

THE LITTLE BOOK
OF VIRTUES

By
Edward Goble

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The Prayer of St. Ephraim. St. Ephraim the Syrian, a sainted monk and venerable father of the 4th century.

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To my daughters, who live steady, virtuous lives before
God and man, with selfless humility, overflowing grace,
and practical, unfailing love for all.
God grant me the faith to follow your example.

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VIRTUE

REFLECTING THE BEAUTY OF GOD

People are like a bag of apples. In most bags, even if they are the same variety, there will be juicy, delicious apples, if you're lucky most will be like this. But mixed in with the yummy apples there may be a few that are a little bruised from the rough trip in from the orchard, or a bit soft due to mishandling by careless shoppers. Some apples may even taste a little funny, on account of being unripe or pithy.

Once in a while there may even be one or two in your bag that are downright rotten—right to the core. You never know what you’ll find.

With the exception of youngsters who are, for the most part, untarnished by the orchard or the people tending it—at least for a while, in most groups of people there will be an assortment of pleasant, bruised, pithy, unripe, overripe, and downright rotten individuals. Like the apples in the bag, people all look pretty much the same, the smiles are similar, their various sizes and shapes and colors are comparable, the difference is in the heart. It is what’s on the inside that really matters.

“... The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”
(1 Samuel 16:7 NLT).

During a career stint that required occasionally hiring people, I always tried to dig a little deeper than the beautiful calligraphy on the diploma announcing competency in a particular field of study.

Finishing what you started has value, but what you are made of, your character and virtue, is much more valuable.

I was looking for signs of virtue—of faith, hope, knowledge, wisdom, honesty, humility, obedience, patience, courage, faithfulness, self-control, kindness, gratitude, and love—a few of the virtuous traits that should be cultivated in every life.

Like the sun hitting your face on a crisp fall morning, or the sweet crunch of the first bite of a tree-ripened apple, virtuous lives are refreshing. Virtuous people are the ones others gravitate toward, because they are strong and safe, they welcome, support, and uphold, they are full of love, and forgiveness.

Those were the kind of people I wanted working for me. You don't find these things on a transcript, virtue is found between the lines, hidden in the mundane, and most apparent in the little things of life.

Tilled into the rich earth of the soul, virtue helps form a person into the leader, parent, spouse, employee, soldier, doctor, friend, or pastor that others want to be around. Follow. Emulate.

These traits are not particularly Christian. You don't have to be a Christian to be virtuous. The virtues should be sought by all people, because they are wholesome and true. They are truth, light, and life. They are the building blocks of morality and ethics. As such, they are desirable among all people, to help create a reasonable, prosperous culture and society. Because of this, each person should know the virtues and pursue them intently, personally, honestly. They should be taught in school, practiced at home, encouraged and worked, like a summer garden.

For the person who is spiritually sensitive and watchful, cultivating a virtuous life, points in every way, to Jesus Christ, who Himself, is the way, the truth and the life—the light and glory of

God. Even as the virtues are true they each connect, inextricably, to Jesus, because He is the Truth. In a real sense, then, pursuing virtue is pursuing Jesus, building into our hearts and minds the same qualities of true personhood that He displayed on earth.

In this way your life on earth will be like Christ, true and good, and you will reflect the beauty of God to the world. Like a breath of fresh air, your virtuous life will be a blessing to your family, a safe harbor for your friends, and a lighthouse of healing for the bruised and broken.



THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM*

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages, Amen

* St. Ephraim's prayer has always seemed to me a plea for God's blessed virtues to take the place of the baser tendencies of my flesh, and, taking their place, make me a more Christlike, and better man.



FAITH

THE FOUNDATION OF VIRTUES

“... God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3 NKJV).

God plants faith in the human heart from its first beat of life. It is faith that assures the innocent child that he or she is safe in the sanctity of his mother’s womb.

This subconscious assurance is nothing less than the biblical definition of faith:

The confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead. (Hebrews 11:1 TLB).

Most mothers can sense the trust that the little one has placed in them, and adjust their lifestyles accordingly to become the safest haven for their special little one. And a short time later, the baby arrives to joyful tears, thankful hearts, and whispered prayers of dedication, asking God, by faith, for the wisdom and resources to provide for every need of this perfect, beautiful, wholly dependent, tiny child.

Faith to faith.

Unfortunately, there are families full of brokenness, where the caregivers themselves have battled or are battling addiction, abuse, or some other evil and have reduced living to fearful, timid existence. Here, faith is not cultivated; it is starved and beaten down. Survival reigns. The

beautiful, affirming virtue of faith is lost, and people begin living selfishly instead of hope-filled. They deny God's existence and, sadly, in their ignorance, are played the fool by Satan, who wants only to steal joy, kill faith, and destroy destiny.

The fool has said in his heart; there is no God. (Ps.14:1 NKJV).

But the seed God planted is not dead, just dormant. And all it takes for a life to be newly animated is for one to look to Jesus, turn to Him with whatever microscopic bit of faith remains. You will find that He is right there, arms outstretched, waiting to love you and remake you into a person of faith.

... Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. (Hebrews 11:6 NLT).

We are created to "sincerely seek Him." It is the rhythm of human nature to press towards God. Virtuous faith is alive and active, never fearful, or

stagnant.

Father Abraham was called righteous because of His faith (Genesis 15:6). What sets Abraham's faith apart from others? It was always in motion. Abraham was told by God to gather his people and possessions and move to a land he did not know, and he did it (Genesis 12:3). He believed God and did as God said - Faith. Time after time in his life, God spoke, and Abraham responded by faith, never wavering.

The virtuous Christian life begins here, with faith.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV).

Faith in Christ is not just a belief or agreement; living faith is active. Faith moves us to repentance, baptism, communion, and the cultivation of the virtues by God's grace. We act by faith in

the light of God's truth.

