

Thanks or No Thanks

Gratitude and Ingratitude in
Vincentian Life

Steve Calme
SVdP National Assembly 2019

Part I

Gratitude

Why Gratitude?

Forbes

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7 Scientifically Proven Benefits Of Gratitude That Will Motivate You To Give Thanks Year-Round



Amy Morin Contributor @

Careers

Psychotherapist and international bestselling mental strength author

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Developing an "attitude of gratitude" is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.

f It's that time of year where many people begin thinking about everything they have to be thankful for. Although it's nice to count your blessings on Thanksgiving, being thankful



To improve your health, practice gratitude

A daily gratitude practice has been shown to significantly increase your happiness — and your physical health. Practicing gratitude improves sleep, boosts immunity and decreases the risk of disease.

By Amit Sood, M.D.

Ever wish there were a magic pill you could take to boost your energy levels, improve your mood, help you sleep better, increase your kindness and even help you make more money? Unfortunately, no such pill exists. But there is a way you can



Why Gratitude?



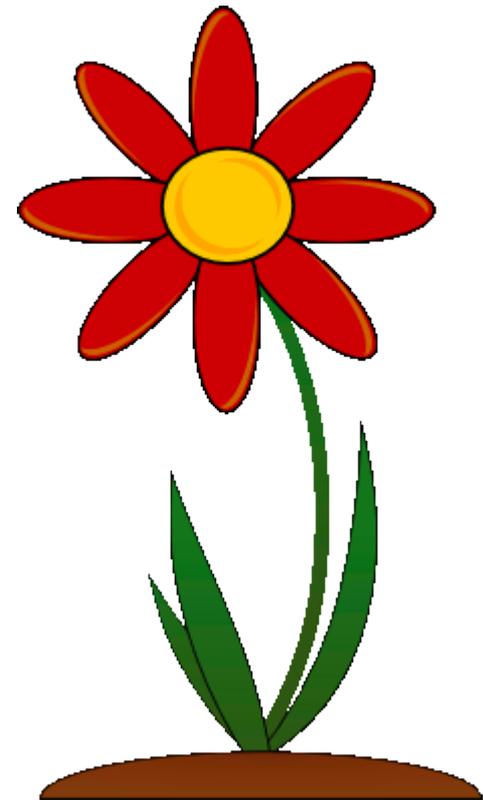
- “[St. Vincent de Paul] used to say that nothing was so efficacious in winning the heart of God as a spirit of gratitude for his gifts and blessings.”

(Abelly, vol. 3, Ch. 17. His Justice and Gratitude)

An Invitation

- “[Vincent’s] own gratitude seemed to him so inadequate that he invited pious persons and even entire communities, mainly his own, to join him in his praise and glorification of God.”

(Abelly, vol. 3, Ch. 17. His Justice and Gratitude)



An Invitation

- “[Win]’s own gr... so in...
that... ed pious pe...
a... re com...
y in... to... in...
l... ase a... glorifi... of
t”

(Abelly, vol. 3, Ch. ... a ... C ...)



What Is Gratitude?

Gratitude

is not only
the greatest of virtues,
but the parent of all the others.

- Cicero

GRATITUDE
TURNS WHAT
WE HAVE
INTO
ENOUGH.

*Gratitude
is the open door
to abundance*



*gratitude,
changes everything*

Gratitude and Humility

- “God pours out his inexhaustible gifts on the humble, those who recognize that all the good done by them comes from God.”

-St. Vincent de Paul

(Documents, vol. 11, 56-57;
cited in McKenna, *Praying with Vincent de Paul*, 74)



Gratitude and Humility

- “God loves a cheerful giver, but God also loves a thankful receiver. At the core of humility is a profound sense that God has given us everything that is good. Humility allows us to see all as gift, so we rejoice, not in our own doing, but in God’s bounty.... **Humility and thankfulness move in tandem.**”

(McKenna, *Praying with Vincent de Paul*, 75)

A Classic Definition

- **Gratitude is a virtue that “consists in recollecting the friendship and kindness shown by others, and in desiring to pay them back.”**

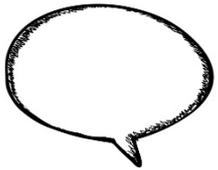
-St. Thomas Aquinas (II.II.80.1), citing Tully

Three Elements Needed for Gratitude

- First, **recognize** the gift as a gift.



