

Teaching the Way of Love

Volume 10 | Issue 1 | September 2020



Circle of Virtue

Parenting with the Heart of Christ

Preparing for this school year looks totally different than last year. Besides buying supplies, shoes and other necessities, parents must watch for any signs of illness, sanitize everything that goes to or comes home from school and keep a stack of clean masks at the ready!

Are you tempted to throw your hands in the air and scream *"I can't do this"* or *"I don't want to do this"* or *"I won't do this"*? Most parents are, even though they know that there is no point to complaining about the added responsibilities. Everyone understands that, if children are going to go to class this year, there is a need to hunker down, steel one's resolve and trudge forward together. So, chin up, Moms and Dads. It is time to face this pandemic head on!



The team at **Teaching the Way of Love** wants to help reduce your anxieties about the coming school year. They have created a strategy that creates a peaceful and calm home-front that can withstand nearly every challenge that you might encounter. It is called the circle of virtue plan. To understand what this is, let's look at the meaning of the word virtue.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines a virtue as a habit or firm disposition to do the good. It is an excellent quality that readies you to choose what is right, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons with ease and pleasure. A circle of virtue within the home, then, is the consistent practice of habits that connects family members together so that they easily choose to do what is right, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons.

There are four main merits that provide the foundation for a family's circle of virtue. These are prudence, justice, fortitude and justice. Prudence is the habit to know what is right and to choose it. Justice is the habit to do what is right in the right way. Fortitude is the moral courage to do what is right even when doing so is difficult. And temperance is the virtue of balancing our desires to embrace the full goodness God wants to give us.

These four virtues are the foundation of a "circle of virtue" because each one gives rise to related virtues. And, as you practice and strengthen the related virtues, you strengthen the foundational virtue. For example, family members who actively practice Prudence develop better humility and thoughtfulness. As the family becomes more humble and thoughtful, they strengthen the foundational virtue of Prudence. The resulting benefit is an upward spiral that leads everyone in

the family to choose what is right for the right reason, at the right time, and to do so easily and readily.

Why should you even think about taking the time to develop these habits within your family? Because a circle of virtue increases the happiness in your home by putting everyone on the same footing. Everyone starts from the same premise, “this family rolls in a virtuous way.” This means that everyone buys into the common good of the family unit. Everyone recognizes that they need each other and that they function best as a family when all contribute to the common good before doing what they want to do. In a nutshell, a home built on a circle of virtue dwells together in love as a community of persons.

How to Form a Circle of Virtue Right Now

Forming a circle of virtue in your home begins with a family conversation. Sit down together and talk about the four foundational virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Once everyone has a basic understanding of these virtues, discuss the following questions.

- How well does our family live these virtues? Do we do them easily and with pleasure or do we have to work hard to bring them to life within our home?
- How easy is it for me as a member of this family to live these virtues with ease and pleasure? Which virtues am I best at living and which take the most effort?
- How can we help each other live these virtues in our home? What do we need from each other to establish a circle of virtue this academic school year?

Here are a few tips that will help you with your discussion and follow-up.

- As each family member answers these questions, another family member should restate what was said. Rephrasing each person’s response gives everyone a second chance to hear what was said. It also helps people attend to the conversation.
- Ask someone to write down the answers given to the last question. Post these responses somewhere in the home where everyone can see them. The goal for the family is to use the responses to support each other within the circle of virtue.
- Pray this prayer together as a family as often as you are able.

***Lord, protect and watch over this family, so that in the strength of your grace
its members may practice the Cardinal Virtues, possess the priceless gift of your peace, and, as
the Church alive in the home, bear witness in this world to your glory.
We ask this thought Christ our Lord. Amen.***

If you want to form a circle of virtue in your home, become one of our members. Members receive a specific parenting strategy each week to grow in virtue, a monthly video message that gives you confidence to parent with the heart of Christ and participation in live on-line meetings where you can get your parenting questions answered. We would love to guide you to be the first and best educator for your children. To join go to: twl4parents.com/membership.

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Parents are busy people! Most days, the best you can do is focus on the next thing: work, home, dinner, supervising homework, bedtime routine, bed. It is so easy to get tunnel vision as you go through your daily lives. Being too busy means not having time to reflect and to plan your response to situations. To avoid tunnel vision, you need to develop the virtues that help you stop, take the time to think, and to plan your actions.

