

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Hearing God's Voice

In a world with many distracting messages, we must listen to God's voice. Only God can tell us how to find happiness in this world and in the next.

What Is Morality?

Morality is much more than labeling actions as "right" or "wrong." Morality is knowing what ought to be done.

Living a Moral Life

Choosing "the good" and uniting ourselves with God's will is the essence of living a moral life. Making good choices moves us toward God and happiness with him.

Character and Virtue

Our free choices and actions shape character—who we are and who we are becoming. Virtues are healthy, good habits that dispose us to make good and moral choices.

Nine Steps for Living a Moral Life

Appreciating our humanity, using our intellect, letting the law guide us, and imitating Jesus are among the nine steps to a moral life presented in the text. Following these steps will help us live moral, virtuous—and happy—lives.

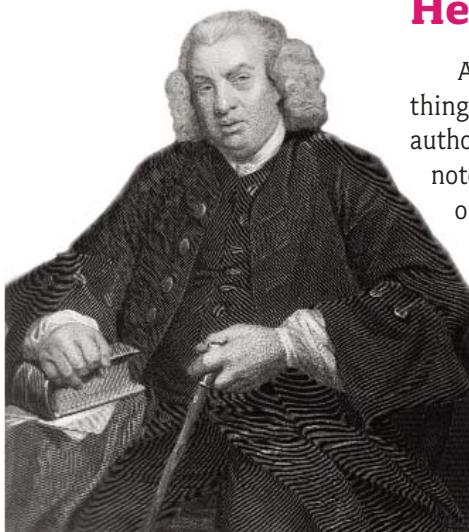
INTRODUCTION



What Is Life in Christ?

Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

Colossians 3:12–17



Samuel Johnson

Hearing God's Voice

Asking questions is typically a human thing to do. Eighteenth-century English author and lexicographer Samuel Johnson noted that curiosity is the sign of a vigorous intellect. He observed, "Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last."

One thing most people are curious about is how to be happy. We want to recognize true happiness, and we want to do what we need to do in order to achieve it.

The Gospel of Mark records a poignant example of a rich youth who sensed that Jesus Christ was the source and key to a happy life. The young man approached Jesus and asked him a question that echoes down through the ages, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17). The young man was interested not simply in being happy in this life, but in being happy for eternity.

We can learn something important from this wealthy youth, namely, his intelligence to approach Jesus and ask *him* for his teaching. For Christians and others who want to know the secret to happiness, the essential first step is to draw near to Jesus the Teacher and learn from him. In a world with so many voices barking conflicting messages at us about how to achieve happiness, we absolutely must go to the Master and hear his voice.

But this is only the first step. The second step is also essential: We must adhere to his instruction—we must do what Jesus says—or we will not attain happiness. We must *put into practice* his example and his teaching by using the many graces he bestows on us.

Attending to and following Jesus' teaching will help us lead moral and virtuous lives, the key to lasting happiness. With the Lord at our side, and armed with the many graces of the Holy Spirit, we can

begin to experience in this life the happiness God intends for us for eternity.

As you study and apply the truths of Christian morality in the chapters that follow, know full well that the Lord Jesus walks the journey with you and seeks for you the happiness that you desire.

What Is Morality?

The words **morality** and *morals* conjure up various reactions from people. For example, the American satirist H. L. Mencken claimed that morality is "the theory that every human act must be either right or wrong, and that 99 percent of them are wrong." The famous novelist Ernest Hemingway was less negative about morality when he wrote, "About morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after." The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who once cynically proclaimed the death of God, concluded, "Morality is the herd-instinct in the individual."

Do these statements have anything to do with a definition of morality? Is morality simply a matter of labeling most human acts as wrong? Is morality simply a matter of monitoring your feelings after you do something? Is morality simply a matter of following the crowd?

Authentic morality is much richer than any of the above statements. Morality has been described as a special kind of knowing—a "knowing of what ought to be done." Humans—both as individuals and societies—are constantly confronted with decisions and choices that demand answers and a course of action. For example, take a student who must decide which course to take, a young person trying to decide whether or not to accept a date with someone he or she barely knows, or a society that is trying to decide whether or not to permit homeless people to sleep in the city park. Each of

morality

Knowledge based on human experience, reason, and God's revelation that discovers what we ought to be and what we ought to do to live fully human lives.

What Will You Do?

For each of the following cases, decide what you would do. Then explain whether your choice is morally right or not.

- *You are involved in an accident with a parked car late at night in a known crime area. The damage done to the other car is slight. No one saw the accident. What will you do?*
- *You meet a homeless person on a city street corner. He asks you for some money for lunch. You also smell wine on his breath. What will you do?*

What's Right? What's Wrong?