Life is to be lived by faith. We have confidence that God's loving purpose will be evident in every situation, and we can move forward without fear because He is love. Through faith, God calls us to be lighthouses of confidence, in a world full of fear and self-seeking.

If the virtues were a building, faith would be the foundation. Dig deep and fill your life with active, God-honoring faith, and the walls of love, hope, gentleness, self-control, and the rest, constructed on top of faith, will help you stand firm against any storm of life.

Recently I held one of our granddaughters, a little bundle of energy about 11 months old. She spotted something she wanted to investigate on a side table by the couch where we were sitting. She started navigating that way, up and over Papa's left arm—reaching. I gave her plenty of slack, so to speak, wondering how this might end. Just when she got to the point where her admirable

core strength wouldn't hold her up anymore, she looked back at me for a moment.

She probably knew she was going a little too far and expected me to reel her in. Or, maybe she just wanted to confirm who was holding her. It was Papa. She was safe. So she turned back to her task and nearly jumped out of my arms, stretching for the object she desired. I had a solid grip on one of her ankles, so she was never in harm's way, but her confidence gave this old man a valuable lesson about faith—my granddaughter knew she was free to move as far as possible within Papa's grip. She wasn't about to sit still and let life come to her; she wanted to go get it.

That is faith, dear one. Make sure it is God who is holding your ankle, then go for it!



PRAY FOR FAITH

Dear Lord, thank you for planting the seed of faith in my heart. Sometimes it seems so small, and I waiver and doubt. I don't want to live that way, Father, I want to live like Abraham, respond to Your voice, and follow Your lead. Like a baby, confident in the arms of her grandfather, I want to live by faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.



HOPE

THE PARTNER OF FAITH

If faith is the foundation of all virtue, then hope is faith's catalyst. Like faith, hope is unseen.

We were given this hope when we were saved. If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently. (Romans 8:24-25 NLT).

Hope is the stimulus of each new venture, each

new relationship, each life choice that might improve your lot, or make you better. “Will it work?” “Can it be done?” “I hope so.” And you step out, on the foundation of faith, and take the risk. Hope.

Without hope, people hurt by love would never try again. Without hope, Abraham might have stopped short of his destiny.

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept moving—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” (Romans 4:18 NLT).

For a person of faith, there is always hope. Hope moves us to trust that God hears when we pray.

For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God. (Psalm 38:15 NKJV).

We have the hope of heaven and eternal life because of the presence of Christ within our lives on earth.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27 NKJV).

The incredible reality of the Christian life is that Christ dwells inside us. His presence, in community with our spirit creates the anticipation and hope of eternal life and victory over sin and death.

Still, some people lose hope. Losing hope is one of life's most devastating possibilities. Because when hope is gone, the void is filled with despair, and despair is hard to overcome, because the soul feels dead, and has given up.

Despair is how broken trust, abuse, neglect, or desertion, can ruin a life, for it sucks out the hope, and knocks the wind out of the soul. When hope is gone, a person stops caring about themselves or others; they feel lost, alone, weary and weak.

For the person without hope and in despair, the answer to any problem is, "Why?" If given an

action plan, or a path out of desperation, the best their heart can muster is, “Why?” Anything that requires some kind of action, even a small one, will only lead, they believe, to further rejection. “Why? Why should I? The end will be the same.”

The only way to salvage a life without hope is the unfailing love of God. Loving that person in practical, tangible ways, that slowly bring healing to their broken soul. It is painful, because it is the last thing they want, and the only thing they need. People without hope will do everything in their power to get you to reject them, but you never do. Because Christ is in you, giving you hope. So you have the strength to love them, for years if need be, until hope is kindled again in their hearts through faith.

Like every virtue worth having, we must cultivate hope. Life has a unique way to help us in this regard—it involves trials, perseverance, and character development.

And not only that, but we also glory in

tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5, NKJV).

Hope is a byproduct of living life. Through the ups and downs, we learn persistence and determination; we learn to stick to a job until it is complete. Perseverance leads to character, integrity, trustworthiness, and, ultimately, hope. We become faith-filled, hope-full people, trusting Jesus in all things.

The partnership of faith and hope, of God molding our lives to look more like Jesus, will never end. There will always be tribulation; there will always be temptations. Through the trials of life, our virtue will be stretched, honed, and matured, and gradually, the beauty of Jesus will shine brightly from our lives for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.



PRAY FOR HOPE

Father, I thank you for filling my heart with hope. For without hope, I know emptiness and despair would be my only companions. I pray for those with no hope. I pray that faith would arise in their hearts as they see Your beauty and experience Your unfailing love. In Jesus' name, Amen.



KNOWLEDGE

EXPERIENCING TRUTH

Recently, our daughter sent a short video of bath-time with our 10-month-old granddaughter. It was titled, *Cutest Video of All Time*, and, for biased grandparents, this was an appropriate title. The little one was standing inside the bathtub in a few inches of water splashing away and “answering” her mother’s questions posed from across the room.

“Say Papa,” she asked. And the baby responded

with a verbal trail of “papa-papa-papa,” which sounded like an old VW running on three cylinders.

“Say Hi, Nana.” The baby raised an arm and waved toward the camera, saying, “nana-nana-nana,” while splashing and dancing and lighting up the little room with her two-tooth smile.

She’s learning. At this point, she is mimicking the people she trusts, but pretty soon, the knowledge will be hers, personally, taking shape in her mind and heart, alongside letters and language, and flavors, shapes, sounds, and feelings. Her little brain will be filled with information, but on a deeper level, the information will be uniquely hers because of how it connects to her emotions, her will, and her spirit.

