



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S 13 VIRTUES

Wisdom In All Things Special Series

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WISDOM

NOTHING WE DESIRE CAN COMPARE WITH HER. -Pr. 8:11

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INTRODUCTION

You could say that Ben Franklin's 13 virtues were an attempt to fill in what he thought was missing from a 5-part sermon on Philippians 4:8:

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." – The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippian church

The preacher's "dry, uninteresting, and unedifying" preaching aside, Franklin could not understand how this passage could be taught and not "a single moral principle... inculcated or enforced."

His disillusionment was at least partly responsible for his conceiving of "the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection... [wishing] to live without committing any fault at any time, and to conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into."

It did not take Benjamin Franklin long to realize the extreme difficulty in attempting to live a life of perfection, despite the best intentions, earnest planning, and meticulous execution. One could only hope that such a zeal would go viral—infesting all who would seek to apply these virtues, if not the latter portion of this letter to the Philippian church.

Living wisely means living virtuously, embodying the qualities championed by this esteemed American statesman. Drawing inspiration from Paul's letter (Phil. 4:8) and Benjamin Franklin's quest for virtuous living, this e-book aims to explore and put into practice these virtues as we exercise Wisdom In All Things.

"The noblest question in the world is What good may I do in it."
– Benjamin Franklin



TEMPERANCE

"EAT NOT TO DULLNESS; DRINK NOT TO ELEVATION."

What probably comes to mind immediately when you read the word temperance, is abstinence. And specifically, related to alcohol.

Abstinence can be necessary. But that only half defines temperance, and can lead to an extreme, and unnecessary, application of the word. What is "not abstinence" and "not indulgence", but moderation? Somewhere between "all and nothing" is temperance. Temperance implies a sweet spot. Not too much, AND, not too little. Each extreme is understood and necessarily avoided. It is a life in balance, requiring control and intentionality.

A dictionary definition pushes the idea of "moderation", describing temperance as "moderation in action, thought, or feeling: RESTRAINT", and "habitual moderation in the indulgence of the appetites or passions."

Aristotle affirms the positive when discussing the virtue of temperance as being equidistant from the extremes: "In the same way that courage is a mean between extremes of response to fear; temperance is a mean between extremes of response to pleasure."

Benjamin Franklin believed that temperance "tends to procure that coolness and clearness of head which is so necessary where constant vigilance was to be kept up, and guard maintained against the unremitting attraction of ancient habits and the force of perpetual temptations."

Being sober-minded ("coolness and clearness of head") allows us to remain focused (avoid the extremes), persistent (remain vigilant), and in control (decisive restraint), all for the sake of the sweet spot that is temperance.

Qualified

What is the sweet spot? To be sure, it is avoiding the obvious extremes, and that which so easily entangles us, in order to serve and protect ourselves and those we love, and fulfill the influential role we are to play. That is the space it occupies, but the qualities, or what "qualifies" it as being the sweet spot are characteristics listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.



TEMPERANCE

"EAT NOT TO DULLNESS; DRINK NOT TO ELEVATION."

While this list describes the qualities that must be evident in the life of an elder in a church, they at the same time identify the characteristics of anyone desiring to be temperate:

- be above reproach
- sober-minded
- self-controlled
- respectable
- hospitable
- able to teach
- not a drunkard
- not violent but gentle
- not quarrelsome
- not a lover of money
- manages his own household well

Arguably, these qualities are what would result, or flow from a life that has a "Philippians 4:8" mindset. They seem to outline a life that is temperate.

Disqualified

The Apostle Paul actually provides both inspiration and instruction regarding temperance, in 1 Corinthians 9:27: "I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

To not exhibit the qualities indicated above would seemingly "disqualify" us from being temperate, and would mean that how we act is not contradicted by what we say. Our moderation, or restraint, should be evident in our speech as well as our behavior. This is where vigilance is required in order that we remain in the sweet spot, but that our speech aligns with our actions and thereby lessen the likelihood of our being "disqualified".

With Temperance acquired and established, Franklin thought: "Silence would be more easy; and my desire being to gain knowledge at the same time that I improved in virtue, and considering that in conversation it was obtained rather by the use of the ears than of the tongue, and therefore wishing to break a habit I was getting into prattling, punning, and joking, which only made me acceptable to trifling company, I gave Silence the second place."



TEMPERANCE

"EAT NOT TO DULLNESS; DRINK NOT TO ELEVATION."

Living Ben Franklin's 13 Virtues: Temperance

"I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." – 1 Corinthians 9:27

Being sober-minded ("coolness and clearness of head") allows us to remain focused (avoid the extremes), persistent (remain vigilant), and in control (decisive restraint), all for the sake of the "sweet spot" that is temperance.