In today's pluralistic society, it is very difficult to get people to agree on what is right and what is wrong, what is moral and what is immoral. Judge where you stand on each statement according to the scale below.

1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=not sure; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree

STATEMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
1. There is never a good reason to lie.					
2. Cheating on tests or quizzes, even if the teacher is unfair and everyone else is doing it, is always wrong.					
3. Abortion is a great assault on innocent human life and can never be justified.					
4. It is wrong for a rich country to engage vigorously in an arms race when it has so many poor people in its midst.					
5. Outside of marriage, it is wrong to engage in sexual intercourse and the actions leading up to it.					
6. People have an obligation to worship God even if they don't feel like it.					
7. Given the efficiency of today's justice systems, it is virtually impossible to justify capital punishment.					
8. It would be dangerous and imprudent to lower the age for legalized drinking of alcohol.					
9. It is wrong to assess or judge people by the color of their skin.					
10. Pornography—both soft and hard—debases human sexuality. It should be outlawed.					

- Why did you choose as you did?
- Would your parents agree with your choices?
- Choose a particular opinion-influencing group (for example, music moguls, Hollywood tycoons, Washington lawmakers). Predict how the majority in that group would rate each statement. Offer evidence for your view.

these decisions and many more like them involve answering the basic questions, "What must I do?" or "What must we do?"

A traditional definition of morality calls it "the science of what humans ought to do by reason of who they are." This definition has held up well over the years. By terming morality a science, we are saying that we can acquire knowledge about a particular subject, in this case, the subject of how we should act as humans. Catholic morality draws on three main sources of knowledge to reach conclusions about how we should act: *human reason* (our God-given intellects), *human experience* (the collective wisdom of others, living

and dead), and *divine revelation* (the teachings of God as found in the scriptures and the teachings of the Church).

Note that the second major feature of this definition holds that human behavior should flow "by reason of who they are." This means that morality hinges on a correct view of the human person. Only if humans are understood as precious children of God who have incalculable dignity can they be expected to act with freedom, dignity, and responsibility. As we will see in the next chapter, a proper view of the human person—derived from reason, experience, and divine revelation—is the



1. What do you think it means to be happy?
2. How do you think you can best achieve happiness?
3. Review the advertisements in a popular magazine. Choose several that depict what the advertisers are promoting to achieve a happy life. Share and discuss these advertised messages with your classmates.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit (CCC, 1830–1832; 1845)

To live the moral life, the Holy Spirit gives us seven gifts that help us follow the Spirit's prompting to live good lives. These seven **gifts of the Holy Spirit** are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They complete and perfect the virtues in Christians who receive them.

In addition, the Holy Spirit allows us to partake in the firstfruits of eternal glory. Twelve in number, the **fruits of the Holy Spirit** are evident in a person who is living a Christ-like, moral, and upright life: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

gifts of the Holy Spirit

God-given abilities that help us live a Christian life with God's help. Jesus promised and bestows these gifts through the Holy Spirit, especially in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The seven gifts are wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel (right judgment), fortitude, piety (reverence), and fear of the Lord (wonder and awe).

fruits of the Holy Spirit

Described as the firstfruits of eternal glory, they are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

Magisterium

The official teaching authority of the Church. The Lord bestowed the right and power to teach in his name on Peter and the apostles and their successors, that is, the pope and the college of bishops.

- *Support of the Church* [CCC, 2030–31; 2047]. The Church is both a mother and a teacher. Through the Church we receive God's Word, which contains Christ's law. The Church also confers the graces of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, through which Jesus himself comes to us and empowers us to worship the Father through upright, loving lives. Further, the Christian community provides the example and inspiration of many Christian heroes who have lived faithful lives, for example, our Blessed Mother, the disciple of Christ par excellence.

- *Help of the Magisterium* [CCC, 2032–2040; 2049–2051]. Catholics also believe that the pope and the bishops are the authentic teachers in the Church, possessing Christ's own authority to teach in his name the truths of salvation that pertain to faith and morals. This official teaching office is called the **Magisterium**. All people have the right to instruction in the way of life and truth. The official pastors of the Church have a corresponding duty to teach this truth. Other competent teachers (like theologians) and ministers should also share their gifts to help pastors explain God's truth to the people.

The teaching authority of the Magisterium also extends to the specific precepts of the natural law, reminding people of who they should be before God. So serious is this responsibility to teach and guide faithful Christians that Jesus has left the gift of *infallibility* to the pope and the bishops united to him. This gift of being preserved from error

extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed (CCC, 2035).