In this way, the virtues of faith and hope are connected to knowledge. As a child, I hear about God’s love from my mother and father. That basis of information can then be affirmed by experience throughout creation, in the beauty of

a spring flower, that explodes from a bloom with brilliant color and a heavenly scent that attracts bees and hummingbirds. And in a million other sites, sounds, flavors, and more. God's beauty throughout creation confirms the things I learn about Him from people I trust. More than academically, I begin to know Him, in the experience of His energies, surrounded by His love, creativity, and goodness.

The Apostle Paul acknowledged that the world's most deep-thinking philosophers were aware of God's overarching presence in creation this way when he quoted:

In Him we live and move and have our being... (Acts 17:28 NKJV).

But Paul is quick to add that God can be known in a deeper way—deeper than knowing He is there, and more profound than experiencing the energy of creation. He told Timothy:

(God our Savior) who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of

the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:4-5 NKJV).

Jesus explained that knowledge of God through Jesus Christ is true, eternal life:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3 NKJV).

Knowing God, knowing Jesus Christ, in living experience and intimate union, is the highest form of the virtue of knowledge.

What begins as early as an infantile mind can start to register stimulation and information, and matures through the loving input of parents, and teachers, is ignited through wonder and the energies of God in creation. Virtuous knowledge reaches the depths of the heart and soul when it becomes truly alive in our spiritual rebirth. When everything we know about the world, about life, about ourselves, is understood in light of God's love and beauty.

Virtuous knowledge is higher than science and deeper than understanding. It is to experience the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Christ, to know God through the revelation of His Son, and receive the indwelling comfort and instruction of His Holy Spirit.



PRAY FOR KNOWLEDGE

Dear Father, let the knowledge of You reach every heart, first with childlike faith and hope, then, O Lord, lead us to know Jesus. Not academically, Lord, or vicariously, through the faith of others, but profoundly, personally, in the depths of our spirit, soul, and life. In Jesus' name, Amen.



WISDOM

THE PATH OF PEACE

Do you know someone wise? Someone who truly possesses wisdom? Wisdom is part common sense and part keen insight. Wisdom is careful and measured, operating based on knowledge and truth. Just living life brings a measure of wisdom, which is one reason to show respect and honor to those older than yourself, and never look down on them because of the side effects of aging.

A great deal of wisdom can be acquired by living a courageous life. If you've ever sat down with a WWII Veteran or spoke with a person that grew up during the Great Depression, you learn this fast. They have wisdom born of experience, which brings great value to their perspective and depth to their life.

Wisdom, like the other virtues, is not a virtue possessed only by Christians. There are many Christians who are not wise at all and a lot of non-Christians who are very wise. But the wisdom of the world falls well short of the wisdom of God. The difference between the wisdom of the world and godly wisdom is that God's wisdom is true, pure, and selfless.

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (James 3:17 NKJV).

Some of the great peacemakers of the world

have demonstrated wisdom sourced in God. Gandhi, Tolstoy, ML King jr. and the Dalai Lama, to name a few.

But there is yet higher wisdom revealed in scripture, imparted by God to His children, the “hidden wisdom of God.”

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:6-10 ESV).

The wisdom the Apostle Paul is describing is embodied in Jesus Christ.

Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:24 ESV).

To know Jesus is to know God's wisdom, He revealed God to man as the incarnate Son of God. Jesus embodied, or personified, the wisdom of God. In other words, Jesus is the Wisdom of God in human form.

No one has ever seen God. But the unique one, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us. (John 1:18 NLT).

The wisdom to seek as you move through life is God's wisdom, discovered and imparted through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus understood God, for He is God the Son, God incarnate. And Jesus understood humanity, as John wrote:

No one needed to tell him about human

nature, for he knew what was in each person's heart. (John 2:25 NLT).

If you want to understand people, to understand life, and how everything fits together in the grand scheme of things, get to know Jesus. Spend time in His Word, seek His heart in prayer, be honest, transparent, and trust Him to bring clarity to your soul. He will. And virtuous wisdom will be your companion. Not for yourself, but for others. By the wisdom from above you will:

...give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace. (Luke 1:79 NLT).

Whatever direction God leads you in life, cultivate the virtue of divine wisdom, and tenderly help others find the path of peace.



PRAY FOR WISDOM

*Dear Father, I desire common sense and insight—
but bring me deeper, Lord, into God's wisdom. Let me
know You, in the power of Your resurrection, and live
without partiality or hypocrisy, led by Your precious
All-Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



HONESTY

THE REFLECTION OF A PURE HEART

On the surface, honesty seems like a natural character trait that would be important to everyone. Why, then, would honesty be considered a virtue? Because honesty is not as easy to find as one might think.

Honesty is implanted in the heart of each person, and many people are basically honest. But honesty has a fearsome enemy that is also resident in every heart and wants to be king—

the flesh.

The flesh is out for itself. It is selfish, wants to be liked, wants to get its way, wants comfort, and preserves itself at whatever cost. The flesh is the enemy of every virtue, but one of its primary and first concerns is to crush honesty.

Our flesh wields a powerful, effective weapon—the lie. Lying is thought of, by our flesh, to be perfectly normal behavior. Lying is speaking things that are not true; it is saying something about others and situations that are not true. Presenting ourselves in ways that aren't true is lying, as is deceiving others, purposefully withholding all or part of the truth.

And all these nuances of lying can be perpetrated publicly, socially misrepresenting yourself, or a situation or they can be internalized, lying to yourself about something you need to acknowledge—denial. It can also be portraying false strength when you are weak, or pretending to be pure-hearted and humble because you know

that is what people want to see, these are all forms of lying.

Even supposed good people, religious people, like the scribes and Pharisees, were not what they appeared to be.

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23:25-28 NLT).