Which of these characteristics are evident in your life? Which of these need further attention as you pursue temperance? Score each (1 = needs immediate attention, 2 = not a concern, but monitor, 3 = consistently evident)

	1	2	3
	1	2	3
• be above reproach	1	2	3
• sober-minded	1	2	3
• self-controlled	1	2	3
• respectable	1	2	3
• hospitable	1	2	3
• able to teach	1	2	3
• not a drunkard	1	2	3
• not violent but gentle	1	2	3
• not quarrelsome	1	2	3
• not a lover of money			
• manages his own household well			

Prioritize those characteristics that need the most attention.



SILENCE

"SPEAK NOT BUT WHAT MAY BENEFIT OTHERS OR YOURSELF;
AVOID TRIFLING CONVERSATION."

It should be clear that Franklin is not intending that we become a quiet person, as there are certainly times to speak up. In fact, Dr. King suggests that we're only truly living when we speak up about things that matter.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is speaking with a purpose that distinguishes this virtue, and avoiding those situations when you would be drawn into inane, unimportant, or trivial discussions. This way, you benefit from your listening, and others benefit from your speaking.

Listen first

Inherent in Benjamin's virtue, and further in his explanation, is the intent to gain understanding and be all the wiser by listening.

How else will you know when or what to speak?

"Wise men speak because they have something to say; Fools because they have to say something." – Plato

Here, a new application of the Miranda Warning might be beneficial. "Arrested" by the gravity of the opportunity, and the need to keep our mouths closed by prioritizing listening, we elevate the fact that we "...have the right to remain silent. [Realizing what's at stake is the fact that] Anything you say can and will be used against you..."

Exercising that "right" more often, is advisable. We don't have to speak. And most certainly, it should not take priority over listening.

Speak second

Speaking can be risky business. Remaining silent, to begin with, can help mitigate the danger. But there comes a point, given what's at stake, that we need to break our silence.



SILENCE

"SPEAK NOT BUT WHAT MAY BENEFIT OTHERS OR YOURSELF;
AVOID TRIFLING CONVERSATION."

In order of importance, speaking should follow listening. When the time comes, what should be our reason for breaking the silence?

The deciding factor may be the question implied in Franklin's admonishment. How will it be of benefit to you or others? By benefit, I mean preservation or protection of your well-being, not that you profit from it.

However, in the case of it benefitting others, it should mean that they profit. That is, they are elevated, honored, or rewarded by what you have to say, and when you choose to say it. You might ask, How will they be blessed by what I say?

Don't listen or speak

As frequently as we are baited these days, avoid trifling conversation.

It is of little, or more likely, no value to even entertain most of what is being discussed publicly, simply because of the way it is being discussed. Not that there aren't any substantive conversations, but that they are largely done without listening. Instead, volume is readily applied to what they feel they need to say.

Before we even seek to listen, it is more necessary that we find that person, group, or conversation that is more than trivial or frivolous, whereby significance, understanding, and meaning can be advanced.

In a word, be selective. In those discussions that seem prudent to join, put a priority on listening, and when the time is right, speak with precision.



SILENCE

"SPEAK NOT BUT WHAT MAY BENEFIT OTHERS OR YOURSELF;
AVOID TRIFLING CONVERSATION."

Living Ben Franklin's 13 Virtues: Silence

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Listen First

By applying the new application of the Miranda Warning (by prioritizing listening, we elevate the fact that we "...have the right to remain silent. [Realizing what's at stake is the fact that] Anything you say can and will be used against you..."), how well are you exercising that "right"?

Can you identify where that is specifically the case? How can you take those successful instances and apply them to situations where you find yourself not listening well?

Speak Second

"The art of communication is not mastered by just knowing what to say and how to say it. A big factor is knowing when to say it." – Kevin Daum

In what situations are you choosing to remain silent when it would benefit others? The next time that situation presents itself, decide that you will speak with the purpose of elevating, honoring, or rewarding those listening by what you have to say, and when you choose to say it. Taking this step will build your confidence and ability when you are required to say something that may otherwise be difficult to say.

Don't listen or speak

With increased frequency, there are situations we face that require us to neither listen nor speak.

How capable are you at recognizing those situations, and avoiding "trifling" (unimportant, trivial) conversation? Listen first for whether or not you should continue doing so.



ORDER

“LET ALL YOUR THINGS HAVE THEIR PLACES; LET EACH PART OF YOUR BUSINESS HAVE ITS TIME.”

