



The Virtues and Character Development Project

The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

I Thessalonians 5:24

Charity – Post-Activity Curriculum

Note – before reading the content in this portion of the module, it is important that the *Charity Pre-Activity Curriculum* and the *Charity Activities* have been reviewed and completed.

Now that you have worked on *charity* as a virtue, it will be helpful to reflect on its relationship with the other virtues (*humility*, *gratitude*, and *generosity*). As we discussed in the *Charity Pre-Activity Curriculum*, these appear quite frequently as connected to each other. In fact, it is not possible for one virtue to be fully present in the life of a person without the others. This interweaving is essential in understanding why we continue to work on new virtues, and the old virtues as well. However, as Paul stated in I Corinthians 13, without *charity*, it will not be possible for the others to fully mature. Furthermore, it will not be possible to live the Christian life without it. Therefore, it will be essential to continue to include *charity* in one's regular habits.

Today's culture places an emphasis on outcomes, i.e., the final result. This leads people to focus on the virtues as a checklist, marking off each one as they move through the various modules. However, this view is fraught with problems. Primarily, it causes one to only consider how a virtue might appear at the end of the exercises after a few weeks. Since we know that character development is ongoing throughout one's lifetime, focusing on a specific outcome will ignore changes that are continuing to occur as life events transpire.

It is more valuable to think of virtue formation and character development as a process that never ends. While it is important to avoid viewing this negatively, i.e., a person will never reach a point that is sufficient, which would be discouraging, it is important to understand that the process is part of the goal. Developing life habits and skills that enable a person to learn from each life experience, and to grow from them, is vital to human flourishing. Periodic self-evaluation, with feedback from others on occasion, will help a person see the growth that has occurred. Since this *charity* module completes the 4th virtue, it would be valuable to take time to reflect on the progress that one has made. Ask yourself questions like, to what extent have I grown in *humility*, in *gratitude*, in *generosity*, and in *charity*? How do I share what I am learning with others in my family and community? Am I learning to exhibit godly character more than before I started on this journey?

The work of St. Aquinas included a discussion of *charity* (*agapē*) and its relationship to *friendship*. This divine love that God brings into the life of a believer leads to a *friendship* with God that He desires. For someone with a Western mindset, it is common to view these two elements as different components that may be lived out separately, emphasizing the differences between them. However, for someone with an Eastern mindset, the focus on words such as these is on how they are integrated. For example, the Old Testament word for breath, spirit, and wind is *ruach*. While the Western mindset focuses on the distinctions between the words, the Eastern view is more that these are interchangeable or deeply interconnected. When one has one, the others also are present.

Let's apply this to *charity* and *friendship*, which are different words in the original Greek (*agapē* and *koinonia*, respectively), it would be better to view them as two aspects of the same concept. We should be thinking that we cannot have *charity* without *friendship*. This would suggest that *charity* and *friendship* are best described as two sides of the same coin.

Remember this example from the *Charity Pre-Activity Curriculum*? When you get married, there is a love for the person you are marrying. At the same time, there is *charity* (love) for the family because you love your spouse. This is a form of *friendship* that extends to ever-widening circles, even to the point of loving an enemy because of the *friendship* connection. So, *charity* and *friendship* are deeply interconnected. As a result, God's love toward us results in a *friendship* that expands to loving others.

In this life, there are numerous opportunities to learn about *charity* and *friendship*. However, we do this imperfectly (partially), even with the help of the Holy Spirit. This all changes when we enter heaven. As Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13:10, *when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away*. However, we have the opportunity to learn **now** how to live a little like we will live in heaven. Each day, practicing *charity* in its full meaning can be done in our families and our communities. This will encourage others to enter into a *charity-friendship* relationship with God.

The idea of living out virtues to enable the community to grow is vital to one's own growth. This view is that one's life is to encourage others to live the same way. One example would be giving anonymously. In the *Charity Pre-Activity Curriculum*, we discussed the issue of reciprocity, i.e., a sense of a need to repay someone for a gift. If someone receives a gift, but does not know the giver, the sense of reciprocity that arises cannot be paid back to the giver. So, it becomes likely that the desire to give forward in the community grows. This pattern of paying forward may become part of the culture of the community.

You should continue to learn about *charity* by reading books and papers, listening to talks, and joining discussions about *charity*. Invite others to talk with you about how they might join your journey in character development. Some recommendations for activities and recourses are available on the project website (<https://www.virtuesandcharacterdevelopment.org/>). If you have other resources that you find helpful, please share them with us. We will add them to the list on the website.