



The Virtues and Character Development Project

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

I Thessalonians 5:24

Gratitude – Post-Activity Curriculum

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

Now that the second virtue, *gratitude*, has been formed, it is important to reinforce this in daily living. There are two reasons for this. First, it is obvious that you want to maintain the virtue in the lives of your child. While it is good to have formed gratitude at some point, it is equally important to maintain it throughout one's life. Second, the virtues are interrelated to each other; one does not have one without the others, at least not at the level of maturity that is desired. It has been learned that *gratitude* leads to *generosity*. We learn to give thanks to God, then give thanks to others. This leads to giving time, resources, and talents. So, developing *gratitude* is a means of preparing for *generosity*, which is the next module being prepared.

As we learned through *gratitude*, life is to be viewed as a gift from God. This causes our heart to respond in faith. The gifts from others can remind us of this in many ways. It also serves as a way to recognize that when we say, *thank you*, we are telling the person, *we belong together*.

To continue forming *gratitude*, it will be helpful to recognize there is an intergenerational transmission through the community of the family. When grandparents and parents tell the stories of the family (past and present), children learn what has been given to them, enabling them to have the opportunity to give thanks for their heritage. Families can build their bonds through engaging in collaborative projects and in community service. Working together reminds children that they are part of a larger community than the one that they see.

Social science studies have found that *gratitude* is linked to awareness. If someone recognizes the gifts given to them (e.g., the creation, the home, the kindnesses), that person is more likely to be grateful. One hindrance to this is distraction, which is a problem in many cultures. For example, it is common for people to turn their attention to their hand-held devices, even in the company of others. This constant information input causes the users not to notice what they are receiving from others, and they are not grateful. One way to minimize this in family gatherings is to require everyone (parents and children) to put their electronic devices away when the family is together. This increases the opportunity to communicate with each other and to grow together.

There are many studies that show that those who have the virtue of *gratitude* exhibit health and well-being benefits. This can be verified in the family during the months (and years) after *gratitude* has been formed. Monitor this in your children by keeping notes on the instances when sickness occurs. Ask your children about their mental and emotional states. Are they calm, content, excited? When does this occur? Are they worried, lonely, angry? When does this occur? You should develop your own lists and talk with your children about their lives.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:3-4 that *suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope*. David Brooks wrote *The Road to Character*, in which he pointed out that

suffering teaches *gratitude*. When life goes as normal, we think of the love we receive from others as something we deserve. However, when we suffer, we realize that this love is undeserved and should in fact be a cause for thanks. As we explore how the virtue of *gratitude* can continue to be developed, we need to see how the challenges in life can make us humble and give thanks. You can help your children learn from difficult times that these enable them to draw closer to God and become more like Him. Help them practice focusing on the good in things and not the bad. This aids them in realizing that God is present in all circumstances.

You also will be able to watch for instances where *gratitude* is not being expressed. The opposite would be *ingratitude* (the state of being) and *ungrateful* (the behavior). When children exhibit a sense of entitlement, resentment, indifference, or are discontent, you will know that more attention needs to be placed on forming *gratitude*. The children need to learn to have realistic expectations regarding life. This will lead to *gratitude* and *joy*. If they have unrealistic expectations, they will be disappointed and not be grateful.

Continue to learn about *gratitude* by reading books and papers, listening to talks, and joining discussions. Some recommendations are available on the website (<https://www.virtuesandcharacterdevelopment.org/>). If you have resources that you find helpful, please share them with us.