- Second, **express** appreciation for the gift.



- Third, **respond** with generosity according to one's means.



1. Recognize gifts as gifts

- “We can be faithful to God in many ways. First, by being attentive to...the graces His Goodness grants us at almost every moment and to esteem them, receiving them with gratitude.”



- St. Vincent de Paul

(Correspondence, Conferences Vincent de Paul, Coste, Vol. 9, C54, page 493, FIDELITY TO GOD, June 3, 1653)

1. Recognize gifts as gifts

- "God alone is the author of every good thing."

– St. Vincent de Paul



1. Recognize gifts as gifts

- Rule 1.12 Gratitude to those we visit

“Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognize that the fruit of their labors springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.”

Reflect and Share

- **Think about a recent encounter you've had with a neighbor-in-need or a fellow Vincentian. What is one gift you received from that encounter?**

Blessings from Vincentian encounters

- Did I see the Holy Spirit at work?
- Did I receive a smile or a kind word? Did a child warm my heart?
- Did I see strength in the midst of adversity?
- Did I come to a clearer awareness of the destructive impact of poverty?
- Was I gifted with the opportunity to share a piece of who I am and the gifts that God gave me?
- Did I learn something about myself—either something I'm proud of or something I need to work on?
- Was my heart made softer, more open?
- Was I allowed into the privileged space of someone's honesty and vulnerability?
- Was I, a stranger, welcomed into someone's home?

Reflect and Share

- **Think about a recent encounter you've had with a neighbor-in-need or a fellow Vincentian. What is one gift you received from that encounter?**

2. Express appreciation

- “We must give as much time to thanking God for his favors as we have used in asking him for them.”



-St. Vincent de Paul

Thanking our neighbors-in-need

- **“Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit.”**

-The Rule, 1.12

The Three-minute Thank You Note



The Three-minute Thank You Note

Dear _____,

- I wanted to take a moment to thank you again for welcoming us into your home on our St. Vincent de Paul visit last week.
- Your [*joyful attitude, openness to sharing your story, obvious love for your children*] was a gift to me.
- I appreciate it and will keep you in my prayers.

In gratitude,

3. Respond with generosity



- “I praise God that in His goodness He makes use of you in this way. Oh, how blessed you are! You must show your gratitude for this by a more perfect love for Our Lord who moves us to a more fervent practice of these virtues.”

–St. Louise de Marillac

*(Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, L. 461, page 493,
[November 1655])*

Reflect and Share



- When thinking about the gift you received in your recent encounter with a neighbor or fellow Vincentian, what holy desires well up in you?
- Do you feel inspired to pray for that individual in a certain way? To offer them some gift of your own? To “pay forward” their gift to another person?

Our Models of Gratitude

- “Vincent learned humility from the poor people that he served. ... Some turned bitter, but others gave thanks and blessings. Out of the sharpness of their need, they grew thankful for God’s often ignored wonders: a crust of bread, clean water, perhaps an apple.”

-Thomas McKenna, CM, *Praying with Vincent de Paul*, 75

Learning from Others

- **When have I seen gratitude demonstrated by a neighbor or a fellow Vincentian?**

Part II

Ingratitude



Strong Words

- “[Vincent] complained vehemently of the extreme ingratitude of men towards God. ... He urged his confreres to practice this virtue of gratitude and thanksgiving, without which, he used to say, we make ourselves unworthy of receiving any favors from God or men.”



(Abelly, vol. 3, Ch. 17. His Justice and Gratitude)

Judging Ingratitude?

- “Vincentians are nonjudgmental. A nonjudgmental attitude excludes assigning guilt or responsibility for a person's needs or problems. ... When uncertain about the truthfulness of a story, Vincentians give the person telling it the benefit of the doubt.”

- *SVdP Manual*, p. 65

Judging Ingratitude?

- “Vincentians endeavor to establish relationships based on trust and friendship....They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.”

- *The Rule*, 1.9

Nonjudgmental



Nonjudgmental

- 1. Recognizing the difficulty of making accurate judgments, especially of people's intentions or moral state
- 2. Responding nonjudgmentally even when we have a pretty accurate judgment about someone



1. Difficulty of Judging Ingratitude

- “For in the first place [the giver] should not easily judge [the recipient of the gift] to be ungrateful, since, as Seneca remarks, ‘a man is often grateful although he repays not.’”

