



BUILDING WISDOM AND STRENGTH **The Practice of Virtue**

The Twelve Virtues of Noble Character

by Heather Carlile

Acquiring the virtues brings a sense of goodness about and respect for the essence of self and the world. Whatever the situation or relationship, with study of virtuous thought, speech and action, we know the most honorable response. We gain inner peace and serenity as we experience the strength, empathy and wisdom which teaches us to accept, respect and love others, ourselves and the world.

CHARITY
COURAGE
DEVOTION
DISCERNMENT

EFFICIENCY
FORBEARANCE
HUMILITY
KINDLINESS

PATIENCE
PRECISION
SINCERITY
TOLERANCE

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In reading the lives of great men, I found that the first victory they won was over themselves, self discipline with all of them came first.

-Harry S Truman



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The Practice of Virtue

*We should every night call ourselves to an account: what infirmity have I mastered to-day?
What passions opposed? what temptation resisted? what virtue acquired?
Our vices will abate of themselves if they be brought every day to the shrift.*
-Seneca

Virtuous thought, words and behavior result in a natural ability to:

- Forgive, be grateful and feel joy,
- Live with inner peace and faith,
- Have reverence for all peoples and all life,
- Be motivated by the desire for purpose and meaning in life,
- Forgive injury and, most of all,
- Laugh and find humor in this very imperfect life on Earth!

When we take the step-by-step path outlined here, the achievement of strong and virtuous character may be clearly and logically pursued. These two simple practices require only commitment and implementation for success.

1. **Daily Retrospection (usually includes journaling)**
2. **Writing a Virtue Diary or Checking a Virtue Chart**

*Only the wise ones, whose thoughts are controlled and purified,
make the winds and storms of the soul obey them.
In the ship of your soul, reclines the commanding Master.
He does but sleep; wake Him!*
-James Allen

Cultivating Awareness for Personal Advancement

RETROSPECTION

Thinking back through our day is necessary for changing ourselves because only with conscious observation can we make decisions regarding our emotions, behavior and habits. This depth of self-examination not only applies to developing virtuousness but it improves the mental ability to concentrate, to self-observe and to choose feelings and attitudes. Change requires mental focus, decision-making and action. Emotions are not who we are rather a feeling response to what we think. Cognitive restructuring is the direct path to emotional intelligence and optimism.

WRITING AND JOURNALING

To deepen consciousness of self, process, emotion, direction and creativity, many people make a commitment to write at least three pages daily. Writing may not be your way, so please don't feel guilty if this is not your style. Knowing the self through focused self awareness is the first and most powerful practice for character development. Writing requires knowledge, understanding and definition. Contemplation bears the same fruits. We achieve the goal of focused and discerning knowledge of ourselves and our unique ways of experiencing the world through self-observation.

SELF-EXAMINATION AND NEW IDEAS

Use the Virtue Chart or the Daily Virtue Diary to work the daily discipline of self-examination and to plan new ways of living and relating.

Daily Retrospection for Self-Examination

Life is not a problem to be solved, it is a mystery to be lived.
-Soren Kierkegaard

Recall Your Daily Thoughts, Words and Deeds:

When first thou dost from soothing sleep arise,
Hasten about thy day's intended work;
Nor suffer sleep to fall on the soft lids
Till thrice thou has each act of the day recalled;
How have I sinned? What done? What duty missed?
Go through them first to last; and, if they seem
Evil, reproach thyself, if good rejoice.
Toil at and practice this: this must thou love;
This to the Path of Heavenly Virtue leads.