If you want to take your parenting to the next level, you need to take the time to **see** your children. You need to see your children's unique strengths and challenges. You need to see how your children communicate and receive love. You need to see how your children change as they mature. But to do all of this, you will need to change your habitual tendency of tunnel vision. Two virtues, foresight and circumspection, can help you do that. Both of them are part of the circle of virtue begun by Prudence, the habit of knowing what is good and making a plan to get it.

Foresight and Circumspection are habits of clear vision, both now and for the future. Foresight is the ability to look ahead and see what effects your decisions might have in the future and then make the choices that lead to the right end. Circumspection is the ability to look around you in the present and see the circumstances you need to consider to make the best decision.

You might assume that you already possess these virtues. After all, any mature adult should be able to consider their circumstances and foresee future consequences. However, like a muscle, virtues get stronger with exercise. If you want foresight and circumspection to become a powerful positive force for your parenting, practice them as you interact with your children. Here are some basic ways to exercise each of these virtues as a parent.



Exercising the Virtue of Circumspection

Identify the circumstances that lead to anger.

Circumspection deescalates anger within the home in two ways. It helps you understand what your children do that triggers your negative feelings. It also makes you aware of how you frustrate your children and create friction. If you can identify the behaviors that you or your children have that inflame tense situations, you can take steps to evade them.

Approach each child as a unique individual.

It's a mistake to apply a parenting strategy to every child in the same way. It is most constructive to approach each child individually. When you practice circumspection, you recognize that each child's strengths and limitations require growth in different virtues. Children may be in various stages of development. It's perfectly OK to negotiate different approaches to your house rules for each child in these cases. You may also need to respond to each child in a way tailored to his or her personality.

See what your children are going through.

Your children's behavior and attitude are often affected by what they're going through at the moment. Stress, fear, friendship dynamics, preoccupation with a school project, or any other event in a child's life can affect mood

and attitude, even about entirely unrelated things. Check-in with your child daily, so you know what is happening in their lives. Seek out the circumstances behind their attitudes or behavior, especially when it's out of character.

Exercising the Virtue of Foresight

What kind of adult do you want your child to become?

Tunnel-vision keeps you reacting to your children's immediate behavior. Psychologists call that "reactive parenting." Here is a simple question to ask yourself that broadens your vision and reduces reactive parenting. What kind of adult do you want your child to become? Reflecting on this question reminds you that what you do today impacts your child's future. This question helps you act rather than react, getting rid of tunnel vision.

Plan your responses ahead of time.

Foresight helps you plan your responses in productive ways that avoid conflict. When you plan out consequences and discipline ahead of time, you are more likely to correct the behavior rather than attacking the child. You may even be able to offer an opportunity to improve your relationship with your children through the consequences or discipline you give. For example, with foresight, you might turn what would ordinarily be an argument into a cooperative problem-solving session.

Help your children create a plan to reach their goals.

Sometimes the things your children focus on are very different from the things you **think** should be their focus. For example, teenaged boys often have the aim of playing video games as often as possible. They may not be so interested in succeeding at school. However, with a bit of foresight, even a goal like having the freedom to play video games can become a learning experience. You might tell your son that his time on the computer is directly proportionate to the responsibility he shows to the family. If he participates in the family and does his chores, he can have more freedom with the computer. What goals do your children have? How could they lead to the development of your child's character, skills, or knowledge? A little foresight might show you the way.

Growing in Virtue

As daughters of Prudence, the virtues circumspection and fortitude require reflection and reasoned thought. Take the time to think about your children and the circumstances in which they live. Listen to your children. Watch their behavior. Then think ahead about how you will respond to them.

If you'd like to learn more specifically about developing and strengthening circumspection and foresight, we invite you to join us in our *Teaching the Way of Love* membership. Each month, you will receive a video lesson to supplement this article. The video lesson will teach you specific strategies for developing and strengthening each of the virtues we cover in the article. This month we'll share a step-by-step process for building these two virtues, and we'll share personal examples of how we exercise these virtues in our own families. Visit www.twl4parents.com/basic-membership to learn more.

This article tells about just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the *Teaching the Way of Love* program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the *Teaching the Way of Love* home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.


