans

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix flour, sugar, and butter for crust; press into 9x13 dish. Bake 15 minutes.
 2. Whisk eggs, syrup, brown sugar, flour, and vanilla. Stir in pecans. Pour over crust.
 3. Bake 25–30 minutes until set. Cool before slicing.
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Apple Pie Bars with Cornflake Crust

Layers of buttery crust, juicy apple filling, and a simple glaze. The crushed cornflakes keep the bottom from getting soggy.

Ingredients:

- 2 pie crusts (homemade or store-bought)
- 2 cups crushed cornflakes
- 6 cups thinly sliced apples
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 cup powdered sugar + 2 Tbsp milk (for glaze)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Roll one pie crust into a greased 9x13 pan. Sprinkle evenly with crushed cornflakes.
2. Mix apples with sugar, flour, spices, and lemon juice. Spread over cornflakes.
3. Roll second crust and lay on top. Cut small slits.
4. Bake 45–50 minutes until golden. Cool slightly, then drizzle with glaze.

Warm Spinach Salad with Bacon Dressing

A fresh, savory side to balance the richness of Thanksgiving.

Ingredients:

- 8 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 6 slices bacon, diced
- ½ small red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp sugar
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Fry bacon until crisp; remove with slotted spoon.
 2. Add onion to drippings; cook until softened.
 3. Stir in vinegar, mustard, sugar, salt, and pepper. Pour warm dressing over spinach. Toss with bacon and serve immediately.
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Closing Thoughts

Thanksgiving is often called the season of gratitude, but really, it's the culmination of all the small thanks we've been practicing all autumn long. The candlelit breakfasts, the soup nights, the walks beneath falling leaves — each has been building our hearts toward this table.

As you prepare your Thanksgiving meal, remember: the most important ingredient is not on the recipe card. It's love. Love baked into bread, stirred into casseroles, ladled into bowls of stew. Love that spills over into laughter, forgiveness, shared memories, and the gift of gathering.

Your children won't remember whether the gravy had lumps or the rolls were perfectly golden. They will remember the warmth of belonging, the sound of voices rising together around the table, and the way your home made space for gratitude.

So breathe deep. Let go of perfection. Celebrate the God who gives all good gifts — from the cornflakes in the apple bars to the turkey on the table — and offer Him your thanks, knowing He has already given you more than enough.

Reflection Questions

1. What is one Thanksgiving memory from your childhood that you want to carry into your own family's traditions?
2. Which part of hosting or cooking for Thanksgiving tends to stress you most — and how can you invite God into that space this year?
3. How can you encourage your children (or family) to see Thanksgiving as more than food, but as a time of true gratitude and worship?

Chapter 10: Carrying Cozy Rhythms into Winter

"Stand by the roads and look; ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; then walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." — Jeremiah 6:16 (AMP)

Devotional Reflection:

As the last leaves fall and autumn quietly gives way to winter, I often feel torn. Part of me grieves the beauty of fall slipping away — the colors fading, the pumpkins softening on the porch, the golden afternoons giving way to earlier nights. And yet, another part of me senses a holy invitation: to carry the cozy rhythms we've nurtured into the long months ahead.

Seasons shift, but the rhythms God invites us into don't have to disappear with them. Lighting a candle in the morning, gathering around the table at night, whispering prayers over simmering pots of soup — these aren't just "fall traditions." They are anchors. Anchors we can bring with us into the darker, colder days when our souls crave steadiness most.

I think of Psalm 90:12, which says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may cultivate and bring to You a heart of wisdom" (AMP). This verse reminds me that every season, every small daily rhythm, is a gift. The fall rhythms we've embraced — gratitude, hospitality, slowing down, gathering together — don't vanish once the season changes. They can become part of the "ancient paths" Jeremiah speaks of, rhythms that guide our families year after year.

Sometimes winter feels daunting, especially for moms. The days are shorter, the weather can keep us inside, and the walls of our homes feel both comforting and confining. But here's the truth: cozy is not confined to a season. Cozy is a way of living. Cozy is a posture of heart that says, "I will make space for warmth, for connection, for God's presence — even in the ordinary."

When the winds blow colder and the snow piles outside, the temptation might be to rush through the days, wishing them away for spring. But what if we received winter as a gift? A slower season. A season of gathering near the fire, of reading one more chapter aloud, of baking bread simply because we have the time. A season of carrying the gratitude we practiced in fall into long evenings filled with conversation, music, or prayer.