God hates lying. One of the Ten Commandments forbids it:

You must not lie. (Exodus 20:16 TLB).

In the familiar passage in Proverbs listing the “seven things which are an abomination to God,” lying makes the list twice!

There are six things the Lord hates— no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family. (Proverbs 6:16-19 NLT).

So a life that is honest, truthful, trustworthy, and not projecting an image of itself that is false, is rare—but it is worth it!

Honesty is not expedient or gainful for the flesh, so it is held in esteem only by those who depend on others' honesty (the defendant, the abused, the vulnerable and needy), and in an unseen realm where God looks at human hearts seeking purity and truth.

Don't fall in with the fools, dear one. Their acceptance is a trap. Beauty, love, truth, and grace in life are found among the honest and pure of heart, people who speak the truth in love, and never twist a situation for personal gain. Be honest, and you

never have to worry about being caught in a lie. In your honesty, God will defend you and never leave your side.

The flesh will always be against you, always testing your heart, so you must cultivate honesty deeply into the soil of your life.

Ultimately, your adversarial, lying, flesh, through disciplines of fasting and prayer, will take its rightful place in your life, in service to soul and spirit, making your body, indeed, a temple of the Holy Spirit. It will be a lifelong fight, but living every day in honesty will lead to victory over the flesh and peace in Christ.



PRAY FOR HONESTY

Dear Father, my flesh is always before me, seeking advantage and gain at the expense of others. Give me victory, Father, through honesty. Make my heart pure, O Lord, and let me be selfless, never twisting a situation or deceiving another, but speaking the truth in love, let me be a trustworthy brother and a faithful servant. In Jesus' name, Amen.



HUMILITY

THE MOTHER OF VIRTUES

Our great internal adversary goes by an assortment of names: the flesh, pride, selfishness, conceit, a haughty spirit, but however you want to slice it, pride is embedded in each human, and it is the cause of all sin.

If pride is the weakness, common disease, or, “Achilles heel,” of every person who would seek to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, then humility is the antidote, the cure.

Humility is the hope of a selfish heart.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; (Luke 1:51-52 ESV).

In an age where pride is highly prized, it can be challenging to know what true humility looks like or how pride can be so bad, literally, the polar opposite of humility. So it is vital to make a distinction about pride.

Being proud of a relative who served their country, a well-earned report card, or a good shot made in a game, after a lifetime of practice in the driveway, is different from the selfish conceit that makes one think they are better than others.

Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. (Romans 12:3 NLT).

Sinful pride stems from wrongly estimating yourself, thinking you are better than you are. On the other hand, humility is more outward focused, more concerned with serving and doing good for others, than with inflating a perception of my value or authority.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." (Philippians 2:3-4 NLT).

Humility isn't looking down on yourself or deflecting praise in self-depreciation. Humility isn't moping around like a worthless sinner, with zero self-esteem—this isn't humility. Acting humble doesn't make you humble. Humility isn't inward-focused; it sees life through a different lens.

Humility is viewing your life and the lives of others through the eyes of Jesus. He sees you, and every person, as a beautiful and unique

creation, a beloved person for whom Jesus gave His life. You are of utmost value, and He loves you unconditionally. When we can see ourselves through that lens, it leads not to pridefulness, but gratefulness and humility. And humility leads us to love our neighbor and do good to everyone, as Jesus did.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11 NLT).

There is no good deed that is below the humble servant of Christ, no person, or part of God's creation, unworthy of our care, and godly compassion.

Christ redeemed the world. Humility is simply being faithful to love and serving in His redemption field, without regard to self or personal gain.

The simple life of humility creates the fertile soil of perspective needed to excel in every good and worthy pursuit. In this way, humility is the mother of all virtues.



PRAY FOR HUMILITY

Dear Father, today and every day remind me to deny myself, to honor others, and to see You in every face, serving and loving unconditionally. I humble myself under Your mighty hand, O Lord, may Your will be done in me today. In Jesus' name, Amen.



OBEDIENCE

THE PATH TO FREEDOM

Obedience may be the most straightforward and most difficult of the virtues to practice. It is also among the most important, as it is the essence of our response to the Gospel.

If you love me, obey my commandments.
(John 14:15 NLT).

Obedience was the only rule in the Garden of Eden, and the original humans couldn't follow it.

Obedience is the fundamental virtue that separated each of the Old Testament saints from their peers. Noah built the ark (Genesis 6). Abraham moved his family based on God's word to him (Genesis 12). Their belief was bolstered by obedience. And on and on. The faithful received God's word and took action, followed, obeyed.

The prophet Samuel said as much to King Saul.

What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22 NLT).

God takes delight—He is honored, glorified, pleased—when we obey Him.

Jesus is the ultimate and consummate example of obedience, for He obeyed His Father perfectly.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38 NKJV).

And this is what Jesus' life entailed—watching, listening, and doing— only what God the Father was doing.

Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. (John 5:19-20 NKJV).

I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. (John 12:49 NLT).

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I am he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me. (John 8:28 NLT).

God knows best. He has revealed Himself to humanity through His Son, Jesus Christ, God with us. Jesus is God in the flesh and modeled a life of perfect obedience. We look to the life and teachings of Jesus to learn how to follow in His steps.

But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (James 1:25 NLT).

For some people, obedience can seem like bondage. On the surface, we can feel that our options, freedom, even our potential, will be limited by following the directives of another. But note that James called the Bible “the perfect law that sets you free,” because obedience to Christ is the path of freedom.

Without Christ Jesus, we are slaves to sin, and while we might think we are free to come and go as we please, we are citizen prisoners, held cap-

tive and blindfolded by one the Apostle Paul called, “the god of this world.”

Satan, who is the God of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. (2 Corinthians 4:4 NLT).