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Parenting with the Heart of Christ

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Longanimity: Patience for the Long Haul

By Alice Heinzen (<https://twl4parents.com/author/aheinzen/>) | 0  (<https://twl4parents.com/longanimity-patience-for-the-long-haul/#respond>)



Parenting for the Long
Haul with the Virtue of
Longanimity



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Let me talk to you as one parent to another. Life is tough. It is rarely a cakewalk. Difficulties happen every day. Regrettably, we often lose our temper and civility when we are provoked or tested under fire. Instead of holding it together, we blow. And that only makes life more trying.

Have you noticed, though, that some parents navigate the inconveniences of life without getting rattled? They maintain a sense of calm as if to say that they know the difficulty will eventually end. No matter the issue or event, some parents remain patient and unruffled. Why is this?

For the skeptics reading this, you might say that undisturbed parents do not care. That is one possible answer. But another possibility is that the unruffled parent chooses to endure the hardships of life. They choose to keep it all together, even when provoked or under trial. They choose to demonstrate the virtue called longanimity.

Longanimity, also known as 'long-suffering', gives you extreme patience. It allows you to be patient with your spouse, your children, your neighbors and co-workers, bad drivers on the highway, slow clerks at the store, people of a different political party... You get it. Longanimity helps you to keep your cool and maintain a peaceful demeanor no matter what comes your way.

It is likely that you have never heard of longanimity before. Perhaps it is because society holds instant gratification more important than waiting. For example, fast food is everywhere. Fast delivery service is expected. Fast checkout lanes exist in most stores. Express services are a mainstay in business and industry. One might assume patience is no longer fashionable, important, or necessary.

But longanimity is more urgent today than ever and here is why. Knowing how to wait, especially in the face of difficulty, results in improved mental stability, physical health, and personal relationships. It helps you act rationally rather than react emotionally. Extreme patience gives you the time to reframe situations, think more clearly, and be more creative in finding solutions to the issues you face.

Consider this. You are driving to a meeting and you are late. To make matters worse, traffic slows to a crawl. Another driver (who also seems to be in a hurry) drives on the shoulder and cuts in front of you. For the next 10 minutes, you follow this impatient driver. What is your reaction? Do you lay on the horn, crowd the car's bumper, flip obscene gestures, and swear? Or do you take a deep breath, say a prayer for the driver and accept that you are going to be late?

Impatience leads to the emotional reaction. Longanimity results in the kinder action because it allows God to work through you. It cultivates God's full nature in your heart, calms you down, and gives you the strength to love despite your suffering. Longanimity helps you resist the temptation to roll your eyes, lose your temper, or pitch a fit. It frees you from the pull toward anger and allows you to act in love.

One more point. Long-suffering helps you accept the trials and frustration that occur as you wait for your child to mature and become the person that God created them to be. It keeps you balanced and charitable when they make life inconvenient with their tantrums and outbursts. It inhibits your desire to lose it when they want instant gratification. It is the key to maintaining peace in your heart when they provoke or push you to your limit.

Clearly, longanimity can help you do a better job raising either a son or daughter to be a faithful and loving person in today's world. It equips you with a calm readiness so that you act not react. It helps you pursue the good that might be a long way off. And, it gives you restraint in the face of anger, even when justified.

Now that you know more about longanimity, what can you do to increase your capacity to practice extreme patience in your daily life? Why not start with this prayer.

God, teach me to be patient, especially when provoked.

Teach me how to stop and think before acting.

Remind me that You will see me through until this suffering ends.

Amen.

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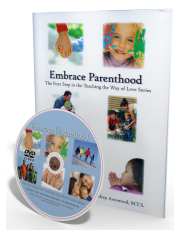
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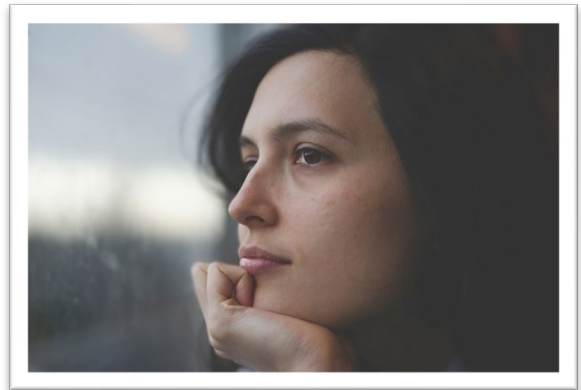
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A friend and I were discussing the fallout from last year. I admitted to him that I caught myself saying, “I don’t know what or who to believe anymore,” nearly every week. He agreed that discerning the truth was a daunting task made more difficult because people seemed to make decisions based on how they felt about an issue rather than on the facts or merits presented.