Guided by Christ-appointed teachers who have our best interest at heart, Christ's Church is a powerful help in learning how to respond in a fully human way to God. The Magisterium continually reminds us that we need to conform our actions to God's divine and eternal law, that is, his wise and loving plan for humans. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this plan can be discovered in the natural law and through God's revelation of the Ten Commandments and his law of love. For our part, we must form our consciences and develop our intellects in cooperation with the moral law and the teaching of Christ's Church.

- *Help of Jesus Christ, God's own Son and our Savior*. Jesus is our model and norm of what a fully human life should be. To be moral is to imitate Jesus, to be Christ-like, to allow him into our lives.

In summary, then, morality is a kind of knowledge based on human experience, reason, and God's revelation that discovers who we ought to be and to do to live fully human lives.

critically important starting point in deciding what is the moral way to respond.

MORALITY AS A RESPONSE TO GOD

Another helpful way to understand Catholic morality involves our quest to become responsible, both as individuals and communities. The key word here is *responsible*. Applied to persons, the word means having the “ability” to “respond.” Responsibility requires freedom and intelligence. Freedom and intelligence are two human qualities that enable us (give us the ability) to become good persons, to make right choices and engage in right actions, and to do our part to help build a more humane world.

But to what do we respond? The better question is to *Whom* do we respond? From a Catholic point of view, morality is a response to a loving God and a continuing venture to become fully the persons God wants us to be. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [1691–98] teaches, we are able to respond to God because of the following:

- *Intelligence and freedom.* God has given us intelligence to know the truth. God has also created us as free

beings with dignity, creatures who share in God’s own life. With God’s help and grace, we can determine our own lives through our decisions and actions.

- *Help of the Holy Spirit.* Humans are also sinners, prone to make bad choices and to engage in evil. However, because of Jesus’ self-sacrificing death on the cross, God gave to us yet another gift—the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to us and bestows on us his many gifts. These gifts enable us to follow the way of Christ, to walk on a path that leads first to a fully human and moral life and eventually to eternal happiness. The Holy Spirit allows Christ Jesus to live in and work through us. The Holy Spirit enables us to participate in God’s own divine life, makes us holy, and gives us the ability to make Christ-like, loving choices. The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts and graces we need to engage in actions that are pleasing to our loving Father.



REVIEW AND REFLECTION

1. Define the term *morality*. Explain the various elements of the definition.
2. List three sources of knowledge Catholics use to reach conclusions on how we should act.
3. In what way is morality a response to God?
4. What enables us to respond to God and live good lives?
5. List the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
6. Who is the *Magisterium*?



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Write a short profile of a Christian, alive or in heaven, who is for *you* an inspiration on how to live a faithful life. Discuss several examples of the person’s fidelity and goodness.

Living a Moral Life

[CCC, 2044-2046]

- ◆ What are some factors that keep people from doing the right thing?
- ◆ How would you describe someone who is fully human?

Living a moral life means to decide and then act according to God's plan for us. It means being responsible and cooperating with God's grace to live a fully human life.

Living a moral life by "choosing good" unites us with God's will and gives us a taste of true happiness. Making good choices allows us to walk down the path that will eventually lead to a final destiny of union with our loving God. On the other hand, when we choose evil over good we misuse the gifts that God has given us. We walk down a path that will ultimately lead to the opposite of happiness because we are acting contrary to God's will for us.

People do not always see the truth of these statements: "being good" leads to happiness; "being bad" leads to unhappiness. In the short term, sometimes it is hard to be good, that is, to do the right thing. We pay a price, and it sometimes hurts. Take, for example, Karen, who refuses to join in the mockery of an unpopular classmate. Karen might, in turn, be teased for siding with a "loser." But she does the good and moral thing by treating her classmate with respect. Karen can live with herself and hold her head high because she shows respect for another human being. An upright conscience does lead to happiness. As the popular saying goes, "If you want a rainbow, you have to put up with the rain." And the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, reminds us, "No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown."

In the short term, "being bad" sometimes seems to bring satisfaction. But how illusory and temporary this pleasure turns out to be because our acts do not mesh with how God intends for us to be. Take, for example, the college freshman who goes out to party every weekend, getting drunk each time. Unfortunately, the

immediate gratification of alcohol so often leads to a lifetime of misery and wasted talents. Whenever we act contrary to what God has in mind for us, we are at odds with our true selves and will ultimately be unhappy.

In brief, living a moral life is living in the presence of God. Being good is responding to God and God's incredible love. In addition to bringing us ultimate happiness, living a moral life:

- allows the Holy Spirit to work in us, making us like Jesus;
- strengthens our friendship with the Lord;
- makes us persons of integrity who are responding to our God-given vocation to be fully human;
- attracts other people to God and to the Christian faith, helping to build up Christ's body, which is the Church;
- and helps bring about God's reign on earth, "a kingdom of justice, love, and peace."

