

What Does It Mean to Be Virtuous?

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“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...” (Titus 2:11-12).

Sometimes it seems that the world at large suffers from a lack of clear moral standards. In the midst of all the noise, it can be hard to find the right compass to guide our decisions and actions. But God has given His people grace to live with virtue in every age, including our own.

Though many associate virtue with specific traits like purity or kindness, it is actually meant to be more. Being virtuous is really an overall approach to life that brings a level of excellence to all we do and say. God calls us to pursue it, because He knows how impactful we can be in our relationships and ministry as a result.



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What Is Virtue?

The Merriam Webster Dictionary definition for virtue reads, “conformity to a standard of right; a particular moral excellence; a beneficial quality or power of a thing; strength or courage; a commendable quality or trait; a capacity to act.”

Some Synonyms listed are: distinction, grace, merit, potency, valor, and value. So, according to this entry, virtue is not only good, but full of potential and power to make things in and around us better.

Throughout time, virtue has been highlighted in philosophy and religion. Greek thinkers such as Plato and Socrates pronounced certain traits – namely prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice – to be basic, or “natural,” virtues for all men. Roman and Medieval Christian thinkers agreed that these were to be pursued.

"And now these three remain: [faith](#), hope and [love](#). But the greatest of these is love" ([1 Corinthians 13:13](#)).

Later, three more virtues were added, based on the Apostle Paul’s letters to the early churches: faith, hope and love. It has been taught that these “theological” virtues are given by God, to be developed within each believer. And in the act of becoming a more virtuous person, other wonderful qualities will begin to emerge. This whole process is not by chance or by one’s own strength, but through the working of God.

What Makes Something or Someone Virtuous?

To be called virtuous, a person must consistently display a high level of excellence in his or her life. It’s not a matter of reaching perfection, which is impossible. Rather, it is a call to adopt and practice those principles that keep us growing in Godly grace.

A person of virtue makes the progression from knowing what is right to doing what is right. He or she intentionally chooses what to say, do, and value, reaching beyond the good toward the best. In every situation, a virtuous person knows that they have an opportunity to honor the Lord and reflect Him to others.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others” ([Matthew 5:14-16](#)).



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What Does the Bible Say about Virtue?

Scripture makes it clear that virtue is something to be sought after and prized. God Himself is by nature completely good, and sets the example for us.

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” ([1 John 1:5](#)).

Since we are made in His image, we already have the potential within us to be morally excellent. But as humans, our sin nature can lead us astray from God’s best. So we must fill our minds with Scriptures that will keep us in line with Him.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” ([Matthew 22:36-39](#)).

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but [be transformed by the renewing of your mind](#). Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” ([Romans 12:2](#)).

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your [faith](#) goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” ([2 Peter 1:5-8](#)).



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Some Good Virtues Listed in the Bible

God didn't announce one complete set of qualities that make up a virtuous life. But within the pages of His Word we can piece together a sense of the kind of traits that a person of integrity strives for. Paul's teaching, for example, tells us to trade our worldly ways and take up God's Ways instead.

"But the [fruit of the Spirit](#) is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" ([Galatians 5:22-24](#)).

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" ([Colossians 3:12](#)).

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" ([Ephesians 4:2](#)).

[Bible Verses about Virtue](#)

Scripture provides lots of teaching on what it looks like to walk with a virtuous spirit, as in [Proverbs 31](#) - a composite portrait of a Godly woman:

"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies...She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life...She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness" ([Proverbs 31:10,12, 25-27](#)).

The Apostle Peter made a bold claim about all of God's people as he urged them to aim for greatness:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” ([1 Peter 2:9](#)).

Many verses talk about the benefits that come with living in a virtuous way.

“Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield” ([Psalm 5:12](#))

“...he will never let the righteous be shaken” ([Psalm 55:22](#)).

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” ([Galatians 6:9](#)).

The Bible also clearly gives cautions for those who are not seeking virtue in their lives:

“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out” ([Proverbs 10:9](#)).

“Better the poor whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse” ([Proverbs 19:1](#)).



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How Can We Strive to Be More Virtuous?

Becoming a more virtuous person is a process that lasts a lifetime. It can be difficult at times, but we aren’t doing it alone. In fact, God wants to show us each step of the path and to walk it with us. And if we’re wise, we’ll follow Him.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” ([2 Peter 1:3](#)).

One of the keys to growing in grace is knowing God better. If we invite Him into a deeper relationship, our Father will reveal more of His character to us. And as we spend more time with Him, we'll appreciate His qualities, and want to imitate them.

The Apostle Paul gives us the first step in [Philippians 4:8](#).

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

It stands to reason that if we think about those kinds of things regularly, our behavior will start to align with them. We can train our minds to become virtuous, which will lead to an outward display of it.

Here are some activities that will help virtue become second-nature to us:

- Read and meditate on Scriptures that talk about virtue - to remind and encourage you.
- Pray about it, confessing ways that you've fallen short, and ask Him to keep working in you - we all need that renewal along the way.
- Share with a trusted sister or brother in Christ, for accountability and fellowship as you pursue it - they might be inspired by your journey
- Think of how living with more virtue would look in your life, and make a list of simple and practical ways you can begin to show it - to begin heading toward the goal.

The world often sends the message that moral standards aren't so important anymore. But as believers, we have the chance to prove that righteousness is something to value now more than ever. God desires to equip and strengthen us to impact the culture by being people of virtue.

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” ([1 Peter 1:15-16](#)).