He had observed many people reacting emotionally to the news or their social media feeds rather than thinking through the stories that reported the latest on viruses, politics, and social unrest. He concluded that people lacked the virtue of solertia and that resulted in their increased anxiety and anger about 2020.



What in the world is solertia? To be honest, I had no idea. He explained that it is a building block of Prudence that helps you quickly size up a situation, pick up on subtle clues, and come to a right decision. (Refresher: prudence is your ability to know what is really good and then to make a plan to get it.) Solertia, he said, helps you determine if something is believable and true in the moment.

Solertia can also be called shrewdness. A shrewd person deals with issues rationally rather than with spontaneous reactions. He or she is NOT tossed about in a sea of emotions when they hear or see something that is difficult or novel. Rather, they STOP and THINK about the topic before ACTING. They rarely react with emotion or make a snap judgment or speak irrationally.

It occurred to me that most of us could benefit from cultivating solertia during the coming year. Here are a few suggestions on how to improve your shrewdness and quickly size up a situation to find the underlying truth.

STOP The most important step to becoming shrewd is to hit the pause button. Give yourself time to assess the situation. Developing this habit will prevent you from entering a rabbit hole or jumping off an emotional cliff that looms right in front of you.

CONSIDER Think about what biases or motivations may be at play. How are your thoughts or those of the other impacting the situation? Consider if these biases are revealing the truth or covering it up.

RESERVE JUDGEMENT Matthew 10:16 tells us to be *shrewd as serpents and simple as doves*. Be precautionous and maintain a holy outlook when you aren't sure what is ahead or true. Never inflame the issue on one hand or overlook it on the other. Sometimes the best and quickest assessment is to admit that you need to think about it for a while before coming to a decision.

PRAY In January of 2014, Pope Francis observed how the Three Wise Men needed to be shrewd and discerning in the face of Herod's deception. He referred to their need as spiritual shrewdness. He commented on how important it was for them to ask God to help them discern Herod's comments and motivations. Praying to God, like the Wise Men did, helps you to avoid falling prey to the world's deceit or be sidetracked by its false attraction. Here is a prayer that can help you to just that.

Good and gracious God,

Teach us how to see your true light in the world around us.

Help us avoid the snares of darkness and the shadows which seek to envelop our life.

Help us safeguard your truth with holy shrewdness and guard it against deceit which, many times, is also disguised as light.

Instruct us never to be content with a life of mediocrity, of playing it safe, but to draw close to what is good, true, and beautiful.

Defend us against evil distractions that confuse us from taking the right path and guarding our faith with prayer, with hope, and with charity. We ask this in the Name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

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Let's Be Reasonable

By Jeffrey Arrowood (<https://twl4parents.com/author/fromtheabbey/>) | 0 
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My son proclaimed at the dinner table one night, “The Bible is homophobic!” He was hoping to get a rise out of me. It almost worked. But I controlled my emotions and began engaging my son in a discussion instead. Not only did we have a great dinner conversation, but hopefully my children learned a thing or two about how to think well and how to seek and value real truth.

Kids are going to come home with opinions that they are convinced are right because one group or another has told them it is right. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that values inflammatory statements more than it values the truth. Instead of seeking truth together through respectful debate, logic, and science, we are shuttled into camps of like-minded people where thought

leaders and majority opinion dictate what we are supposed to believe. We are encouraged to build mental bunkers that don't allow any contradictory thoughts and are lured into name-calling, labeling, and agitation. This kind of culture is very confusing for our children.

Honestly, adults are tempted to seek truth from like-minded people who agree with us as well. We often let majority opinion and emotions dictate what ideas are worthy of praise and which ideas are worthy of ridicule. We are happy to follow whichever crowd confirms our beliefs without requiring us to examine them. Sadly, groupthink does not reveal the real truth.

Here is the challenge. How can you and your children uncover the truth and value it?

We explored part of the solution last month with the virtue of *solertia*, or intellectual shrewdness. Solertia helps us put on the emotional breaks and analyze whatever is being claimed to be true. It keeps us from being swept away in the moment.