I believe God calls us to remember that our rhythms shape our families more than our schedules do. Our children may not remember the exact dates of holidays or the precise lessons from school, but they will remember the way home felt. They'll remember the soup simmering, the candles flickering, the warmth of blankets as the wind howled outside. Most of all, they'll remember the peace of Christ filling the small spaces of their days.

As we wrap up this season of fall, let's not pack away the lessons with the pumpkins. Let's carry them forward:

- The gratitude of November into the ordinary Mondays of January.
- The hospitality of soup nights into February's cold evenings.
- The rhythm of slowing down into the bustle of spring.

The cozy rhythms we've practiced are not seasonal trends — they are spiritual disciplines. They train our hearts to rest, to notice, to give thanks, to love well. And they remind us that in every season, God is present at our tables, in our homes, and within our daily lives.

So, mama, don't feel like winter will erase what fall has built. Instead, see it as an invitation to deepen it. To build upon the cozy foundations you've laid. To keep lighting the candle, baking the bread, savoring the moments. These rhythms, carried with faith, will not only warm your home — they will shape your family's story for generations.

Reflection Questions

As fall turns into winter, what cozy rhythms from this past season do you want to carry forward into the colder months?

1. Jeremiah 6:16 talks about the “ancient paths” that bring rest for our souls. What family rhythms or traditions feel like those “ancient paths” for you — practices that bring lasting peace and steadiness?
 2. How can you invite your children into keeping these rhythms alive, even when schedules get busy or days feel long?
 3. What parts of winter usually feel the most difficult for you as a mom? How might God be calling you to receive this slower season as a gift instead of something to endure?
 4. What is one small way you can create an atmosphere of peace and presence in your home this week, reminding your family (and yourself) that cozy is not just seasonal but a way of living?
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The Firelight Reflections

The first snow had already dusted the ground outside, thin and patchy in some spots, thicker where the wind had swept it into corners and hollows. It wasn't enough for sledding or even much for footprints, but it was enough to make the world look changed. The golden leaves were gone now, the trees stark and bare, and the air outside bit sharp against the skin. Fall had done its work and handed the season over to winter.

Inside, though, our house still carried the warmth of autumn. The fire crackled low in the fireplace, its light bouncing off the walls and pooling across the carpet like melted gold. The children had pulled every quilt and blanket they could find from the closets, building nests on the floor, draping a few over the couch, and leaving a heap of pillows near the hearth. The old rocking chair creaked as I lowered myself into it with a sigh, a mug of tea warm in my hands.

"Okay," I said, once everyone had settled. "I thought tonight we could do something a little different."

My youngest looked up, his cheeks pink from having pressed too close to the fire. "Like what?"

"Like remembering," I said. "Fall is ending, winter's beginning, and I thought we could talk about our favorite memories from this season. All the little cozy things we did together."

The children perked up at this idea. They loved remembering, especially when it involved telling their version of a story louder than the person next to them. My husband, stretched out on the couch with the cat nestled on his legs, gave me a smile that said, *This will take a while*. I smiled back. Good. That was the point.

The littlest started first, because he always did. "My favorite thing was the caramel apple dip," he said immediately, smacking his lips at the memory. "With the sprinkles. And I liked when you said we could have it for lunch, not just dessert."

I laughed. "I remember that. You wanted to dip every single slice, and then you asked for another apple."

He grinned proudly, as if eating two apples covered in caramel was a grand achievement.

My daughter, curled up with her sketchbook balanced on her knees, looked thoughtful before answering. "I liked the leaf walk. When we filled the basket and you said the red one looked like it was on fire."

"You drew it later," I reminded her. "I think you caught the colors even better than the real thing."

She ducked her head with a shy smile, her pencil already moving across the page as if memory itself demanded to be sketched.

The middle boys took longer to decide, arguing in low voices over which story counted as whose. Finally, one spoke up: "The bonfire. When we roasted hot dogs and you let us stay up late. And then we told the silly stories until Dad made up that one about the raccoon that stole someone's socks."

Laughter rolled across the room at the memory, and even my husband chuckled, raising his hands in mock surrender. "Hey, it could happen," he said. "Don't leave your socks on the porch."