A GOSPEL EXAMPLE OF LIVING A MORAL LIFE

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.'" He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.



Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

—Mark 10:17–23

The dialogue between the young man and Jesus teaches us much about what it means to be good. Note how the young man wants to live a life of meaning and value, one that will merit eternal life and happiness. We are all like this youth; we all sense a connection between doing good and our eternal destiny.

In his answer to the young man, Jesus first points out that the goodness to which the young man is attracted has its source in God. God is good because God is love, so loving that he gave his only Son to the world so we may live (cf. Jn 3:16). God gives the definitive answer to our human existence. This good and loving God implanted in the young man, and in us, a desire to be good, loving, and moral. This same desire leads all people to approach

Jesus, God incarnate. Jesus' own goodness bears witness to God.

Made in God's image and likeness, the young man is attracted to the good and wants to know how to achieve it. Jesus immediately lists some of the commandments. These commandments—do not kill, do not commit adultery, honor your parents, and so forth—are part of God's covenant with all of humanity. They are the essential ingredients for living a fully human and moral life. These commandments find their fulfillment in the gospel, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in Christ's commandment to love.

By linking the commandments and eternal life, Jesus teaches of the necessity to obey God's word. When we ignore God's will for us, we act in a way that is contrary to our own good. In this gospel story, Jesus teaches us that

The commandments . . . are meant to safeguard the good of the person, the image of God, by protecting his goods.



Addressing the youth of the world, the late Pope John Paul II wrote:

"Jesus, looking at him, loved him." May you experience a look like that! May you experience the truth that he, Christ, looks upon you with love! . . . Man needs this loving look. He needs to know that he is loved, loved eternally and chosen from eternity.¹

- Write of a time when you felt Jesus' love.



“How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” What do you think Jesus means by these words?

- Read Mk 10:24–31.
- Then answer the following: What comparison does Jesus use to drive home his point? How do the apostles react? How does Jesus reassure them?

“You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness” are moral rules formulated in terms of prohibitions. These negative precepts express with particular force the ever urgent need to protect human life, the communion of persons in marriage, private property, truthfulness and people’s good name.

The commandments thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbor; at the same time they are the proof of that love. They are the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom, its starting-point. (Splendor of Truth, 13)

The young man assured Jesus that he observed the commandments. In Matthew’s account of this same dialogue, the young

man asks, “What do I still lack?” (Mt 19:20). Jesus sensed that this young man’s heart yearned for greatness, that he wished to do more. And, with great love in his heart, Jesus invited him to sell his belongings and come and follow him.

This invitation of Jesus to be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect, to love as Jesus loves, is the heart of the dialogue with the rich young man. Its message is meant for all followers of Christ. We are to “let go and let God” into our lives by clinging to the very person of Christ, to make him the foremost priority in our lives.



REVIEW AND REFLECTION

1. Who is the greatest help in living a moral, responsible life? Why?
2. What does it mean to “be good”?
3. In his dialogue with the rich young man on the good life, what does Jesus say is essential for gaining eternal life?
4. What more does Jesus ask of the rich young man in Mark 10:17–23?



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

“Measure your wealth by who you are rather than by what you have.” Briefly discuss how wealthy you are based on who you are. Also, discuss the strength of your current relationship with Jesus Christ. Is it great? Good and getting better each day? Or just OK?

Character and Virtue

Various surveys reveal some disturbing realities concerning the moral state found in Britain and America today. For example:

- The British are forgetting the Ten Commandments. Less than half of those surveyed could recall the commandments forbidding theft, murder, or adultery. Only 9 percent recalled the commandment not to lie. And only 4 percent remembered the commandment to “keep the Sabbath day holy.”²
- In a recent study of almost 25,000 high school students, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) said they cheated on exams and more than one in four (27 percent) stole from a store within the past year. Additionally, 40 percent admit they “sometimes lie to save money.”
- In this same study, 42 percent of the teens surveyed believe that “a person has to lie or cheat sometimes in order to succeed,” and 22 percent believe that “people who are willing to lie, cheat or break the rules are more likely to succeed than people who do not.”³
- Retail losses to shoplifting annually now amount to over \$33 billion with the average shoplifting case amounting to \$30.⁴
- “Pornography has grown into a \$10 billion business—bigger than the NFL, the NBA, and Major League Baseball combined—and some of the nation’s best-known corporations are quietly sharing the profits.”⁵
- Almost 1.5 million babies were born to unmarried women in the United States in 2004. This set a record. Fifty-five percent of the births for mothers ages twenty to twenty-four were to unmarried women.⁶

It is impossible to reconcile these responses to Jesus’ instruction to the rich young man to obey and put into practice the values of all the commandments, including telling the truth and not killing



others. These findings point out that our society is lacking in morality. How can we improve? Two ways, discussed below, involve building one’s character and cultivating virtues.