The next part of the solution is to use the virtue of reasoning. Reasoning is the habit of logical thinking. It is a process to analyze an issue from premise to conclusion, to investigate and compare possibilities, and to avoid logical fallacies in the search for truth. In other words, the virtue of reasoning applies clear thinking in the pursuit of truth.

Like science, the virtue of reasoning is based on some basic assumptions. The first assumption is that truth exists independently of us. Our beliefs don't create truth. Every person does not have his or her own truth. Rather, our task is to discover the truth and to shape our lives around it.

That means that our opinions are not untouchable ideas that need to be defended at all costs. It also means that we can't avoid conflict simply by tolerating the thoughts and ideas of others. Instead, we should see all opinions as theories that need to be tested. That means that we need the humility to admit that our opinions may be wrong. But we happily present our opinions to be tested because our goal is to find and embrace the truth, not just to win an argument. Likewise, we use the virtue of reasoning to test the opinions of others in the same search for objective truth.

So how do you respond when your children come home with the latest group opinions? How do you use reasoning to bring them clarity? It starts with being a good listener. Let your children know that you welcome their opinions by looking them in the eye, letting them tell you their thoughts, and engaging with them. Don't shut them down, no matter how ludicrous their thoughts seem to you.

You should ask good questions. Ask your children to define their terms. Inflammatory statements are often based on rhetoric and assumptions about what words mean. Help them test their logic by asking them if their conclusion fits their claims. For example, "Does it necessarily mean that 'y' is true just because 'x' is true?" or you might ask, "What are the possible causes of this effect? What are some other possibilities?"

Remember that the point of asking questions is not to win an argument but to help your children to seek the truth through clear thinking. Approach every issue calmly. Instead of setting yourself up as the opposition, present yourself as a partner with your child. Seek the truth together.

All of us need to remember that the truth exists independently of our opinions. That is why people discuss situations logically and calmly. There is a purpose to arguing and debating one's position or beliefs with others because that is how real truth is discovered and clarified. When truth becomes clear through a discussion, take a moment to praise God for revealing it to you. Because, as we all know, God is the source of all that is true.


Good and gracious Lord,

Help me develop the virtue of reasoning. Give me the strength to think logically, especially when emotions run hot. Grant me humility so that I will be more interested in seeking the truth than in winning the argument. I ask this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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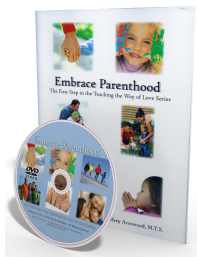
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Teaching the Way of Love

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Circle of Virtue

Parenting with the Heart of Christ

Is it just me or do people today seem more angry, desperate, and defiant? The news must think so because they often describe the U.S. as a divided nation. They write stories about family members who yell at each other, of hostile neighborhoods and workplaces where sides have been taken. The picture they paint is highly toxic and dysfunctional.

One of my neighbors even confirmed this assumption. She encountered a rude individual at the grocery store who really rocked her steady demeanor. When she shared the event with me, she asked this question, “What can be done to restore a sense of calmness to this world?”

Honestly, there is no one ‘thing’ that can be done to reinstate peace and goodwill. There is no one ‘fix’ that can turn this around. But there is one virtue that, when practiced, can open the door to decency and respect. It is called affability.



Affability is a habit of directing one’s emotions towards others in a spirit of warmth, caring and friendship. It is a decision to see other people in the light of good will rather than contempt. It is the ability to give others the benefit of the doubt rather than assume they are wrong or harmful. In short, affability is being kind to people.

Why is affability sorely needed in today’s world? People become exhausted and worn out when they are – or think they are – surrounded by folks who are hostile or itching for a fight. A sense of constant battle drains one’s emotional reserves and that is unhealthy. Conversely, persons who live – or simply think they live – in an affable environment find it easier to maintain their emotional balance and perspective.

How can people become more affable? First, they extinguish body language that looks toxic. They stop rolling their eyes, folding their arms, and pursing their lips. Instead, they engage others with a smile, they lean in when listening and they maintain eye contact. Affable people know how to ask good questions that allow others to talk and tell their story. Listening rather than commenting is part of being affable. Finally, they never blow another person off. Pleasant people will always make time for the other.

