



# Family Values

## Virtue Realities

### Thankfulness

*Bruce Strade, Chief Officer of Organizational Delight, Lutheran Community Services Northwest*

We live in a land of plenty. Most of us have more than we need. There is food left over on our plates. More clothes in our closets than we know what to do with. Space galore in our homes, compared to people in other parts of the world. We own the latest gadgets and electronic devices. We drive SUV's that guzzle gas. We take our abundance for granted and even consider all that we have as "basic necessities."

Given such circumstances, it is easy for our thankfulness to sound like the Pharisee who prays: *"God, I thank you that I am not like other people: . . . or even like this tax collector."* His gratitude is at the expense of other people. It is based on the belief that he deserves what he has, not like the other unfortunates. In contrast, the tax collector expresses his appreciation in a totally different manner when he says, *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (Luke 18:11-13) On the surface, it does not even appear to be a prayer of thanks, until one recognizes the depth of indebtedness.

In the Old Testament, thankfulness is the appropriate response to all that Yahweh has done and continues to do to preserve the covenant relationship. The Psalmist expresses this fact most clearly when he states in Psalm 106:1:

*"O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever."*

Yahweh remains faithful to His agreement. Yahweh continues to care even when His people turn their backs on Him. Such unconditional love is undeserved and originates with Yahweh.

Christ embodies God's unending desire to remain connected and to bridge the gap between Himself and His creation. Through Christ the lost are found, the broken are healed, and the weak are strengthened. Through the Spirit we are joined in community, we become the body of Christ. All because God takes the initiative. God overlooks our shortcomings and does not hold them against us. He makes right where we have gone wrong.

Our response to all that God has done and continues to do on our behalf is one of heartfelt gratitude. We not only are indebted to God for our very existence, but He continues to reach out to us and to sustain us. Our thankfulness flows out of the depth of our soul. It is spontaneous. It is the Spirit working through us. It completes the spiritual connection. Paul sums it up in the following: *"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."* (Col. 3:17) The core of our appreciation is not for what we have or what we do, but rather what God makes possible for us through Christ. We join the angels in singing: *"Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!"* (Rev. 7:12) So be it!

Here are some ways to practice thankfulness:

- 1. Begin each day with thanksgiving.** Thank God that you are alive and that you have another day before you. Ask God to help you make the best of it.
- 2. Count your blessings.** Rather than take things for granted, recognize your indebtedness.
- 3. Praise others.** Show people that you appreciate them. Let them know how they have benefited you. .
- 4. Appreciate your own contributions.** Be in touch with your own internal value and what it is you have to offer.
- 5. Take time to reflect.** Allow yourself to go deeper into your being to tap into the core of your gratitude.

**Affirmation: Today I will have an attitude of gratitude.**

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