The other boy added, "And the chili night. When we had nachos too, and everyone piled theirs different. I made mine like a mountain, remember?"

"I remember you needed a fork to finish it," I teased.

The teenager spoke last. She had been lounging in the corner, earbuds dangling from her neck, but she was listening. "I liked the movie night," she admitted quietly. "Even though I pretended I didn't. But I did. The blankets, the popcorn, the cocoa. And the s'mores bar. That was fun."

I caught my husband's eye again and saw the little glimmer there—the gratitude that she had spoken it out loud. These teen years were full of push and pull, resistance and

softening, but moments like this were the threads that held us together.

When they had all shared, I leaned back and let the warmth of the fire sink into me. "I loved all of those things too," I said. "But you know what my favorite part was?"

"What?" chorused several voices.

"That we did them together. That's what makes them special. Anyone can eat soup or watch a movie or light a candle. But when we do it here, with each other, it becomes more. It becomes part of our story."

The room grew quiet in that way it sometimes does when everyone is listening but no one wants to break the spell. The fire popped. Outside, the wind rattled a bare branch against the window. Inside, the cat purred like a steady drum.

After a moment, my husband shifted, sitting up. "You know what this reminds me of?" he asked. "When I was a kid, we'd gather at my grandma's house at the end of fall. She always made bread—just plain white loaves, nothing fancy. But she'd slice it warm and hand it out, and we'd sit around her kitchen, telling stories of the season. It felt like the year ended in that kitchen, every time."

I smiled at the picture he painted. "Maybe that's what we're doing here," I said. "Ending the year together. Wrapping it up in firelight and memory."

The littlest yawned, pulling a quilt tighter around his shoulders. "Can we do it again tomorrow?" he asked drowsily.

"We'll do it every year," I promised. "This will be our tradition."

We weren't in a hurry to end the night. Instead, we lingered, one story leading to another. Someone remembered the time we spilled soup all over the counter and ended up eating bread and butter for dinner, laughing the whole way through. Someone else remembered Mrs. Green's pickled beets at

soup night and how she said they were “the color of joy.” We remembered the crisp that bubbled perfectly in the oven, the first fire of the season, the candlelit reading hours, the afternoon walks when the geese flew overhead in their perfect V.

Little by little, the season gathered itself into a tapestry of moments—bright threads, simple and strong.

Later, after the children had drifted off one by one—some on the couch, some carried to bed with their quilts still wrapped around them—I stayed by the fire. The embers glowed low, shadows flickering across the room. My husband sat beside me, both of us too tired to speak much, but too grateful to leave just yet.

“This was good,” he said softly.

“It was,” I agreed. “We don’t always need more. Sometimes we just need to notice what we already have.”

He nodded, poking the fire with the iron poker until a small flame licked back to life. “It’s been a good season.”

“Yes,” I said, leaning my head against his shoulder. “And the best part is, it doesn’t end. The season shifts, but the memories stay. The coziness, the gratitude, the faith—it all carries forward. We just have to remember to bring it with us.”

We sat there until the last ember faded, and in the quiet I prayed the same simple prayer I had prayed all fall long: “Thank You, Lord. For enough. For more than enough. For the gift of this home, this family, this season.”

And as the house settled into silence, I knew deep down that even as winter came, the warmth of fall would remain—woven into our hearts, carried into tomorrow, and stitched into the fabric of our family forever.

Activities for Wrapping Up the Season

As fall fades into winter, it's easy to feel like the cozy rhythms of the season get swallowed by the busyness of the holidays. One way to hold on to the sweetness of fall is to slow down and intentionally reflect as a family. These activities give space for remembering, celebrating, and carrying gratitude forward.

1. Family Reflection Questions

Set aside an evening around the table, with candles lit and maybe a plate of cookies, to talk through the season together. Ask simple but meaningful questions like:

- What was your favorite memory from this fall?
- What made you laugh the hardest?
- What's something new you learned about God, about yourself, or about our family?
- If you could choose one tradition to carry into next year, what would it be?

Write down everyone's answers in a notebook or on slips of paper and keep them in a special box. Pull them out next year when fall begins again—it's a sweet way to see how everyone has grown and changed.