Put Mornings In Their Proper Order

Does that first part of his quote sound familiar to you? In looking it up, it is possible that he may be responsible for the phrase: “a place for everything and everything in its place.” It was attributed to a few people, but I like the idea that Ben said it—because that is exactly what he is saying.

Order is both quality and quantity. Every ‘thing’ has its own place, assuming that each ‘thing’ is important enough to warrant a place.

If it is going to be kept, then it must be worthy, and if it is worthy, it must have a place. “Things” without places, are perhaps “things” that should not have a place. This is hinted at in the definition of order: “arrange (something) in a methodical or *appropriate way*.” (emphasis mine)

Taking the time to bring about order is to take the necessary time to prioritize what is essential. Doing so, as the latter part of Franklin’s statement reads, will allow you “room” for your business. That is the real work or focus of your life.

Benjamin hoped having order “would allow [him] more time for attending to [his] project and [his] studies.” To ensure that order would allow him the space to tackle more pressing and valuable concerns, here is how Benjamin Franklin ordered (it is actually titled ‘scheme’) his day:

- Morning (5a-8a)
 - “Rise, wash, and address *Powerful Goodness!* Contrive the day’s business, and take the resolution of the day; prosecute the present study, and breakfast.”
- Work (8a-12p)
- Noon (12p-2p)
 - “Read, or look over my accounts, and dine.”
- Work (2p-6p)
- Evening (6p-10p)
 - “Put things in their places. Supper. Music, or diversion, or conversation. Examination of the day.”
- Sleep (10p-5a)



ORDER

“LET ALL YOUR THINGS HAVE THEIR PLACES; LET EACH PART OF YOUR BUSINESS HAVE ITS TIME.”

I was immediately taken by the fact that he had an excellent morning routine, not to mention that he allowed 3 hours for it! He started his day with the proper order of things. His addressing the “Powerful Goodness” went something like this:

“O powerful goodness! Bountiful Father! Merciful Guide! Increase in me that wisdom which discovers my truest interest. Strengthen my resolution to perform what that wisdom dictates...”

Bringing Order

If you wanted to dig into the morning routine, I tried to make the argument that you really ought to become a morning person. Here are a few other points I would highlight about bringing order to your life:

- **Find a place for your keys.** I mean this both literally, and figuratively. Make it easy to eliminate the potential daily frustrations and distractions! Even by just having a place for your phone and keys. Having fewer, or easier, decisions to make is one advantage of order.
- **Order creates time and space.** When you prioritize, and place those things where they need to go, order will create space in your life and your schedule. It is almost like a reset. You clear the clutter and establish a starting point for building order into each day.
- **Be your own critic.** In order to maintain order, you’ll want to consistently evaluate how you spend your time—and ban the offenders! Being particularly critical of those things that don’t have a place, or, have a place, but shouldn’t.



ORDER

“LET ALL YOUR THINGS HAVE THEIR PLACES; LET EACH PART OF YOUR BUSINESS HAVE ITS TIME.”

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Order

Taking the time to bring about order is to take the necessary time to prioritize what is essential. Doing so, as the latter part of Franklin’s statement reads, will allow you “room” for your business. That is the real work or focus of your life.

Morning Routine

Our day is best ordered when we start in the morning, which is why I highly recommend that you become a morning person.

In addition to the article I mentioned above, I also have laid out a plan for having a ‘[meaty, meaningful morning](#)’. A focused morning leads to a focused day. Using these two articles, how do you need to correct or refine your morning routine?

Where can you decrease daily frustrations and distractions by building simple routines (like a place for your keys or phone)? Evaluate how you spend your time, decide where you can increase efficiency, and eliminate waste (i.e. wasted actions that are wasting time).



RESOLUTION

“RESOLVE TO PERFORM WHAT YOU OUGHT; PERFORM WITHOUT FAIL WHAT YOU RESOLVE.”

Only Do What Ought Be Done

I'll admit it. I'm guilty of romanticizing the past, and this may be one of those times. But when I look back on the period in which Franklin lived, I picture the vast majority of people having a strong sense of “oughtness”. From the way they dressed, spoke, worked, and leisured—there was a way to do things, and that's the way they did them.

Oughtness: “the quality or state of being morally obligatory”

It may be my age, and probably because I'm a parent, but I am more frequently aware of how things are not being done the way they ought to be done. Anyone from Franklin's time would no doubt conclude that we have lost our sense of “oughtness.”

To not have the right understanding of what “ought” to be, you, well, end up with what Nike declared in 1978: Just Do It. What's it? Anything you want it to be.

Resolve: “decide firmly on a course of action.”

