

CONNIE CLARK

SERVING
in the **JOY** *of the*
SPIRIT

A
SERVICE
PROJECT
JOURNAL

*for
teens*



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SO YOU'VE SIGNED UP TO HELP...

Maybe it's through a service project at your parish, school, or work. Or maybe you saw a need and responded on your own. No matter how you serve, God has chosen *you* for this work. Think about that. What does God have in mind here?

Well, your service is helping someone, but it's also helping you. That might sound a little cliché, but it's true. Have you ever noticed that when you reach out to help another person, you stretch yourself a little? That's not your imagination. You're actually exercising gifts you've been given, called virtues. The virtues are what motivate you to take good action and give the very best of yourself.

To get an idea of how virtues work, think of someone you admire who has amazing talent in sports or the arts. They were probably born with that God-given talent, which they practiced and developed to get to where they are. Virtues are like that. Think of virtues as the “muscles” of your soul. Working out any muscle makes it stronger and healthier, right? Giving your virtues regular workouts keeps you spiritually strong, which leads to greater joy.

You'll see how with this journal. It takes you through your service work with inspiring people who served others. Do the simple virtue strengthening exercises (they only take a few minutes), and with the help of the Holy Spirit, you'll be serving—and living—in the great joy that God wants for you.

The theological virtues

*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things. PHILIPPIANS 4:8*

God wants the very best for you. So he gives you supernatural gifts to help you achieve your best life. Yep, that's right. You're walking around with supernatural gifts that are above and beyond human nature. Jesus explains it this way: "And I have given them the glory you gave me... that they may be brought to perfection..." (John 17:22–23).

You receive this amazing, divine glory whenever you receive Jesus in the sacraments. The gifts of this glory are called the theological virtues. We use the word "theological" to describe them because they come from God and lead us to God. (The word theological comes from the Greek *theos*, which means God, and *logos*, which means word or understanding.)

The theological virtues light up your soul with God's grace so you can do great things that would be impossible to do on your own. And they give your good actions meaning and life. You might know the theological virtues as faith, hope, and charity. We'll start with these virtues, because they're the basis of a joyful Christian life.

FAITH

MOST OF US ARE JUST MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS WHEN WE'RE ASKED TO SERVE. We might not be sure what's expected of us, or even what we'll be doing. But there's someone who knows how we feel. Mary is minding her own business when out of nowhere an angel pops up, telling her that God has chosen her to do something. And it involves having a baby. *Whaaat?* This probably isn't what Mary has in mind for her future. And she can't possibly know all that lies ahead. But like you, Mary has been given the gift of faith.

Faith is defined as the theological virtue by which we believe in God and all that he has said and revealed to us. Sounds pretty straightforward, right? But believing also means accepting what God asks you to do and then actually doing it. That's where things can get a little uncomfortable. How do you even know what God wants you to do? What if you don't think you can do what God asks?

Well, you have this supernatural gift in your back pocket, the virtue of faith. You don't have to fully understand it to get all of its benefits. All you have to know is that through this virtue, God will help you believe, even when belief seems impossible. God will help you be faithful, even when you have more questions than answers. God will help you live your faith, even when life seems unlivable.



For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

That doesn't mean you can sit back, relax, and expect God to do the rest. We all have to do the work of faith: actively loving God, others, and ourselves. The good news is that when you're doing God's work, you don't have to worry about hanging on to your faith, because your faith is hanging on to *you*. Faith is what saw Mary through some huge challenges. Like when she had to explain to Joseph about the baby she was going to have. Like when she gave birth to this baby and had to lay him in a manger for animals, even though the angel had said the baby was destined for greatness. Like when she watched her beautiful son nailed to a cross.

Her son, Jesus, triumphed over that cross and over death, showing Mary—and all of us—that we can triumph too. Faith isn't superstition or anything we've concocted in our heads. Faith is real. It is God showing us that we are born for greatness—his greatness—even if we can't see it. Faith lets us walk forward and do the work of living, even when we can't see what's ahead. Like right now, as you begin your service.

SERVICE JOURNAL

What do you know about the service you've committed to?

Jot down what you know.

Who is your service meant to help?

Spend a moment picturing the person/people who will benefit from your service. What do you hope they will get out of it?

VIRTUE STRENGTHENING EXERCISE

Choose one faith practice to work on for the next thirty days: daily prayer, regularly receiving the sacraments of Communion and reconciliation, or daily Bible reading. Ask God to help you choose one. Then ask him to help you do it. Write down what you decide to do here:

God, I have no idea what's ahead as I serve you. Strengthen my faith so that I can see, hear, and act, knowing you will give me everything I need to do your will.