CHARACTER

Our free choices and our actions, which are outward expressions of our choices, form who we are. Our character is at the very heart of our self-chosen moral identity.

Our character is how we respond to the divine invitation to love God, self, and neighbor. Character is our “yes” or “no” to Christ’s invitation to friendship. *Character is who we really are and who we are becoming through our choices and actions.* It is the part of us that does good or chooses evil.

Have you ever watched the formation of an icicle? As each drop of water freezes, the icicle gradually grows, sometimes to well over three feet. If the water droplets are clean, the icicle that results is crystal clear and sparkles in the sun like a diamond. But if some droplets are dirty, the icicle that forms is murky, marred by the turbid water. It is like this with our character. Our good thoughts and decisions—important as well as trivial—help to form us. Everything we process—experiences,

Character is what a person is in the dark.

—ANONYMOUS

- ◆ If you found a wallet containing \$1000, would you return it to its owner?
- ◆ If you were an employer, would you hire yourself?
- ◆ If you were a parent, would you be proud to have a child like you?

images, words—helps create our character. Each of our freely chosen actions forms us as a person and strengthens or weakens our character.

The important lesson here is to take note of the droplets that form our lives. “Small” lies, arrogant attitudes toward others, evil intentions—all contribute to the defiling of a good character. Conversely, each seemingly insignificant act of kindness, truth-telling, and love forms us into people with Christ-like characters.

Here is one way to summarize character:⁷

1. Persons with good moral characters are *loving*. They love God above all. They love themselves. And, following Jesus, they recognize, respect, and respond in love to all other human beings.
2. People with good moral characters are *fully human* persons. They are free, intelligent, responsible, open to growth, social, and spiritual.



virtues

“Firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith” (CCC, 1804).

theological virtues

Three important virtues bestowed on us at baptism that relate us to God: faith, or belief in and personal knowledge of God; hope, or trust in God’s salvation and his bestowal of the graces needed to attain it; and charity, or love of God and love of neighbor as one loves oneself.

3. Good people are *virtuous* people. Virtues are the building blocks of a good character.

VIRTUES (CCC, 1803–1829; 1833–1844)

Virtues are the heart of the moral life. Virtues are healthy, good habits that help us do good and empower us to become what God wants us to be. These personal qualities emphasize that who we are greatly affects what we do. Virtues form our character and make us Christ-like. Virtues are moral skills for Christian living that help us act naturally. They equip us to face both internal and external obstacles on our journey to God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines virtue this way:

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. . . . Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. (CCC, 1803–4)

Church teaching lists two major categories of virtues: theological and cardinal.

Theological Virtues (CCC, 1812–1828)

The theological virtues are gifts from God that empower us to be good so that we may do good. Infused by God into our souls, the three **theological virtues** of faith, hope, and charity (love) enable us to live in relationship to the Blessed Trinity. Their origin, motive, and object is the one, Triune God. These virtues serve as the basis of a Christian moral life. The theological virtues will be covered in more detail in Chapter 7. What follows is a brief definition of each:

- *Faith*. This theological virtue enables us to believe in God, all that God has said and revealed to us, and all that the Church proposes for our belief because

God is truth itself. Christians must cultivate their faith, but also proclaim it, bear witness to it, and spread it to others.

- *Hope*. Hope enables us to desire heaven and eternal life, trusting in Christ's promises and relying on the help of the Holy Spirit and his graces. Hope keeps us from getting discouraged as we live the Christian life and keeps us going when times get tough and lonely. It makes it possible for us to strive for true happiness and live the life of Jesus' Beatitudes.
- *Charity (Love)*. This greatest virtue of all empowers us to "love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God" (CCC, 1822). Charity enables us to observe the commandments and love everyone, even our enemies. This key virtue helps us practice all the other virtues and uplifts our human ability to love, raising it to the perfection of divine love.

Cardinal Virtues (CCC, 1805–1811)

Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are the **cardinal virtues**, from the Latin *cardo*, which means "hinge." The cardinal virtues are the source of all other good habits. Even non-Christians have recognized the cardinal virtues as the "natural virtues." We can gain these virtues through education and repeated practice in using them. Like anything worth doing, it takes effort to grow in the virtues, especially for humans who are weakened by sin and are prone to be lazy. But with God's help and the graces he gives us through the Holy Spirit, it is possible to strengthen these "spiritual muscles" that are necessary for robust Christian moral living.

