



Family Values

Virtue Realities

Helpfulness

Bruce Strade, Chief Officer of Organizational Delight, Lutheran Community Services NW

Helpfulness is a misunderstood and deceptive virtue. As Christians we all are interested in helping others. This does not, however, mean that we do everything that another person may want us to do, nor do we always know what is most helpful for another person. In some cases to be overly helpful could actually be hurtful when it makes that person dependent or prevents him or her from developing fully. In other situations our helpfulness may be self-serving and not necessarily be welcomed or experienced as beneficial by the other person. Genuine helpfulness enhances and does not diminish. It builds up and does not exploit. It respects people's ability to ask and their right to say no. It is a two way process.

Jesus understands the nature of helpfulness when he recognizes that *"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."* (Matt. 6:8) Yet He encourages believers to *"ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be open for you."* (Matt. 7:7) The Father respects the capacity of his children to take the initiative and allows space for that to happen. God also gives his children freedom to fail and to learn from their mistakes, while also letting them know His availability should they need Him. When they fall and feel ashamed to be naked, he clothes them and keeps them from perpetuating their mistake by denying them access to the Tree of Life. (Gen. 3:21-24). The Father responds with grace but does not force His will on his children. The Psalmist captures this essence when he describes God as a *"very present help in trouble."* (Ps. 46:1)

Maybe the best way to define helpfulness is in terms of service. One author describes service in the following: *"True service . . . is a relationship between people who bring the full resources of their humanity to the table and share them generously. . . . A helping relationship may incur a sense of debt, but service, like healing, is mutual. Service is free from debt. The wholeness in me is as strengthened as the wholeness in you. Everyone involved is fortunate to have had the chance to participate. In helping, we may*

find a sense of satisfaction; in service, we have an experience of gratitude . . . When we serve, we discover that life is holy." (Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings*, pp. 198-99).

Such service is reflected in Paul's description of the mind of Jesus Christ,

"who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6-8)

He had the right to lord it over us, but instead comes to us on our level as an equal and on the cross reconnects us with the Father. Now that is helpfulness at its best!

Ways to practice helpfulness:

1. **Pray for discernment.** Ask God to give you sensitivity to the needs of others, along with the ability to respond without becoming self-serving or being exploited.
2. **Help yourself.** Take care of your own needs before helping others. Remember the rule on airlines: *"Put your oxygen mask on first before assisting someone else."*
3. **Know when you need help.** Recognize when you feel helpless and ask for help from others.
4. **Focus on service.** Reach out with compassion. Appreciate the mutual exchange that happens. Practice random acts of kindness.
5. **Make a difference.** Be available to your children, to the elderly and those in need. Be a blessing.

Affirmation: Today I will not refuse a kindness to anyone who asks it, if it is in my power to perform it. (Proverbs 3:27)

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Portland Office
605 S.E. 39th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214
503-231-7480, www.lcsnw.org