



Marilyn Sharpe
Ministries, LLC

(612) 202-8152

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VALUES AND VIRTUES

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. - Matthew 6:21

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? - Micah 6:8

FOR ALL OF US

Three things have caused me to reflect on the meaning of values and virtues and how we pass them on to the kids we know and love.

First, reading the Bible and discussing it with the kids I love. (You knew that was coming!) Last Sunday, I was with families, parents and kids together, who have been doing Bible study together for almost six years. Unpacking an Old Testament minor prophet, we turned to this week's newspaper and each family skimmed a section, looking for ways that people today are turning their backs on God, evidence that God still loves us and wants to be in a relationship with us, and identifying the

prophetic voices we hear today, calling us to do what is right and faithful. Trust me, to hear it in the voices of these children was inspiring and brought me to my knees with thanksgiving, profoundly touched that it will be into these hands that we will entrust the world. We close with kids and parents blessing one another, by tracing a cross on each forehead and saying, "Remember that God is always faithful to you."

Second, reading David Brooks newest book, *The Road to Character*. He makes a fascinating distinction between "resume virtues," the ones that get us a job or college acceptance letter or recognition for excellence or an award, and "eulogy virtues," the ones for which we hope to be remembered by those we hold most dear. It is tempting to build a resume, get accolades from the world, garner attention for our accomplishments. But, what is it that you really want others to remember about you. I want to sit down and write my preferred eulogy now ... and then live into it, while I still have time.

Third, hearing the tenor of the political rhetoric this season. My mothering ears cringe and I want to send so many candidates, on both sides of the aisle, to their rooms. I'd like them to remember the messages of virtues and values their parent taught them. No name calling. No put downs. Hands are not for hitting ... and neither are words. You can disagree without being disagreeable. Speak the truth in love. Build one another up. Love one another as God in Christ has first loved you. Love God with everything you've got and love your neighbor as yourself. Now, can we try that again?

FOR FAMILIES

For your kids, to which virtues and values do you give the most attention? Do grades trump kindness? Does making a traveling basketball team lord it over regular visits to an elderly neighbor? How do your kids really know what you value, what you laud as virtues worthy of a life?

It is true for all of us: What gets attention gets repeated. If it is your child's grades, accomplishments, popularity, place on a varsity team or homecoming court that get your attention, then that is what your child will repeat. Count on it!

It is also true that your actions speak louder than your words. If you say you value honesty and truth telling, but your kids overhear you making up an excuse for why you can't help with a school or church function or give a friend a ride, honesty will slip down the list of values, replaced by ease or convenience in your life. And you will see it repeated in your child's behavior. They learn our lived lessons well ... and repeat them.

If you aren't sure whether or not your kids are learning the virtues you value, ask your kids to tell you the things that they believe your family values. Make a list. Refine it. Talk about it. Catch your kids living those values. When you fall short, then own your mistake and apologize. Confession is good for all of us ... and forgiveness is an amazing gift.

NEED SOME HELP?

Do you need some help gaining perspective, evaluating your ministries, reestablishing your priorities, discerning where God is calling your congregation now, and engaging all to participate? This

FOR CONGREGATIONS

What are the values and virtues people experience when they first connect with your church? Look through your website - does it declare and show that all of God's children are welcome? How does the receptionist greet people in the office and on the phone? If someone has

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limited mobility, who is there to help them receive communion? Does signage help people find their way? Do greeters just chat with those as tall as they are or with those they already know? Who opens the circle wider, so that groups of friends having coffee, welcome the strangers and make them feel welcome? How would your community and the world be impoverished if your congregation wasn't there?

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Marilyn Sharpe Ministries, LLC, 6501 Cherokee Trail, Edina, MN 55439

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