It is into this realm of spiritual blindness that the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, was born and demonstrated, with power and authority, His Lordship over creation, and defeated Satan in the battle for the human soul. Through His death, burial, and victorious resurrection, He took captivity captive and redeemed the world and every inhabitant, giving sight to all who would believe. Jesus described it like this:

Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house. (Mark 3:27 NLT).

In simple terms, this is what Jesus did to the god

of this world (Satan)—bound him and plundered what he had stolen and wanted for his own—creation and the souls of humankind. Jesus said no.

People might think freedom is the absence of rules, living without regard to the law of God. But this is the worst kind of unnecessary captivity; Satan has nothing for you but deception. True freedom is the gift of grace available only through the finished work of Jesus.

Jesus defeated sin, death, and the grave so that each human can be genuinely free, experience the goodness and grace of God, and walk in the destiny Christ has for those who love Him and are obedient to His commands.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him...

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will

come to him and make Our home with him.
(John 14:21,23 NKJV).

Dear one, make obedience to Jesus your priority. Sow His Word deeply into your heart and mind so that you will know His will and commandments. Then, make the sometimes difficult choices to follow, obey, and remain on the narrow path.

Instead of blinders, you will discover binoculars, instead of chains, you will find wings. Obedience is true freedom.



PRAY FOR OBEDIENCE

Dear Father, obedience seems so easy, but I find myself weak and failing in practice. Help me, Lord, to follow you carefully, keep me on a short lead, for my heart is Yours, and I want to be obedient to your ways and follow in your steps. Thank you, dear Jesus, Amen.



PATIENCE

THE VIRTUE OF THE LONG RUN

But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15 NKJV).

We have noted that the virtues are natural attributes, common to humanity, that must be cultivated in a person's life to be effectual. They are not exclusively Christian traits. The virtues take on a new dimension for the follower of

Christ, whose spirit has been made alive by the Spirit of God. For example, anyone can learn patience, but it takes work, it is frustrating to learn, and progress is often slow. But for the Christian, patience is a fruit of being filled and led by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit in our lives is, throughout our lifetime, conforming us into the image of Christ, so we gradually begin to act, talk, and think like Jesus. And since Jesus was the perfect human expression of all the virtues, one of the byproducts of a Spirit-filled life will be virtuous fruit. That is, our lives will produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Like an apple tree that produces apples and a plum tree bears plums, the Spirit-filled life produces patience and other virtues.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Galatians (5:22-23 NLT).

For the Christian then, there is unseen assistance in cultivating the virtues, and in the case of patience, most of us can use all the help we can get. Even in our modern society of instant everything, some things can't be accomplished immediately.

Jesus likens patience to farming in the parable of the sower and the seed (Luke 8:4-8). The seed sown on good soil, "brings forth fruit with patience," (Luke 8:15 KJV). That is good trees, in good soil, produce good fruit, but not immediately. It takes time. It takes patience on the part of the farmer because the process has to be honored to reach the desired result. The parable analogy is the effect of the Word of God sown into a person's heart, which will produce the fruit of repentance, that is, a changed life by the Spirit of God.

It doesn't happen overnight. Life change takes time. The Bible says that we have been "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). That is, the old me

died with Christ and was “buried with Him in baptism” (Romans 6:4). It might seem that new life with Christ would be sin-free and virtuous, but that isn’t how it works. It’s a struggle to be conformed into the image of Christ. There are adversaries everywhere, as close as your own heart.

There is a curious verse in Psalm 118 that says:

God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. (Psalm 118 27 KJV).

There were large protrusions on each corner of the temple altar, in the Old Testament, that resembled heavy animal horns, that was part of the altar design. Binding the sacrifice is curious because the animal would be slain before being arranged on the altar. Why tie a dead animal to the altar?

One idea is that binding the sacrifice to the altar was symbolic. And the symbol was of a living

sacrifice. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, died for the sins of the world, nailed, alive, to the cross of Calvary. In like manner, we now come to God through the atoning blood of Christ, by faith. We offer ourselves to God now—not after we die, but now, as living sacrifices.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1 NKJV).

Sometimes I think the horns on the altar were intended for people like me—people whose tendency would be to wriggle off when the heat increased. So the Psalmist writes, “Bind the sacrifice,” tie it down!

Virtuous patience means submitting to the process, building endurance, staying on the altar, remaining on the cross—when everything in my flesh is saying to slip those knots and run, patience tells me to stay right where I am.

If I want to be like Jesus, it will take a lifetime—and it will be worth every lesson, every challenge, every denial of my flesh. Because Jesus is Lord, and He is worth it.

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6).

God will complete what He's started in you, dear one, hang in there, stay yoked to Christ, bound to the altar.



PRAY FOR PATIENCE

*Dear Father, grant me patience for the journey.
Bind me to the cross, Lord. I know following You is
a journey of self-denial and sacrifice—an adventure
of loving, giving, and serving. Keep me close, Father,
I need your help today and every day. In Jesus' name,
Amen.*



COURAGE

THE KEY TO PATIENCE

Courage. It's all the lion wanted in the Wizard of Oz. He was known as a coward and he wanted to change that, to be courageous. Courage is a virtue we should all pursue.

Courage is the opposite of cowardice. Courage steps up when cowardice runs back. Courage is a product of faith, while cowardice comes from unbelief. Cowardice fears everything—courage fears only God.

Fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment. (Proverbs 9:10 NLT).

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life; Of
whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1
NKJV).

...In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world. (John 16:33 NET).

Courage is needed to face life's trials and tribulations. When the unexpected comes crashing down, and your faith is pushed to the limit, it takes courage to get up and face the day, to stay hopeful, to trust that Jesus will cover the small things, as well as the overwhelming. Courage.

