

This is why we give thanks

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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My children's favorite grace before meals is—(ducks and blushes from theological embarrassment)—the Johnny Appleseed song.

*Oh, the Lord's been good to me / And so I thank the Lord
For giving me / The things I need
The sun and the rain and the apple seed
The Lord's been good to me*

Maybe you've heard it. Maybe you hate it. Maybe you, too, live with small children in the frigid north and have to substitute "snow" for "rain" six months out of the year.

Whatever. We sing it. Every day. Lord, have mercy.

It started when the kids were toddlers, and I figured any warbling hymn of thanks was music to God's ears. Over the years? Of course it stuck. (Anything you hope won't stick is invariably what does.)

I try to limit it to lunchtime, so as to revel in a richer repertoire of church hymnody for other meals (because truly, one can only evoke Girl Scout campfire singalongs so many times before one deeply regrets ever teaching one's offspring the tune in the first place).

But here's the truth I hate to admit. The dang song is *right*.

We've been given everything we need.

One afternoon, [a few months after our preemie twin daughters died](#), the kids were shout-singing their favorite grace over lunch. My eyes wandered (bored? bemused?) from the family table to the porch windows, noon light streaming bright and strong. Then I heard my children's words, strong and true. I realized the song was right.

God has always given us what we need. That sun and the rain and the apple seed.

Like you, I spend an awful lot of time wanting much more. My current short list includes (but is not limited to)

1. absolute guarantees about the health, longevity, safety, and survival of all existing and any future children;
2. some feasible way to pay for their probable college educations;
3. for all of them to stop picking their noses in public. (To dream the impossible dream.)

The truth? I have not always gotten what I wanted. But I have always had enough of the things I need. Including but not limited to food, water, sun, God. While most humans on this planet lack one or more of these, every day, in desperate extremes I can only imagine.

So why not sing it out? Why not give thanks and praise for the simplest gifts?

This year [has been an awful year](#). It's been a year when I rarely wanted to give thanks.

But after months of stubborn (at best) or sorrowful (at worst) songs of thanksgiving offered from our family table, **I have learned that giving thanks only makes sense if you do it all the time.**

Otherwise love of God becomes transactional: you give me this; I thank you for that.

No. We give thanks because it is the impulse of love, the language of being.

We are here, breathing, eating, sunning ourselves on this spinning planet. It is radical gift and plain marvel that any of us exist at all, that our cells lined up to produce persons of astonishing complexity and capacity, that we have enough water, sun, food, and love to keep going (let alone the luxury of sitting down to write words, read them, share them with others), that what we know of this earthly existence is only the slimmest fragment of the eternal whole that whispers mystery around us.

The Lord has been good to me, wildly good to me.

I know you could look at the particulars of my life and scoff that such a statement is blind faith, dogged denial, or sheer stupidity. I believe it is none of these.

I believe that my children—in their hand-clapping, table-drumming, rousing renditions of the World's Most Annoying Song of Thanksgiving—teach me this most basic truth of my life: **God has given me abundance by giving life itself.**

These kids keep me singing. For this I give thanks. The sun and the rain and the apple seed.

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