You might think that affable behaviors are difficult to develop. Quite frankly, you would be correct. Yet there is one simple action that you can easily master (or at least fake) that will help others see you as kind-hearted. It is the decision to smile at others. A smile elicits good will – both in the person smiling and to the one seeing the grin. Smiles are known to decrease negative emotions and boost happiness.

Note that affability is not blind optimism nor unbridled positivity. No amount of sunniness can eradicate life’s messiness and disappointment. Affability is NOT learning how to deliver platitudes to those who are irritable or tense. It is NOT putting a Pollyanna spin on life that claims everything will be fine so there is no need to worry. Nor does affability mean that we ignore the need to defend the truth when necessary.

However, the virtue of affability makes it much more likely that people will listen to you when you stand up for what is true and good.

Rather, affability is a decision to reframe your perspective about your fellow human beings. It is the resolve to present yourself as someone who can be approached safely; someone who is willing to listen and share a burden. Simply, it is a choice to acknowledge people in ways that put them at ease.

We cannot change other people. But we can change ourselves. We can act like the type of person we want to encounter. It is fully within our power to be decent, enjoyable, and happy. We can present ourselves as people who want to help others flourish rather than make them fume. We just have to decide to reframe our thinking and accept that fellow human beings are more like a brother or sister, not an enemy. You might then find that the people you treat with kindness will in turn be much more friendly to you. The prayer of St. Francis gives clear direction on how to become affable.

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
Where there is hatred, Let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand; To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

This newsletter series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, creators of Teaching the Way of Love. Teaching the Way of Love is designed to help you become a faithful, joyful and confident parent. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies on how to become the best parent you can be. Consider becoming an annual member of the Teaching the Way of Love program. Members receive practical and timely parenting resources. Go to twl4parents.com/membership for more information.



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The Debt of Gratitude

My daughter wanted to go to a friend's house, but she first needed to complete a set of chores that she had been putting off for a few days. So, she rushed through her chores and declared that she was ready to go. However, when I checked on her chores, I discovered that she really did a poor job, trying to meet the bare minimum requirement of being "finished." I told her that we would leave for her friend's house once her chores were done properly. Unfortunately, this escalated into a heated back-and-forth about what was "good enough." Finally, her chores were completed in an acceptable way and we left for her friend's house.

Almost as soon as we got on the road, my daughter took out her phone and put in her earbuds. She didn't even make an effort to talk to me until we got about five minutes away from her friend's house. When I dropped her off, she mumbled out a "thank you" and ran to her friend's house.



On the drive home, I was irritated. More than irritated, I was seething with anger. I began thinking and praying about what was bothering me so much. The obvious answer was that, despite my daughter's perfunctory "thank you," her entire attitude lacked gratitude. As I thought and prayed, the Holy Spirit turned the question back on me (as He often does). How grateful am I for the good things in my own life, like the fact that my daughter did complete her chores? Did I show her any gratitude?

Why is gratitude so important?

Theologian Dietrich Von Hildebrand teaches some insightful things about the virtue of gratitude. Here are a few powerful points that he makes:

1. Gratitude means understanding the value of the benefit you've received.
2. Gratitude also means that you understand the beneficence of the giver - that the gift or service communicates love or regard.
3. Loving relationships are not based on a tit-for-tat exchange of goods, but they are based on an assurance of mutuality. In other words, I am able to freely offer myself to my loved ones because I know that they will in turn freely offer themselves to me. Loving is about giving and receiving. Gratitude builds loving relationships because it is an assurance of mutuality. It assures me that I am not being used by the other.
4. Finally, gratitude is good for the one who is grateful! Gratefulness brings us a sense of wholeness when we complete the circle of giving. Gratitude satisfies the debt we sense that we owe for a person's goodness to us.

Gratitude is Justice - Right Relationship

Gratitude is tied to the cardinal virtue of justice - giving to each person what is due. We often think of justice in cold, legal terms. But justice is the virtue of right-relationship. When Von Hildebrand talks about the mutuality of loving relationships and closing the circle of giving, he is talking about justice. When someone does something good for us, we owe that person a debt of gratitude; the acknowledgment of the value of the good given to us, and of the love it represents.

