

Have you ever thanked God for the thorns in your life? In her radio series, “The Blessing of Thorns,” Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth shows how our afflictions can be the tool God uses to make us like Jesus. This discussion guide was developed to complement “The Blessing of Thorns” radio series which you can order on two CDs by visiting the Revive Our Hearts store at www.ReviveOurHearts.com. Use this devotional plan with your family the week leading up to Thanksgiving to give them a deeper appreciation for the purposes of God behind the hard times that come into our lives. This series includes a moving drama to share with your whole family when they gather for Thanksgiving.

Day 1, Monday

(Drama and Part 1 on Nancy’s teaching CD)

Introduce the Drama Reading: *“On the surface, this is a story about gratitude. The drama encourages us to be thankful. But the greater story is about God—His love and purpose for our lives. The story is perfect for Thanksgiving, but as you will see, it’s always the right season to express a thankful heart.”*

- Play the Drama Reading from the CD.
- Get reactions from each family member.

Introduce Part 1 of Nancy’s teaching material: “In order to get a clearer picture of what the store clerk meant by her ‘Thanksgiving Special,’ this CD has five short talks to focus our minds and hearts on how God can use the thorns in our lives. This is Part One.”

- Play Part 1 of Nancy’s teaching material.

Part 1 Discussion Questions:

- Why are thorns true gifts from God?
- How do thorns show us the “beauty of God’s comfort”?
- How can thorns make the “roses” of life more precious?
- What is a “thorn” in human experience?
- What does it mean to see our thorns from heaven’s point of view?
- When did thorns come into the world?
- What are some minor thorns in life?
- What are some major thorns in life?
- Thorns press in on us and “squeeze” us. What thorn is squeezing you?
- How does God transform our thorns into things of beauty?

Close in prayer.

Day 2, Tuesday

(Parts 2 and 3 on Nancy’s teaching CD)

Introduce the lesson: Display a “bouquet” of thorny stems on the dining room table to remind family members of the drama. Ask family members if they discovered any thorns in their lives during the past week.

Introduce Part 2 of Nancy’s teaching material: *“We want to see a biblical example of how God used a thorn to transform and shape a man’s life, and how he responded to his thorn. This is Part Two.”*

- Play Part 2 of Nancy’s teaching material.

Part 2 Discussion Questions:

- How can a person have overflowing joy in the midst of a thorn experience, like the Apostle Paul?
- What do you think is God’s “big picture” purpose for your own thorny situations?
- Some thorns go on and on, and we are tempted to lose heart. What will help us press on?
- What was the apostle Paul’s response to afflictions?
- How can a person have overflowing joy in the midst of a thorny experience?
- What do you think is God’s “big picture” purpose for your thorny situation?
- How valuable are your thorns in making you more like Jesus Christ?

Introduce Part 3 of Nancy’s teaching material: *“Let’s discover the real source of afflictions in your life, and your part in ‘receiving’ these afflictions. Prepare to be surprised!”*

- Play Part 3 of Nancy’s teaching material.

Part 3 Discussion Questions:

- If a thorn is a “messenger of Satan,” is he the ultimate cause?
- What should be your response to any thorn that God chooses not to remove after much prayer?
- Is it possible for a Christian to obey and serve the Lord and still experience thorny afflictions? How so?
- What was Paul’s attitude about his “thorn in the flesh”?
- How can a thorn be a “messenger of Satan”?
- How can a thorn be a gift from God?
- What should be your response to a thorn that God does not remove after prayer?

Close in prayer.

Day 3, Wednesday

(Parts 4 and 5 on Nancy’s teaching CD)

Introduce the lesson: Take time for a short review of this fresh way of looking at Thanksgiving.

Introduce Part 4 of Nancy’s teaching material: *“God’s grace is so amazing. We sing about it, but do we really understand how God blesses our lives? Part Four will help us understand.”*

- Play Part 4 of Nancy’s teaching material.

Part 4 Discussion Questions:

- What part does God’s grace and our humility play in our being able to bear the trials and afflictions of life?
- Is God’s grace sufficient for all of your thorns? How do you know?
- If we do not have a perfect understanding of why God is allowing a thorn in our lives, what should be our response to suffering?
- Is God’s grace sufficient for every circumstance . . . for dealing with every difficult person? How do you know?