What follows is a brief description of the four cardinal virtues. Later chapters will discuss them in greater detail.

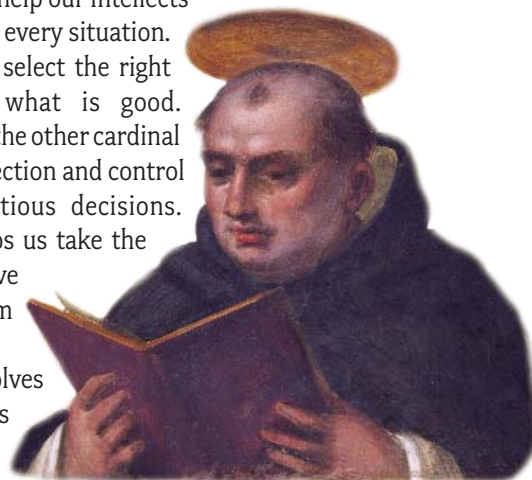
Prudence. St. Thomas Aquinas called prudence "right reason in action." Prudence is practical wisdom, the virtue of responsible decision-making. Prudence uses memory, foresight, imagination, and

openness to learning to help our intellects discover what is good in every situation. Prudence also helps us select the right means of achieving what is good. Prudence permeates all the other cardinal virtues, giving them direction and control as we make conscientious decisions. Prudence, in short, helps us take the moral principles we have learned and apply them to concrete cases.

Justice. Justice involves relationships with others and our life in community. Justice gives both God and neighbor what is their due by right. Justice, for example, requires us to worship and adore God since he is our all-loving Creator. And it helps us respect the rights of all other humans.

Fortitude. Fortitude gives us the strength and courage to stand firm with our own convictions and do the right and moral thing. Fortitude helps us to resist temptation and to overcome obstacles to living a good life. It helps us make sacrifices and overcome fears of criticism, failure, rejection, and disappointment as we pursue the good. Fortitude gives us the "spiritual guts" to resist peer pressure which might tempt us to conform to evil practices.

Temperance. Temperance is the virtue of moderation that brings balance to our life. It helps regulate our appetite for the good things God has given to us, such as food, drink, sex, and possessions. Temperance assists us in counteracting the vices of greed, gluttony, and lust by helping us master the appetites of our senses and indulge them within honorable limits.



St. Thomas Aquinas

The shrewd man does everything with prudence, but the fool peddles folly.

—PROVERBS 13:16

cardinal virtues

The four hinge virtues that support moral living: prudence, or "right reason in action," concerning the best way to live morally; justice, or giving God and each person his or her due by right; fortitude, or courage to persist in living a Christian life; and temperance, or moderation in controlling our desires for physical pleasures.

A Self-Examination on the Cardinal Virtues

How well do you practice the following virtues? Check the appropriate box.

CARDINAL VIRTUES	Very Well	Well	Needs Work
PRUDENCE (SOUND JUDGMENT)			
I respect learning and am open to new ideas.			
I reflect on past mistakes before acting.			
I can recognize goodness, truth, and beauty when I see it, and I can pick out what is evil, false, and ugly.			
JUSTICE (FAIRNESS TOWARD OTHERS)			
I both acknowledge and respect the rights of others.			
I do my duty, honor my promises, and follow through on my commitments.			
I respect the reputation of others, refrain from gossip and rash judgment, and give others the benefit of the doubt.			
FORTITUDE (COURAGE)			
I am able to put up with inconvenience, disappointments, and setbacks.			
I am willing to face problems and obstacles and refuse to run away from them.			
I am my own person and make strong efforts to overcome peer pressure, especially when others want me to do wrong.			
TEMPERANCE (SELF-CONTROL)			
I can say “no” to myself and wait for rewards and gratification.			
I enjoy in moderation the pleasures of food, drink, entertainment, sports, and the like.			
I am an actor rather than a reactor. For example, I respect rude people rather than returning nastiness to them.			

Nine Steps for Living a Moral Life

This introduction has provided some key terms—morality, character, and virtue—that are important in the overall study of Christian morality. From a Christian point of view, this material has also briefly reflected on what it means to “be good.” The remaining chapters of the text will focus on nine steps necessary for living a good moral life. Briefly, the steps are:

1. *Appreciating the gift of being human.*

We respond to God in a responsible way when we act as the beautiful creatures God made us to be, that is, in the divine image and possessing tremendous dignity.

2. *Using your intellect.*

God endowed us with intellects that can systematically search out the right course of behavior when confronted with various options. When we use our God-given intellects we can discover the right thing to do. Chapter 2 presents a “STOP Sign” method of moral decision-making, which is an organized technique of applying our intellects to moral issues.