More Than Words

While saying the words “thank you” is very important, some relationships demand more than that for a proper show of gratitude. Saying “thank you” is an act of civility that shows love and respect for anybody. In a loving relationship such as a family or a friendship, it’s a good start. But the mutuality of loving relationships requires something more.

True gratefulness in a loving relationship is a matter of giving and receiving love. Through gratefulness, we acknowledge the value of the gift we have received and the love behind the gift. This part of gratefulness may include the words “thank you.” But we then reciprocate that love through acts of charity.

To grow in the virtue of gratitude, consider how you can reciprocate the love shown to you by your family and friends by reciprocating their love with actions as well as words. **Show** them how much you appreciate their love.

As you grow in the virtue of gratitude, don’t forget the three relationships we owe the most gratitude in. These are debts we could never pay, other than with our gratitude and our love. WE owe gratitude to our parents (the virtue of piety), to our country (the virtue of patriotism), and to God (the virtue of religion).

Loving God, help me make my life a gift of gratitude
to you and to everyone that loves me.
Help me to truly receive the gifts of others
- especially those that are hard to receive-
and the love they express.
Teach me also to give love in return.

Amen.

Would you like to learn more about growing in longanimity and every other virtue we cover in this year’s series? Join Teaching the Way of Love’s new membership! Members receive a short video lesson each month and a bonus resource sharing strategies for growing in the month’s virtue. Visit twl4parents.com/memberships and choose the option that fits you best!



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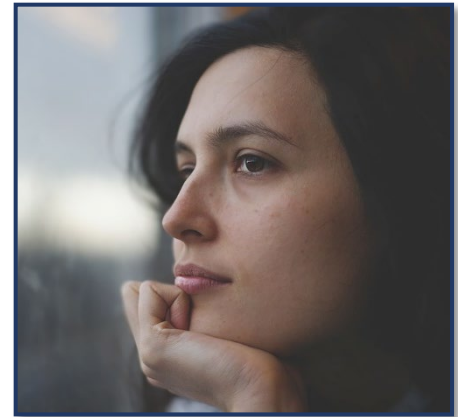
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What to Do When You Think You Aren't a *Good Enough* Parent

Parenting is hard work. It is not easy to embrace parenthood and stick it out. That is why a group of parents asked me to join them in a discussion about parenting. They wanted me to listen to their situations and offer some ideas for hope. A mom talked about her head-strong son who questioned every decision and request she made. A father described his daughter who had become an accomplished liar. Another mother shared concern about her timid daughter who struggled to stand up for herself. Another parent disclosed how her son's independence was leading him to detach from the family and its guidance.



As the conversation developed, I was struck by several common threads that ran through each of the parent's concerns. All of them wanted their children to succeed in life. Each of them wanted their son or daughter to do their best. Yet, all of them felt insecure about their ability to support and guide their children. None of them felt they were prepared to face the challenges of parenting a child into adulthood. As one parent succinctly put it; "I just don't feel like I am a *good enough* parent."

This feeling of being inadequate took me back to the time when my children were becoming adults. I also worried about raising children to be happy, healthy, and holy adults. I doubted my ability to be the first and best example for my kids. It was so easy to question my actions and motivations back then; so tempting to feel that I couldn't be the parent I needed to be. It was tempting to feel like I should abdicate my parental authority to another adult or institution or let my kids go it alone.

Thankfully, I never gave in to the negative emotions tugging at my heart back then. I resisted the voices trying to convince me to give up; to settle on being *just good* enough. Gratefully, I chose to acquire the virtue of **fortitude** and tackle parenting head-on.

When the parents in this small group asked me to comment, it was a privilege to acknowledge their emotions and struggles and offer fortitude as a solution to their parenting struggles. I shared that fortitude is a foundational moral virtue which ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in doing what is right and good. It is mental and emotional strength to face doubt or temptation courageously. Fortitude helps you overcome emotions like fear and despair; feelings that make you think you are lacking and not worthy to be a wonderful parent who can guide and lead.

Making fortitude the center of the discussion shifted the group's focus from worry to hope. We discussed how moral courage is needed to face struggles and move forward. We talked about fortitude as a way to push outside of your comfort zone and act intentionally. We explored how fortitude confronts personal

weaknesses and the feeling to give up. Most importantly, we discussed that fortitude makes it possible to do what is best – especially when it will cause you suffering.