2. Journaling Prompts

Encourage older kids (and yourself) to take a little quiet time to write. Here are a few fall-themed prompts:

- "The moment I felt most thankful this fall was when..."
- "Three small blessings I want to remember from this season are..."
- "If I could describe our fall in three words, they would be..."
- "The way I saw God's goodness this season was..."

Younger kids can draw instead of writing, or you can let them dictate their answers for you to record.

3. Create a Seasonal Scrapbook

Print out photos from the past couple of months—pumpkin patches, soup nights, leaf walks, or even just everyday moments at home. Add ticket stubs, pressed leaves, children’s drawings, or recipes you tried. Bind it simply with a three-ring binder or scrapbook supplies. Each year, add another “fall chapter” to your family’s story. Over time, you’ll build a beautiful record of traditions and memories.

4. Family “Gratitude Collage”

Gather old magazines, scissors, and glue sticks. Invite everyone to cut out pictures, words, or colors that remind them of what they loved about this fall. Arrange them onto one big poster board, creating a collage of gratitude. Hang it in your dining room or school space for the winter—a visual reminder of the season you shared.

5. Memory Jar for the Year Ahead

Take an empty jar and decorate it with fall colors or simple twine and a tag that says “Memories.” As you move into the winter months, begin adding little slips of paper with memories, funny quotes, or answered prayers. By next Thanksgiving, you’ll have a whole jar of moments to look back on.

Comfort Foods for Wrapping Up the Season

As the air turns cold and the days shorten, our meals naturally shift to heartier, warming dishes. These recipes are perfect for using up Thanksgiving leftovers, creating cozy family meals, and keeping everyone full and happy around the table.

Shepherd's Pie

A classic comfort dish, perfect for chilly nights when you need something hearty and filling.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 1 cup beef or chicken broth
- 1 Tbsp tomato paste
- 2 lbs potatoes, peeled and boiled
- 4 Tbsp butter
- ½ cup milk
- Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Cook ground meat and onion in a skillet until browned. Add carrots and peas; cook until softened.
2. Stir in flour and tomato paste. Slowly add broth and simmer until thickened.
3. Spread mixture in a 9x13 dish.
4. Mash potatoes with butter and milk, season well, then spread over meat mixture.
5. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes, until golden on top.

Leftover Turkey Pot Pie

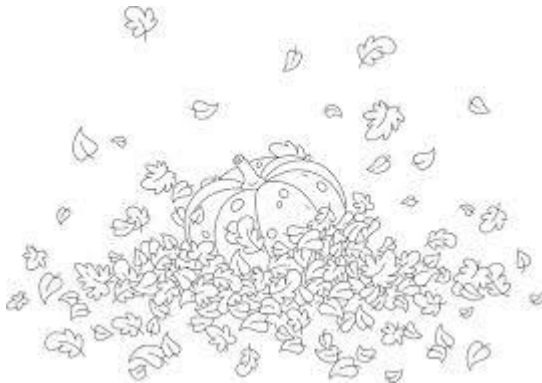
A delicious way to turn Thanksgiving leftovers into a whole new meal.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked turkey, diced
- 2 cups mixed vegetables (carrots, peas, corn)
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 4 Tbsp butter
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup flour
- 2 cups chicken or turkey broth
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk or cream
- 1 refrigerated pie crust (or homemade)
- Salt, pepper, thyme

Directions:

1. Melt butter in a skillet, add onion, cook until soft. Stir in flour.
2. Slowly whisk in broth and milk, cook until thick. Season with salt, pepper, and thyme.
3. Add turkey and vegetables, stir well.
4. Pour into a 9-inch pie dish, cover with pie crust, cut slits to vent.
5. Bake at 400°F for 30–35 minutes until golden.



“Tastes Like Thanksgiving” Casserole

Layers of holiday favorites baked into one cozy dish.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups leftover stuffing
- 2 cups cooked turkey, shredded
- 2 cups mashed potatoes
- 1 cup turkey gravy
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (optional)
- ½ cup dried cranberries (optional, for sweetness)

Directions:

1. In a greased 9x13 dish, press stuffing into the bottom.
 2. Layer shredded turkey, then drizzle with gravy.
 3. Spread mashed potatoes over the top. Sprinkle cheese and cranberries if desired.
 4. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes, until heated through and golden on top.
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Warm Bread Pudding

Cozy, custardy, and perfect for using up extra bread.