Courage is a foundational virtue for life, like faith, hope, and humility. These undergird their sister virtues. Courage especially bolsters patience. Courage is to patience as a strong hull is

to a boat—It makes it stable, unsinkable, and seaworthy.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience (perseverance, endurance, steadfastness) have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4 NKJV).

Without the courage to persevere, we could never have victory in prolonged conflict. Some of the things that oppose us are not conquered overnight; they take time, patience. Correcting lifestyle choices that have led to unhealthy excess or addiction takes time to overcome. Obesity, drug addiction, alcoholism, anger, disease, are examples of tribulation that can take time to defeat in life.

Jesus has overcome the world, He has defeated sin, death, and the grave, and He has made us more than conquerors over the weapons of

Satan, by the blood of Jesus Christ. We have the victory. But like the children of Israel moving into the promised land, we must take the land, defeating the enemies—This is the long obedience, the extended conflict. This is where patience has its perfect work—this is where courage is essential.

Without courage, endurance can run thin against strong opponents. This is why the Lord told Joshua, before beginning their journey into the unknown:

Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9 NKJV)

“Be courageous, Joshua, this will be a long, difficult journey, but I will be with you every step of the way!” What an encouragement that is to the soul! God is with you. You can do this!

If you find yourself fearful of taking on something in your life that you know will take a long time, maybe years, to defeat, and you dread it and wonder

if you have what it takes, the patience, the perseverance—you need courage.

One of the ways to cultivate courage, dear one, is fasting. In fasting, you deny yourself for a relatively short time and replace the craving and hunger of your flesh with trusting the Lord. Instead of consuming food, you feed on the goodness of the Lord, practice His presence, pray, read His Word—and demonstrate to your flesh that Jesus is your Lord, not your appetite.

Fasting and prayer will help develop the courage to believe that the things that require long perseverance to overcome are within the victory Jesus has already provided. Take courage in His victory. You can do it. The promised land is just over the river.



PRAY FOR COURAGE

Dear Father, I have giants in my life that I have never been able to defeat. Give me the courage to be patient, Father, I desire to be obedient in everything, not only in the areas that come easy to me but also in tearing down mountains, and defeating giants. Help me develop courage by fasting, Lord, and help me walk in Your victory. In Jesus' name, Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

THE TRUSTWORTHY VIRTUE

Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man? (Proverbs 20:6 NKJV).

Faithfulness is keeping your word, even when it is impossible. Faithfulness is working hard, and doing your best in what God has given you to do, even when the prideful voice within says the work is below you, or unappreciated. Faithfulness is doing what you say you will do, even if it takes years.

Jesus promised to return to earth one day, and His disciples have been longing for that day since the moment He ascended to heaven. Its been a long time, it is an old promise. But Jesus is faithful. If He said He would return, He will. Faithful is one of His Kingly names.

The Apostle John was given a vision of the end times and the second coming of Christ. In the vision, John saw heaven opened, and a white horse on which Jesus was riding, and John said—

He who sat on him was called Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11 NKJV).

John saw a future, yet to be realized event—the second coming of Christ. It is still to come. As of this writing, Jesus has not returned to earth. And there is no telling how much longer it will be before what Jesus promised, and what John saw in the vision will come to pass on the earth. But we know it will because Jesus is Faithful, He keeps His Word.

This is how we must conduct ourselves, dear one.

Faithful to our word, no matter what. And faithfulness is difficult because it is hindered by our number one adversary—pride. When pride is wounded, it calls for pay-back, “If you don’t like me, then I don’t like you. So there!”

But we are called to a perfect love that forgives and is unoffendable. Part of faithfulness is the ability to stand up to ridicule, hate, and any harmful attack, but not respond in kind. That is, try and defuse intolerant circumstances, and people, humbly, with the confidence that Christ is in you and with you. Face ridicule with kindness, deescalate hatred with love and pray for those who persecute you. Being faithful to stand up for the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, is vital because hateful intolerance is rampant. Vulnerable, abused, or marginalized people, will one day need a faithful person, someone like you, to stand for them in truth. Selfless humility will empower faithfulness, giving you the power to deny yourself.

Isn’t this what Jesus did as He was being betrayed

by Judas and arrested? Think about what Jesus endured yet remained faithful —

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led
as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep
before its shearers is silent, So He opened
not His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7 NKJV).

Isaiah saw a vision of the future rejection of Jesus, the Messiah, and described what he saw as a lamb being led to slaughter. He could have resisted and escaped—He was God Incarnate. Yet He chose to endure the suffering and rejection for our sake. By His actions, He exposed the shallow, narrowmindedness of His accusers.

Jesus had surrendered His will to the will of the Father. He wasn't living for Himself, or His comforts, He was humbly walking the path God set before Him. Willingly, selflessly, lovingly.

Pride is always looking for a crown—only humility will lead you to a cross.

Pride will resist the cross with kicking and screaming. Following my pride will never lead to God's path for my life. Faithfulness is following Jesus; it is complete dedication to what God has given me to do and be in life. Receiving God's will with joy is faithfulness.

In the parable of the talents, the master gives His servants resources: some a little, some more. But the point of the entire story is faithfulness. Those who work with what they have are faithful, while those who are fearful and reluctant called wicked and lazy (Matthew 25:26 NLT).

The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together! (Matthew 25:23 NLT).

Faithfulness is challenging whether or not a person is Christian. Since pride and self tend to lead the non-christian person, faithfulness is doubly hard. For the Christian, help comes from the

presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Faithfulness is among the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter five.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23a NLT).

So faithfulness is a byproduct of a Spirit-filled life. Faithfulness is among the virtues God will grow in your life as a result of laying aside your agenda and picking up His.

Follow Jesus, dear one, and He will lead you to a selfless, faithful, and truly fulfilling life.



PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS

Dear Father, I desire to be a faithful man. Both before You, my family, my friends, and the vulnerable, marginalized people in this generation. By Your Spirit help me stand in faithfulness even in impossible circumstances. In Jesus name, Amen.



SELF-CONTROL

THE VIRTUE OF MASTERING THE MIND

Self-control is something everybody thinks they have until they don't.

Real self-control is more than mastering discipline, routine, and the forming of new habits. Real self-control is the freedom that comes from mastering the lusts of the mind, referred to by the apostle John as:

The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16 NKJV).

This mastery is the control over our tendency to overdo things, to take things too far.

It's not wrong to eat; everyone needs to eat. But gluttony is too far; it is a lust of the flesh. Money is not bad because we need to make our way in society by working, buying, and selling. But when the accumulation of wealth becomes our focus, we have gone too far.

Humanity is in bondage to lifestyles that focus on self. Our fallen culture constantly stimulates behavior that revolves around ourselves, with little consideration of others. So we get all we need, then, and having plenty, lust for more and more. We become slaves.

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? (Romans 6:16 NKJV).

They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you. (2 Peter 2:19 NLT).

Part of our redemption in Christ, though, is deliverance from slavery to sin. Jesus' victory over sin has set us free. Even though many, maybe even most, Christians remain imprisoned to some fleshly vice, the cell doors are no longer locked. Bondage to sin is not our destiny; it is our choice.

Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over

you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14).

The virtue of self-control is the final fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. As we cultivate a Spirit-filled, Spirit-directed life, these healthy fruits should begin to grow and develop. Just as the Holy Spirit's presence brings freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17), the fruit of the Spirit replaces the formerly corrupted selfish focus of our lives, with the Christlike ways of outward-focused love.

Mastery over the lusts of the mind and flesh, through self-control, will lead us to experience the beauty of God's design for our lives. We are free from fleshly entanglement, free to live simply, free from the guilt that comes from our double-minded flesh, free to be who God created us to be.

Self-control is the path to mastering the mind.



PRAY FOR SELF-CONTROL

Dear Father, like most of the people I know, I tend to overdo things. I need Your help, dear Lord, to take my focus off of myself and keep my eyes on You and Your ways. Lead me into simplicity and grace, and out of this selfish, me-focused, pattern of life into which I have fallen. Let me experience, in this life, the freedom found in mastering the self-centered tendencies of my flesh. In Jesus' name, Amen.



KINDNESS

THE DISARMING VIRTUE

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4 ESV).

For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 117:2 NKJV).

One of the ways God's love is revealed to

humanity is through His goodness and kindness. Kindness is an action of God's love. He is rich in kindness, and His kindness is great toward us. He is even kind to those who are unthankful and wicked:

Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. (Luke 6:35 NLT).

Love, goodness, and kindness are the very nature of God, which, disarmingly, leads people to repentance of their sins and acknowledging His great love in Christ.

This is the power of kindness. Kindness is another fruit of the Holy Spirit, and when it offered, your attitude and actions begin to reflect the heart of God, and people will be changed. Perspectives, attitudes, bias, and even behavior

can change because of virtuous kindness.

I was once at a large gathering where we were seated at dining tables with people who, for the most part, didn't know each other. One man I did recognize at our table was a world-renown composer and pianist. I knew who he was, while he wouldn't have known me from Adam. I was shy, fumbling in the presence of someone I considered to be a true star, and tried to appear calm. Some of the others at the table didn't know him and talked like he was a regular guy like the rest of us. I was star-struck.

To my surprise, this man walked around the table and met each person, asked about family and home, and showed genuine interest. Then, he began to serve, hopping up to get extra napkins, refilling drinks.

His kindness was disarming. Unexpected.

I thought, "Doesn't he know who he is?" He's a big star; I should be serving him. But, I wasn't seeing God's perspective at all. This man was just

like the rest of us. What separated him wasn't his notoriety; it was his virtuous life. His kindness.

He made the meal one of the most pleasurable I had ever experienced, for I was privileged to see God's loving-kindness on display through one of His children—in this instance, through musical genius, and servant of God, Kurt Kaiser.

I didn't get to know Mr. Kaiser very well, but it is my understanding that he exuded this kindness and servanthood to everyone, all the time, not just strangers at a party. And that's the difference in virtuous kindness and just being a thoughtful person. Genuine kindness is especially tender and giving to those closest to us—the most familiar. Because the people closest to us tend to be the ones we take for granted.

We don't mean to, we just expect them to know, or expect them to be different, or better, and we become short, curt, even harsh and cruel. That kind of behavior with the ones we genuinely love should make us question the kindness we

display around strangers. Is it an act? Or do we truly love them, and demonstrate that love with kindness, forgiveness, and gentleness?

Kindness isn't weakness. It is not condoning bad behavior or overlooking sin. On the contrary, kindness forgives sin and brings correction; only it does so without cruelty. It does so by walking the extra mile, generous with our time and resources, and doing good things that are unexpected.

When was the last time you took over a chore for a sibling, just because you love them? How about opening the car door for your wife, or mother, or completing a task she hates, like laundry or dishes, or washing windows.

The apostle Paul summed up virtuous kindness best when he wrote:

If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you

say be good and helpful so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

(Ephesians 4:28-32 NLT)

Kindness, when I receive it I find myself wanting to be better, to be kind, authentic, Christlike.



PRAY FOR KINDNESS

Dear Father, Even as your loving-kindness has drawn me to Your side, I pray that you would help me be kind in the same, disarming, genuine way. First to the people closest to me, my family and friends, and then everyone I encounter, in every situation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Edward Goble



GRATITUDE

THE RHYTHM OF A
PEACE-FILLED LIFE

Gratitude gives thanks for all things. In our country, we set aside a day for giving thanks. It occurs during the work-week, so, many people are thankful for a day off—unless we are in one of the millions of service positions for which Thanksgiving is just another, or even a particularly busy, workday. During the Thanksgiving holi-

day, many gather with family, if possible, to share a wonderful meal, watch football, or any number of traditions. On Thanksgiving, even people who are not particularly religious, gather for a prayer of thanks to God.