Essentially, Benjamin is saying: get ‘it’ right—with conviction. Acknowledgment, or intellectual assent, is not the same as having a resolve. Like a soldier under command, our conviction should lead to the commitment to carrying out the right course of action.

As I write this, it is Memorial Day. Where we reflect on men and women from generations past, who, with great conviction, carried out what had to be done. That I know I've not romanticized.

Resolve to... Resolve

For regular readers, I know I don't need to spend much time at all discussing what we ought to resolve to do. With Wisdom In All Things, I've tried to make the point that God has made clear how we are to live—wisely, in all areas of our lives.

However, I found a few principles that might be helpful in developing a process for how we can resolve to do what we ought.



RESOLUTION

“RESOLVE TO PERFORM WHAT YOU OUGHT; PERFORM WITHOUT FAIL WHAT YOU RESOLVE.”

Probably most important, is understanding that we don't have to “find” resolve. We develop it.

“Self-discipline isn't like a reservoir that can be tapped. Instead, it's like a muscle that can be strengthened with training.” – Jacko Willink, former NAVY SEAL

Up until recently, research led us to believe that resolve, or willpower, was more like a gas tank that we drained and refilled. However, it is now believed that it is more like a skill that is developed through hard work and training. In other words, the more you practice it, the stronger it becomes.

Martin Meadows, from *Highbrow*, offers his tips to strengthen resolve. I found them to be more in line with the understanding that resolve is more like a muscle that we need to exercise.

“Do It Now.” Resolve will weaken if not applied. When we put off a response to what ‘ought’ to be done, the conviction to follow through begins to wane.

“Delay Temptations.” This is where a little “true grit” will be very helpful. If there is any good in procrastinating, this is it. Put off those unhealthy cravings or temptations for a good 15-20 minutes, and they will pass.

“Be Honest With Yourself.” Especially when you've given in to temptation. Quickly question yourself as to the validity of your “reason”. Don't let yourself get away with anything!

“For instance, if you notice it's getting cloudy outside and you're supposed to go for a jog, you may be tempted to think, “It's going to rain soon, so I'd better stay home so I don't get sick.” Stop this thought process and be honest with yourself. You're making an excuse so you can be lazy without feeling guilty about it.”

“Think of the Consequences.” On the other side of being critical of what may do you in, are the consequences of your actions (or, inaction) if you do. What will it cost you to give in? Let your mind step through what will result if you decide to take the easy way out.

Remember, resolve only grows when practiced.



RESOLUTION

“RESOLVE TO PERFORM WHAT YOU OUGHT; PERFORM WITHOUT FAIL WHAT YOU RESOLVE.”

“**Imagine Others Can See You.**” Or, if you really want to pile on the conviction, just imagine Jesus standing beside you. I sometimes imagine a day in the future when I’ll get to (or have to) talk about this situation I’m contemplating making excuses to try and avoid it. Before you take your foot off the gas, picture in your mind a day in the future when you’ll be able to say, “I saw it through.”

These five tips, or principles, reinforce the truth behind possessing resolve: we can all have it, and that it can make a significant difference, but only if we’re serious about making it habitual.

That is, resolve to... resolve.

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Resolution

Essentially, Benjamin is saying: get ‘it’ right—with conviction. Acknowledgment, or intellectual assent of what must be done is not the same as having a resolve. Like a soldier under command, our conviction should lead to the commitment to carrying out the right course of action.

“Self-discipline isn’t like a reservoir that can be tapped. Instead, it’s like a muscle that can be strengthened with training.” – Jacko Willink, former NAVY SEAL

While true habits take some time to fully establish, begin with the smaller goal of spending at least 5 days in a row exercising Martin Meadows’s 5 tips to begin building a regular habit of resolution.

DO. If there is something that ought to be done, I will “**Do It Now.**”

DELAY. I will “**Delay Temptations**” or unhealthy cravings for 15-20 minutes until they pass.

DIRECT. I will “**Be Honest With Myself**” and quickly question the validity of any “reason” for giving into temptation.



RESOLUTION

“RESOLVE TO PERFORM WHAT YOU OUGHT; PERFORM WITHOUT FAIL WHAT YOU RESOLVE.”

DETRIMENT. I will “**Think of the Consequences**” of my actions (or inaction) and what it will cost me if I give in.

DETECTABLE. I will “**Imagine Others Can See Me**” when I am contemplating making excuses to try and avoid what must be done.



FRUGALITY

“MAKE NO EXPENSE BUT TO DO GOOD TO OTHERS OR YOURSELF;
I.E., WASTE NOTHING.”

There is Freedom in Frugality

By design, Mr. Franklin originally laid out the list of virtues in the order that we have them today.