3. *Looking to the law to guide your freedom.*

Possessing freedom enables us to be responsible. However, misusing freedom is morally hazardous. Thankfully, to help guide our conduct, we have objective norms—laws—which are based on the wisdom of past ages.

4. *Imitating Jesus.*

Jesus is the preeminent norm and guide for Christians who want to live a moral life. Learning from his example, heeding his teaching, and allowing him to live in us are all profound helps in living a Christian life of virtue for God and others.

5. *Forming, informing, and following your conscience.*

Through our consciences, God’s voice calls us to be who he created us to be. As a

practical judgment in discerning right from wrong, we must develop an upright and truthful conscience and then have the fortitude to follow it.

6. *Repenting and seeking forgiveness when you sin.*

Unfortunately, at times, we do not take the moral and virtuous course of action. We violate the dictates of God’s law and our own consciences. We sin. When this happens, we need to repent, reform our lives, and gratefully accept the mercy of our loving and merciful Savior.

7. *Loving God above all.*

As our loving Creator who is the source of all our gifts, God deserves us to love him with all our hearts, souls, and minds (Mt 22:37). God has first loved us. By observing the first three commandments and exercising the virtues of faith, hope, and love, we can begin to return God’s love.

8. *Loving yourself.*

Without a healthy love of self, it is very difficult to love others and God. We must love ourselves by practicing virtues like gratitude, humility, and temperance and by sharing the many gifts God has given us. We also show love of self by observing the commandments.

9. *Loving your neighbor.*

We prove our love of God by loving our neighbor, including our enemies. We love others by exercising virtues like justice, kindness, and respect and by following the commandments, especially the fourth through the tenth of the Decalogue.

Following these nine steps of moral living is intended to help Christians to live moral and virtuous lives. They will help us attain happiness in this life and in a life of eternity with our Triune God.



- Add two personal statements under each virtue.
- Which virtue needs the most work in your life right now? State a plan of action for how you can improve in this area of your life.



A Study in Character: “Have It Your Way”

The fast-food Burger King franchise is known for its advertising motto, “Have it your way.” This true story happened at a Burger King in Deltona, Florida, when Henry Snowden drove up to the take-out window and was given two bags. One contained the sandwiches and fries that he and his friend ordered. The other had the day’s receipts of \$4,170 in it. The clerk at the window mistakenly handed Henry the money bag that the manager inadvertently plopped down next to Henry’s food order. The policy of this particular Burger King was to place the day’s earnings in a regular food bag rather than in a bank-deposit bag in order to fool potential robbers.

When Henry got home and discovered the mistake, he concluded that he should take the money back. But he admitted he was tempted to keep it since it would help him with his Internet provider company. The next morning he did in fact return the misplaced receipts. He was rewarded with tears of thanks and a free lunch.

Restaurant workers told him that he would probably get a reward. But Henry said he received something much better than any monetary reward—a clear conscience. He said, “I’m not a glory hound. I’m glad I was able to do the right thing. And I feel better than I’ve ever felt.”⁸

- Do you think Henry was obligated to return the money, especially knowing that the restaurant manager engaged in the unwise practice of placing receipts in a regular food bag?
- What do you think you would do in a similar situation?
- What kind of character does Henry have?

Don’t care what others think of what you do; but care very much about what you think of what you do.

—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



REVIEW AND REFLECTION

1. What is *character*? Describe some qualities of a person with character.
2. What is a *virtue*? How does it help us live a moral life?
3. What are the theological virtues? The cardinal virtues?
4. Briefly describe what each cardinal virtue does.
5. List and briefly discuss nine steps to living a moral life.



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Ask your parents which of the four cardinal virtues they think is most absent in today’s world. Discuss the reasons for their choices and compare their answers to your own view.

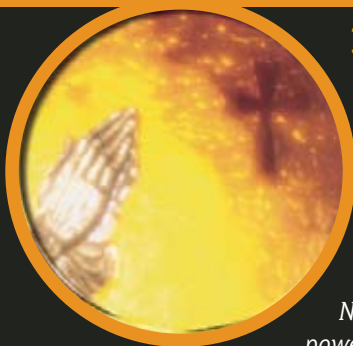
Catholic Life in Action

Exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven gifts that He bestows on us to help us live good lives. Put into practice one or more of these in the coming two weeks. Write a journal entry on what you did and what you learned about yourself.