Through the discussion, the parents came to a collective understanding that parents – ALL parents – struggle. Each mom and dad is challenged. Each parent worries. As one father put it, “pick your hard. It is hard to parent. It is hard not to parent. So, pick your hard.” His comment made the group see that building fortitude was the reasonable way to shoulder the hard burden and increase parental hope.

Developing any virtue takes time, effort, and a lot of grace from God. Maturing in fortitude is nearly impossible without divine assistance. With God’s help, parents can stop feeling sorry for themselves, learn to control their anger and anxiety, and resist the impulse to make everyone happy. They can set and implement boundaries and standards for behavior. Under God’s care, parents can learn from their mistakes and plan for a better future. Filled with the grace and mercy of God, parents can renounce misgivings and embrace sacrifice for the sake of the child. Here is a prayer to help you build fortitude.

*Dear God, help me to develop fortitude,
for it is something that I lack.*

*I need courage to raise my child/ren
to know, love, and serve you above everything and everyone else.*

*I need courage to fight against my doubts,
against worries and troubles, temptations,
attractions, darkness and false lights,
against tears, depression, and above all fear.*

*I need fortitude, dear God.
Strengthen me with Your love and Your grace.*

*Console me with Your blessed Presence
and grant me the courage to persevere
and know that I am the best parent for my children.*



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Humility and Parenting: Taking an Accurate Look at Yourself

This past year has been a difficult parenting year for my wife and me. Our children have provided some unique obstacles for us. They gave us ample opportunity to grow in parenting virtues. One lesson that we learned came from a rather abrupt statement from a Christian parenting coach whose audio program we listened to. He said, “Your children push your buttons because you have so many buttons to push. That’s your problem, not theirs.”

As He often does, the Holy Spirit let that statement hit me hard. He led me to reflect on my own character flaws, pride, and selfishness that get in the way of me becoming the best parent I can be. It was a painful process. But in the end, my wife and I grew in our ability to respond to our children more calmly and rationally. We grew in the virtues of patience, fortitude, and prudence. But it all started with the virtue of humility.



Humility is a commonly misunderstood virtue. People often assume that humility means thinking yourself small and unworthy. In reality, humility does not mean having a low opinion of yourself. Rather, it means having an **accurate** perception of yourself. A humble person recognizes his or her strengths and gifts as well as the weaknesses, vices, and sinfulness. The opposite of this part of the virtue of humility is pride. Sometimes pride means seeking a disordered amount of honor and regard from others. Other times, pride means assuming that disordered honor and regard for yourself.

Parents who want to grow in the virtues we discussed this past year need the virtue of humility and an accurate self-perception to know which virtues they need to develop. They need the ability to look at their parenting objectively, without the bias of pride. They need to be able and willing to admit their weaknesses, and even to allow others to point them out. Without humility, I would never have heard the message that I needed to face my emotional triggers and learn to control my responses.

The other part of humility is that you think of others more than you think of yourself. The opposite vice of this dimension of humility is self-centeredness. Self-centeredness isn’t quite the same as selfishness. Selfishness refers to a choice to put yourself above others. Self-centeredness refers to a pattern of thought where you think only about yourself and are unable to see others. Self-centered people fail to see how their actions and words affect others. They don’t see the needs of others. They aren’t able to consider how other people may think or feel. Their own needs,

concerns, and desires just scream too loudly. Humility is the virtue of quieting the clamor of the self so you can “hear” others.

Parenting is a great tool for overcoming self-centeredness. Just needing to think about the needs of a baby or a young child teaches us to think of someone else. However, there is always room to grow in selfless love. It takes the clarifying vision of humility to see where in your life you are still putting yourself before others. For me, the challenging words that my selfishness was allowing my children to frequently push my buttons forced me to face my need for a greater transformation of my heart.

Humility is a difficult virtue to adopt. It requires the willingness to admit our own weaknesses and sinfulness. However, if you want to grow in virtue as a person or as a parent, you need to first be willing to see what parts of yourself need to be corrected and strengthened. When we face a difficult task, we know that we can rely on God to help us. Start with this prayer.

Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind and shine your light into my heart

That I might know myself as You know me.

Remind me always of my value as a child of God.

But also reveal to me my weakness and sinfulness

That, with your help, I might replace them with the virtues I need

For my own sanctification and to lead my family to holiness.

I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.



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