-from *The Golden Verses of the Pythagoreans*

1. **READ THE SCROLL:** For effective cognitive restructuring, learn what your thoughts, words and actions look like when you are true to the virtue. At the end of the day, read the **Virtue Scroll** for the week or month.
2. **RETROSPECTION: Think backwards through your daily experience.** Holding the virtue in mind, (eg: Patience) observe when you had an opportunity to be patient. Consider how patiently you responded to people and experiences in your thoughts and words and actions. Did you express patience? Could you have been more patient? Are you more or less patient than you had thought? How do you feel when you're impatient? patient?
3. **GATHER THE DATA:** Note a plus or minus on your **Virtue Diary** or **Virtue Chart** for each event. Do this without judging yourself. Be accurate, keep to intelligent observation like a scientist taking data in an experiment.
4. **NEW IDEAS:** As each day comes, you will find yourself becoming more conscious of your possible choices to think and behave with patience. Then you will move from awareness into embodiment of your new insights and ideas and **the virtues will naturally become second nature** for you. You will usually gain a sense of power for good because it was a direct result of your decision.

Goals for Strong Character

Ninety percent of the world's woe comes from people not knowing themselves, their abilities, their frailties, and even their real virtues. Most of us go almost all the way through life as complete strangers to ourselves.
-Sydney J. Harris

NOTICE THAT TODAY IS BETTER: Seeking virtue turns our eyes to the shining best of being human. If we become discouraged, we can remember to make precious where we are today. Our advancement is the reasonable outcome of what we have learned up to the present. Turning to look back and to see how far we've come can keep us inspired to continue the journey.

THE SPAN OF HUMAN GROWTH: The four columns in the chart below show a simple example of how we can view the growth of humanity. It conceptualizes a continuum which acknowledges the profound lessons many of us have already mastered in human maturation:

1. **PRIMITIVE:** the innocence and ignorance of original primitive awareness
2. **BARBARIC:** the damage done by peoples who have learned to defend and fight
3. **CIVILIZED:** the effort for respect and peace through order and civility
4. **REVERENT:** the goal of society reaching to make life honorable and happy.

Humanity Advances: From Primitive to Reverent

PRIMITIVE	BARBARIC	CIVILIZED	REVERENT
IMMATURE	WOUNDED	MATURE	VIRTUOUS
SURVIVING	WARRING	THRIVING	HONORABLE
CARELESSNESS	INCOMPETENCY	RESPONSIBLE	EFFICIENCY
RIVALRY	REVENGEFUL	NOT RETALIATING	FORBEARANCE
FEARFULNESS	COWARDICE	STRENGTH	COURAGE
DEFENSIVE	PREJUDICE	LISTENING	TOLERANCE
HAPHAZARD	DESTRUCTIVE	ORDER	PRECISION
INSINCERE	HYPOCRISY	HONESTY	SINCERITY
TAKING/USING	GREED	GIVING	CHARITY
CONTROLLING	IMPATIENCE	WAITING	PATIENCE
REACTING	INDISCRETION	PROBLEM-SOLVING	DISCERNMENT
JEALOUSY	MALICE	SHARING	KINDLINESS
SELFISHNESS	TREACHERY	LOYALTY	DEVOTION
SELF-PRESERVATION	ARROGANCE	RESPECT	HUMILITY



VIRTUE RECORD

Date:

Today's Virtue:

The news for today and how I did or didn't live with the virtue:

Insights I have about myself and life today:

Insights about my virtue practice today:

Virtue Reflection: +	-
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Ideas for self-refinement tomorrow and/or in the future:

Virtue Log: The Practice of Virtue in Mind, Word and Deed

Virtue is not to be considered in the light of mere innocence, or abstaining from harm, but as the exertion of our faculties in doing good.
-Joseph Butler

VIRTUE	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Retrospection	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -
Efficiency							
Forbearance							
Courage							
Tolerance							
Precision							
Sincerity							
Charity							
Patience							
Discernment							
Kindliness							
Devotion							
Humility							

VIRTUE	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Retrospection	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -
Efficiency							
Forbearance							
Courage							
Tolerance							
Precision							
Sincerity							
Charity							
Patience							
Discernment							
Kindliness							
Devotion							
Humility							

As you think back through your day, place plus marks and minus marks in the box for the day. Read a Virtue Scroll a day and watch your pluses increase and your minuses decrease!



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