- St. Thomas Aquinas

Difficulty of Judging Ingratitude



- “...that indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you.”

—Bl. Frederic Ozanam

What makes it difficult to tell if a neighbor is grateful or not?

- Different people express emotions in different ways
- Gratitude may be hidden by the anxiety and stress that remains
- Often the transaction isn't completed during the home visit
- Immediately expressing thanks/emotion toward a stranger is difficult and makes one feel vulnerable
- They may respond in generosity in ways we don't see
- We don't know what's in their heart

Giving the Benefit of the Doubt

- "Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favorable light at all times and under all circumstances."

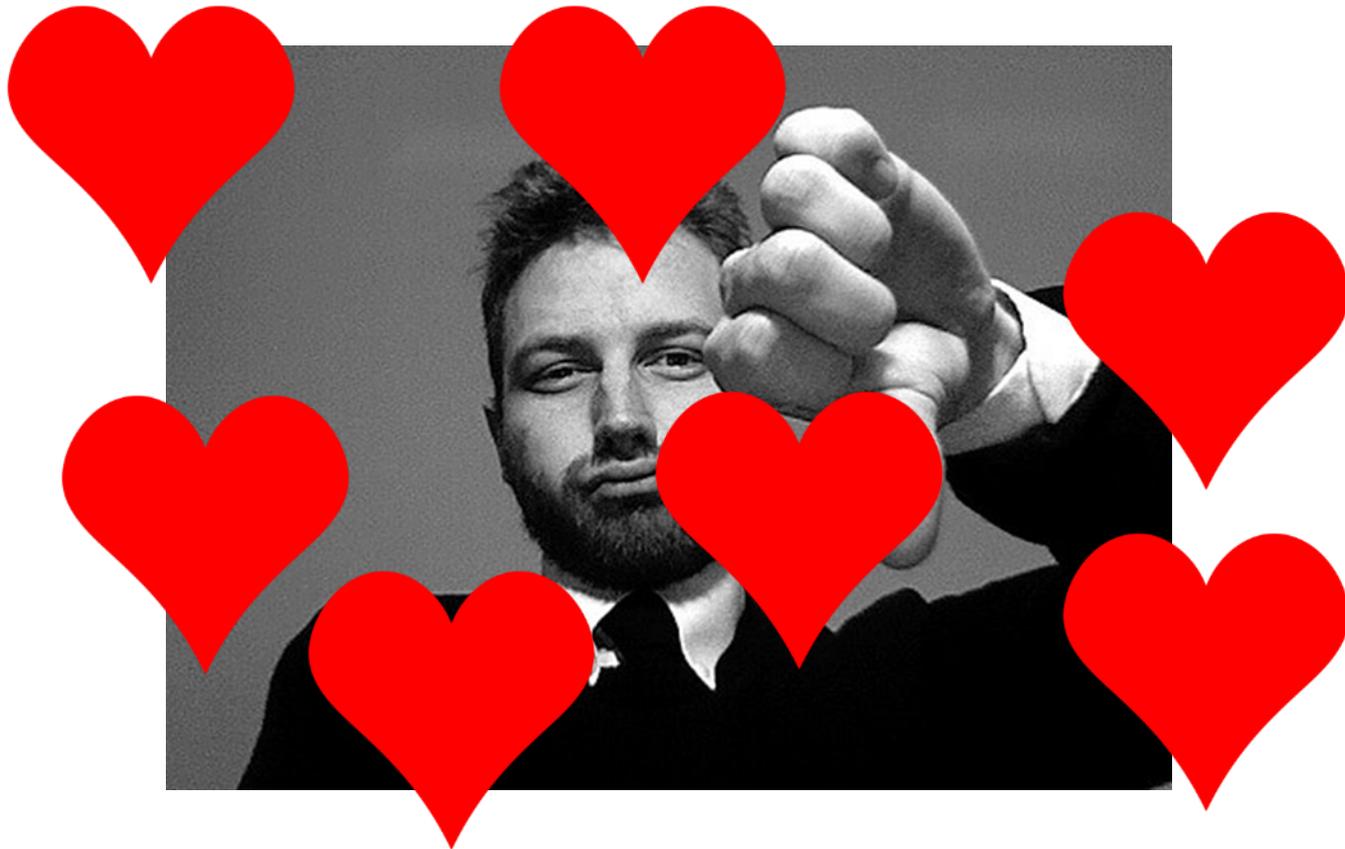


–St. Vincent de Paul

2. Responding to Ingratitude



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Responding with Love

- “The ruder they are, the more dignified you must be. Remember, Our Lord hides behind those rags.”