Introduce Part 5 of Nancy’s teaching material: *“God uses our thorns to accomplish many purposes in our lives. They are not meaningless. As we listen to Part Five, ask God to show you how He wants to use your thorns.”*

- Play Part 5 of Nancy’s teaching material.

Part 5 Discussion Questions:

- How does God use thorns (afflictions) to discipline us, to make us more dependent on Him, to keep us humble?
- Would you be willing to have a thorn remain in your life if to do so would protect you, keep you humble, make you dependent on the Lord, sanctify you, and make you a more fruitful servant of God? How can a Christian say, “God intended my thorn for my good”?
- Thorns are not meaningless. How does God use thorns (afflictions) to discipline us?
- Name some ways that thorns can make us a blessing to others and equip us for ministry.

Encourage family members to share this unique Thanksgiving message with others (at school, at work, in the neighborhood).

Close in prayer.

Day 4, Thursday, Thanksgiving Day

(Drama CD and Testimonies)

Replay the drama— a good reminder and a “treat” for the children, as well as invited guests!

- Note: Small children could make a craft (such as drawing long stems with thorns or wrapping clay around a drinking straw and adding thorns).

Testimonies

- Each family member can share “Things for which I am thankful”—(See the “Sharing a Blessing” activity under “More Ideas for Your Family” below.
- Did anyone share the “thorns” concept with others last week? What happened?
- If planned ahead of time, an older Christian can share how God transformed his or her thorns into a thing of beauty.

Prayer: Close the session with a time of prayer, allowing each family member to offer a simple prayer of thanks to God for all His good gifts—the roses and the thorns.

More Ideas for Thanksgiving Day

1. Purchase a bouquet of roses for your Thanksgiving dinner.

- Cut off the roses and use the rose stems as the centerpiece.
- You can do something creative with the rose petals, perhaps scatter them on the table around the base of the vase or in a basket in the bathroom.

2. Place a small piece of a stem with thorns at each plate setting at the table. When opportunity for the conversation opens, share the story of the “Bouquet of Thorns.”

- Share your own personal story—be sure to keep it short and simple.
- Offer an opportunity to each one at the table, if they’d like, to share a “difficult thorny situation” they have or are facing at the moment.
- As each person shares, have each one cast their stem of thorns into the center of the table as an act that symbolizes giving this area to the Lord. End with a “Thanks”-giving prayer.

3. Take two bouquets to the hostess if you are a guest for Thanksgiving dinner: one as a thank you for hospitality, and one as an “object lesson”—the bouquet of stems with thorns—(an opportunity to explain).

4. Plan a “Thorny Thanksgiving”

- Use a “crown of thorns” as a centerpiece on purple velvet. Use this as a conversation starter while at dinner. (Perhaps someone might explain the meaning of thorns in our lives.)

5. Sharing a Blessing

- Start with one rose. Have everyone share one blessing or something they are thankful for.
- As they share, ask them to pull off a rose petal and toss it in the middle of the table.
- When the rose gets back to the hostess, cut off the remaining petals of the rose. Then, share the story or drama.
- Share your thorn story. Then, pass the rose stem around asking each to share their “Thorny Thanks”-giving story.

Using the Drama CD

If you wish to only play the drama CD for your family (rather than the four-part teaching series), use the following discussion guide.

Introduction: *“This drama gave me an entirely different way of looking at Thanksgiving. I hope it will be a special blessing to you, too.”*

Or, you can say: *“On the surface, this is a story about gratitude. The drama encourages us to be thankful. But the greater story is about God—His love and purpose for our lives. The story is perfect for Thanksgiving, but as you will see, it’s always the right season to express a thankful heart. I hope this will be a special blessing to you.”*

Discuss the drama. After the drama finishes playing, say, *“Doesn’t that give you a whole new insight into thankfulness and Thanksgiving?”* Engage in further discussion, as the Lord leads, with your group of friends. You can use the discussion questions from the devotional plan as a guide.

Questions you might ask:

- Why are thorns really gifts from God?
- How can thorns make the “roses” of life more precious?
- How can seeing our thorns from heaven’s perspective change how we respond to affliction?

Another Idea: Take a copy of the Drama CD to a host/hostess’s home on Thanksgiving Day. Ask if you can share a special Thanksgiving drama. You might mention that you have a short series of messages by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth that expands on this theme. Consider leaving the CD with your hostess to review over the weekend.

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