I believe our Father in heaven receives all of these prayers with joy, even though He won't hear from most of these folks again until they're experiencing their next crisis.

But heaven's glory is rich on Thanksgiving because declarations of gratitude are rising in prayer. And gratitude is the natural posture of creation before the Creator. It is what we were born to do. That thirty seconds of gratitude directed to God, one day each year, is how we were created to live all the time. Thankful. Grateful.

No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. (John 3:27 NLT).

In the Old Testament, thanksgiving was the daily rhythm of the temple. The Psalms were read, setting the tone, and the atmosphere re-

sounded with thanks, all through the day.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the Most High. It is good to proclaim your unfailing love in the morning, your faithfulness in the evening... (Psalm 92:1-2 NLT).

In the early church, the celebration around which the church gatherings flowed, was the Eucharist. Eucharist means “thanksgiving,” and is known in some churches as Communion or the Lord’s Supper. It is the celebration of the wine and bread, which Jesus initiated at the Last Supper with His disciples (Matthew 26:26-28).

In the same way that thanksgiving was the rhythm of the Old Testament temple, thanksgiving is the core and strength of the New Testament gathering through the centrality of the Lord’s Supper.

When our church-life is centered around the Eucharist, our life away from the church gathering is influenced to reflect that same gratitude.

Because at the table of the Lord, the Lord's Supper, we come face to face with the fact that what we need the most, the wholeness (salvation), that comes from being made alive in Christ, is something Jesus did for us on the cross. We could never pay the price of redemption ourselves. Consciously living out that truth leads to a life of gratitude.

Not selfishly, thankful only that I get something from God, instead, with gratitude, grateful to God for His grace toward all humanity. When we are grateful to God we become grateful in general. We show gratitude and thankfulness toward people, not for what they can do for us, but for their intrinsic value and worth before God.

The opposite of gratitude is complaining, which grows out of bitterness. The selfish, proud heart can never be truly grateful because it is never satisfied, and is so easily offended. Think about this when someone close to you does something relatively minor, which sets you off. Check your

heart, return to gratitude, give thanks for them, and forgive.

And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:20 NLT).

God knows what is best. Believing this opens a gateway in your soul for virtuous gratitude before God and all people, from strangers to your closest companion.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Romans 8:28 NLT).

Good and bad are the same to those who are giving thanks for all things by faith in God's goodness and love. This is gratitude.



PRAY FOR GRATITUDE

Dear Father, I pray for a grateful heart. Lord, let my life flow with the rhythm of heaven, peaceful gratitude for Your love and goodness knowing You are on the Throne, and You are God and King. In Jesus' name, Amen.



LOVE

THE GREATEST VIRTUE

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13 NKJV)

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God showed how much he loved us by

sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we

will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. We love each other because he loved us first. (1 John 4:7-19 NLT).

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. (John 13:34 NLT).

The greatest and most radical virtue is love. Love is the manifest energy and expression of God in creation. The Bible reveals the unfailing love of God on every page. God graciously plants this beautiful virtue in the heart of every person and, by His Spirit, leads us to love Him and love each other. Everyone can love. But love is truly animated and brought to its full purpose and

expression when we are in Christ.

And this is the essence of love, that everything we do and say would be for the well-being of others.

Love is our lives' energy spent in acts of selfless, genuine goodness for others, and for creation in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is how God loved us first, by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us while we were still sinners.

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8 NLT).

Jesus describes the radical, disarming power of love in the Sermon on the Mount.

You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heav-

en. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48 NLT).

Dear one, loving with God's love, being truly 'others focused' in all we do, is difficult. Seeking good for all, in every circumstance, and blessing them in God's name, will cause our prideful flesh to rise and scream, "Me first!" or "Not them!"

Ask Jesus for strength, practice love through giving, learn the discipline of fasting, and pray. God will help you love from a pure heart because that is His plan—to reveal His risen Son to the world, that is, to every person on the planet, through the selfless love of people like you.



PRAY FOR LOVE

Dear Father, thank you for your unfailing, everlasting love. Through love, You have created and sustained all that exists and saw fit to plant this vast and unfathomable love within your children's hearts. Dear Lord, please grow this choice fruit of love in my heart and life, both for Your eternal glory and for the life of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Edward Goble



EPILOGUE

Dear one, as you cultivate the virtues in your life, always look to Jesus, keep your eyes on Him, study what He said, note His actions and the way He treated people. Emmulate Him, let His mind be in you, be conformed into His image. Walk in love and make no provision for the flesh.

Yours in Christ,

Ed Goble

Campbellsville, Kentucky

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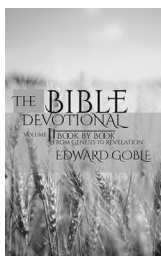
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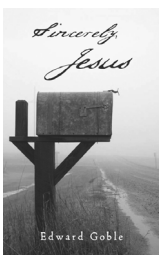


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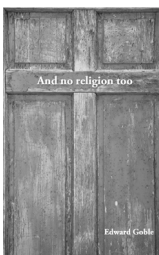
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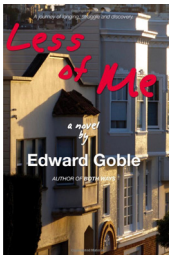
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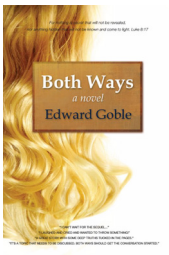
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