- **Wisdom:** Seek the advice of a person you respect and admire on an issue you are struggling with or a decision you are trying to make.
- **Understanding:** Listen carefully to a friend or parent the next time he or she is talking to you. Try to understand not only what he or she is saying, but feeling, as well.
- **Right Judgment (counsel):** Before making your next decision that involves right and wrong, consider the alternatives and consequences of each approach. Pray for guidance.
- **Fortitude (courage):** Dare to speak up when a classmate is being verbally attacked. Express your displeasure at prejudicial remarks made in your presence.
- **Knowledge:** Read about one of the saints, persons of heroic character, at one of these websites:
 - Catholics Online: www.catholic.org/saints/
 - Catholic Forum: www.catholic-forum.com/saints/indexsnt.htm
 - Theology Library: www.shc.edu/theolibrary/saints2.htm
- **Fear of the Lord (awe and wonder):** Take a nature walk and notice the beauty of God’s wondrous creation. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the awesome gifts God has given to you, including the gift of your own life, which is made in his image and likeness.
- **Piety (reverence):** Show your respect to God by being especially attentive and prayerful at next Sunday’s liturgy. Study the Sunday readings ahead of time so you can derive greater benefit from them. You can find the readings at the United States Catholic Bishops’ website: www.usccb.org/nab/.

Summary Points

- ◆ There is a strong link between living a moral life and being happy. Christians believe that we need to hear the teaching of Jesus and then put it into practice as steps on the road to happiness in this life and unending joy in eternity.
- ◆ Morality draws on human reason, human experience, and divine revelation in searching out what we ought to do.
- ◆ Morality is a response to a loving God and a continuing venture to become fully the person God wants us to be.
- ◆ We can respond to God morally because God has endowed us with intelligence and freedom, gives us the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit who lives within, supports us with the witness of fellow believers, and guides us through the official teachers in the Church. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, is the greatest help of all in living a moral life.
- ◆ A good person lives morally, deciding on and then acting according to God’s plan for him or her. In his dialogue with the rich young man, Jesus teaches that keeping the commandments and observing his law of love are essentials to being good. Jesus also teaches that we must “let go and let God” into our lives by making friendship with Jesus our top priority.
- ◆ Our character is who we really are and who we are becoming through our choices and actions. Character is the heart of a self-chosen moral identity. Persons with good moral characters are loving, fully human, and virtuous.
- ◆ Virtues help form a good character. A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good. The theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—relate us to God and enable us to live Christ-like lives. Charity is the greatest virtue of all. The cardinal (“hinge”) virtues can be gained through education and repeated practice and strengthened with the graces of the Holy Spirit. They are prudence (right reason in action), justice (fairness), fortitude (courage), and temperance (moderation).
- ◆ The steps to living a moral life are appreciating and using your human gifts, using your intellect, seeking guidance from the law, imitating Jesus, forming and following your conscience, repenting and seeking forgiveness for your sins, and loving God above all things and your neighbor as yourself.



FOR PRAYER REFLECTION

or this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:14–21

- Describe a time when you have most felt the “breadth and length and height and depth” of Christ’s love for you.
- Write your own brief prayer of thanksgiving to God.

NOTES

1. Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* of Pope John Paul II to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year, No. 7, April 1, 1985 <www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2YOUT.HTM> (9 August 2006).
2. ASSIST News Service, Jeremy Reynalds, “The (Forgot) Ten Commandments: Survey Indicates British are Forgetting Commandments,” September 17, 2004 <across.co.nz/TheForgotTenCommandments.html> (9 August 2006).
3. Josephson Institute of Ethics, The Ethics of American Youth—2004 Report Card: Press Release and Data Summary <www.josephsoninstitute.org/Survey2004/2004reportcard_pressrelease.htm> (9 August 2006).
4. Jack L. Hayes International, Inc., “Theft Surveys: Shoplifting” <www.hayesinternational.com/thft_srvys.html> (9 August 2006).
5. abcNews.com, “Corporate America Is Profiting From Porn — Quietly,” January 28, 2003 <www.churchsermon.org/sermons/reports/Porn_profits.htm> (9 August 2006).
6. Sharon Jayson, “Births to Unmarried Women Hit Record,” *USA Today*, October 30, 2005 <www.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-10-28-unwed-moms_x.htm?POE=NEWISVA> (9 August 2006).
7. This summary comes from Russell B. Connors, Jr., and Patrick T. McCormick, *Character, Choices & Community: The Three Faces of Christian Ethics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 24–33. We will develop the theme of being fully human in Chapter 1 and what it means to be loving in chapters 4 and 7–10.
8. “Worker Mistakenly Gives Bank Bag to Honest Customer,” *Northwest Florida Daily News*, June 24, 1998, 6C. Accessed online from the *Daily News* archives <www.nwfdailynews.com/archive/kid's_corner/980624newskid2.html> (9 August 2006).