-Bl. Rosalie Rendu



Helping Others Grow in Gratitude



“So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love.” -Luke 7:47

Reflection on the Three Elements of Gratitude

- 1. Recognize gifts as gifts.** *Nothing stifles gratitude like a sense of entitlement or pride. When everything seems due to us, there is no space for gratitude.*

“Vincetians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognize that the fruit of their labors springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.”
—Rule 1.12

Think about a recent encounter you’ve had with a neighbor-in-need or a fellow Vincentian. What is one gift you received from that encounter?

- 2. Express appreciation for the gift.** *At times we feel that we don’t need to express our gratitude because the giver already knows that we are grateful. But expressing our thanks is both a blessing to them and a way for us to grow in gratitude and humility.*

“We must give as much time to thanking God for his favors as we have used in asking him for them.”
—St. Vincent de Paul

Write a three-minute thank you note. (Sample for a home visit:)

Dear _____,

I wanted to take a moment to thank you again for welcoming us into your home on our St. Vincent de Paul visit last week. Your [*joyful attitude, openness to sharing your story, obvious love for your children*] was a gift to me. I appreciate it and will keep you in my prayers.

In gratitude,

3. Respond with generosity. *True gratitude desires to respond to generosity with generosity, “at a suitable time and place, according to one’s means.”*

“I praise God that in His goodness He makes use of you in this way. Oh, how blessed you are! You must show your gratitude for this by a more perfect love for Our Lord who moves us to a more fervent practice of these virtues.”
–St. Louise de Marillac

When thinking about the gift you received in your recent encounter with a neighbor or fellow Vincentian, what holy desires well up in you? Do you feel inspired to pray for that individual in a certain way? To offer him/her some gift of your own? To “pay forward” that gift to another person?

For further personal or shared reflection:

Recognizing gifts

1. What kind of gifts in your life do you have the easiest time recognizing? The hardest time recognizing?
2. How is your own ability to give to others itself a gift?

Expressing gratitude

3. How often do you express your gratitude to others, especially to fellow Vincentians and to the neighbors you serve? What form does it take (in person, by phone or text, in a letter)?
4. How often do you express your gratitude to God? In what form?

Responding generously

5. When has your gratitude as a gift-recipient inspired you to be a gift-giver?
6. When you give a return gift to someone, do you do so out of a desire to “even things up” or out of a desire to be generous?

From Psalm 136: Hymn of Thanksgiving for God's Everlasting Love

Praise the LORD, who is so good;	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Praise the God of gods;	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Praise the Lord of lords;	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who alone has done great wonders,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who skillfully made the heavens,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who spread the earth upon the waters,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who made the great lights,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
The sun to rule the day,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
The moon and stars to rule the night,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
And led Israel from their midst,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who split in two the Red Sea,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
And led Israel through,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
But swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Who led the people through the desert,	<i>God's love endures forever.</i>
The LORD remembered us in our misery,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
Freed us from our foes,	<i>God's love endures forever;</i>
And gives food to all flesh,	<i>God's love endures forever.</i>
Praise the God of heaven,	<i>God's love endures forever.</i>

A Personal Psalm of Thanksgiving

In Psalm 136, the psalmist looks back on the history of God's people and recalls the many ways God has blessed them. As you look back at your Vincentian life so far, what people, moments, and blessings from God do you want to recall in gratitude?

Praise the LORD, who is so good; *God's love endures forever;*

Praise the God of Vincent and Louise; *God's love endures forever;*

Praise the God of Rosalie and Frederic; *God's love endures forever;*

Praise the God who _____ *God's love endures forever;*

Praise the God of heaven, *God's love endures forever.*