Ingredients:

- 6 cups cubed day-old bread
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup cream
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp vanilla
- ½ cup raisins (optional)

Directions:

1. Grease a 9x13 dish. Spread cubed bread inside.
 2. In a bowl, whisk eggs, milk, cream, sugar, cinnamon, and vanilla. Pour over bread.
 3. Let soak 15 minutes (or overnight). Stir in raisins if using.
 4. Bake at 350°F for 45–50 minutes until golden and set. Serve with whipped cream or caramel sauce.
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Harvest Chicken Skillet

This one-pan dish makes the kitchen smell like autumn and fills everyone up without much fuss. Perfect for a cozy weeknight dinner at the tail end of fall.

Ingredients:

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (or thighs)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 medium apples, peeled and diced
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp dried thyme (or 2 tsp fresh)
- 1 tsp dried rosemary (or 2 tsp fresh)
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- ½ cup chicken broth
- Optional: handful of dried cranberries or chopped pecans for garnish

Directions:

1. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Season chicken with salt and pepper.
2. Sear chicken 4–5 minutes per side until golden. Remove from skillet and set aside.
3. In the same skillet, add onion and sweet potatoes. Cook 6–8 minutes until beginning to soften.
4. Stir in apples, garlic, thyme, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Cook another 3 minutes.
5. Pour in chicken broth, stir, then nestle chicken back into the skillet.
6. Cover and simmer on medium-low for 15–20 minutes, until chicken is cooked through and sweet potatoes are tender.
7. Sprinkle dried cranberries or pecans over top before serving, if desired.

This dish is hearty enough to stand alone, but pairs beautifully with warm bread or a simple side salad.

Gingerbread Cake with Warm Vanilla Sauce

Spiced and soft, this cake is everything fall coziness should be, and the sauce takes it over the top.

Ingredients (Cake):

- ½ cup butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar, packed
- 1 egg
- 1 cup molasses
- 2 ½ cups flour
- 1 ½ tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ½ tsp cloves
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup hot water

Ingredients (Vanilla Sauce):

- ½ cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup heavy cream (or half-and-half)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Directions (Cake):

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 baking pan.
2. Cream butter and sugar together. Beat in egg and molasses.
3. In another bowl, whisk flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, and salt.
4. Add dry ingredients to wet mixture alternately with hot water, starting and ending with dry.
5. Pour into prepared pan and bake 30–35 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean.

Directions (Vanilla Sauce):

1. In a saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add sugar and cream, whisking until smooth.
2. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes until slightly thickened.
3. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla.

Serve cake warm with sauce poured over each slice. It's comfort in every bite.

Closing Reflection: Preparing for What's Next

Fall has always felt like a bridge season to me. The air grows crisp, the colors blaze, and then—quietly—the leaves fall away. It is a season that reminds us that nothing lasts forever, and yet every ending is also a preparation for what's to come.

As we close this season together, maybe your home feels a little more worn-in from all the cozy rhythms we've been practicing — loaves baked, soups simmered, candles burned down low. Maybe your children's laughter still lingers in the walls from simple traditions, or your kitchen carries the memory of shared meals with neighbors and friends. These moments are not small. They are holy. They are seeds planted in the soil of your family's story.

And now, winter waits at the doorstep. A season of deeper stillness, of longer nights, of its own beauty and challenges. The good news is that God goes before you there, too. The same God who painted the leaves with fire will wrap the world in quiet snow. The same God who whispered to your heart as you slowed down this fall will meet you in the hush of winter evenings.

So as you pack away the pumpkins, as you fold the last quilted blanket a little tighter, take courage: the rhythms you've cultivated don't stay in one season. Gratitude, rest, family, hospitality — these will carry you through the cold months ahead.

Fall is ending, but God's faithfulness is not. This is the joy of living in seasons — each one whispers the same truth in a different tongue: "*I am with you always*" (Matthew 28:20b, NLT).

So breathe deeply, mama. Light one more candle. Give thanks for what was. And step gently into what's next, carrying the cozy lessons of fall like a lantern into the winter to come.

Reflection Questions

1. Looking back over this fall, what memory stands out most as a moment of true joy with your family?
2. Which rhythms or traditions from this season do you want to carry forward into winter?
3. How has God met you in the ordinary moments of fall, and how can you look for Him in the season ahead?
4. What one word would you choose as your prayerful “theme” to carry into winter?