“My intention being to acquire the habitude of all these virtues, I judged it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time, and, when I should be master of that, then to proceed to another... and, as the previous acquisition of some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others.”

What might be a helpful sidebar, is to reflect on the list, and its application, holistically, and even speculate as to why he decided on this particular order.

Another, and more specifically, would be to consider Frugality in light of what we have waded through up to this point. There was Order, Resolution, Temperance, and Silence.

Benjamin described the influence of Frugality, as well as Industry (next in our list), as “freeing me from my remaining debt, and producing affluence and independence.”

There really are two aspects to enabling growth: stop doing what we shouldn't, and, start doing what we should. It would be counterproductive to only do one or the other. Pursuing frugality should lead us to “backfill the hole”, but also produce a level of wealth and autonomy that puts us in the driver's seat.

We put ourselves in the financial position to be free to do what must be done—what needs doing. It wouldn't be prudent to develop the previous virtues, to then be held back because of debt or lack of means.

A keen sense of frugality will be a balance of “prudence in saving” while “lacking in wastefulness”, with the maturity of growing financially independent. Being free and clear puts us in a better position to say Yes! when presented with the right opportunity. Having a choice is freeing!



FRUGALITY

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Limitation with a Purpose

My wife has been a real influence on me in the area of frugality. The draw of having, or doing more, without real purpose has lost its appeal. There just isn't the desire to go or spend, unless it meets the right criteria.

I first want to visit some of the more familiar recommendations that are offered when considering frugality.

Live within your means

Katherine Martinko points to some of those key principles of being frugal in her article, *20 Habits of Frugal People*: make your own food, don't buy new (i.e. car), buy in bulk (just not cheese puffs—but oh, so tempting), find low-cost exercise, and think long-term. Then she plainly states what it is to be frugal: live within your means.

The Diderot Effect

In his article, *9 Daily Extravagance Habits Frugal People Don't Have*, Jim Wang is equally persuasive in applying the essential foundation for frugal living. He covers things like comparison shopping, and overpaying for convenience, but also highlighted the Diderot Effect. This social phenomenon is where someone will buy pants, but not have a shirt or shoes that really go with it, so to complete the outfit, will buy new shoes and a new shirt.

Is it any wonder we have trouble with frugality when we're so given over to complete sets, make sure everything goes together, and feel compelled to keep the cycle of adding more stuff going?

Frugality is liberating

If you really want to be motivated to consider being more frugal, consider how liberating it is! Chris Muller, in his Money Mozart article, *The Top 10 Reasons Frugality is So Liberating*, provides near-instant euphoria with just the first reason: you retire earlier. Not having to do what you're doing day in and day out, sooner?! I'm in.



FRUGALITY

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I.E., WASTE NOTHING.”

What I especially appreciate in his article is the idea of thinking more strategically. There are two sides to frugality. Those that are forced to be, and those who do so intentionally. This is significant. There is a dramatic difference between someone who has to be frugal but would not be if they didn't have to, and someone who does need to be as frugal, but chooses to. Franklin encourages the latter; that making money is not so that we have more to spend, but that we can do more good.

Do the best you can with what you have

Michelle Schroeder-Gardner is a successful “frugalist”, and in her article *Change Your Life By Becoming A Frugal Freak – 11 Ways To Be More Frugal*, highlighted two points I want to reiterate here. The first is: be content. It also sums up the idea of frugality. Live within your means. Do the best you can, with what you have. The other point she made, which goes hand in hand with contentment, is dissolving the idea that you deserve everything. Even if you did, you can't afford it. Especially if you're intending to be frugal.

Limit your frequency

In addition to these foundational principles, I wanted to provide a way to transition, or at least, simply bring balance to being frugal: force yourself to experience the freedom from frequency. You don't have to spend as much, attend as much, consume as much, watch as much, subscribe as much, or upgrade as much. Reducing the frequency can help balance the need and want.

Becoming frugal (or more frugal) doesn't necessarily mean going without. It is limiting of course. But rather, think of it as storing. Having the surplus to pursue a specific direction, with purpose. It can put you in the position of spending wisely for your own good and the good of others, and keep us in line with Franklin's admonition to “waste nothing.”

Living Ben Franklin's 13 Virtues: Frugality

Benjamin described the influence of Frugality, as well as Industry (next in our list), as “freeing me from my remaining debt, and producing affluence and independence.”

There really are two aspects to enabling growth: stop doing what we shouldn't, and, start doing what we should. It would be counterproductive to only do one or the other.



FRUGALITY

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I.E., WASTE NOTHING.”

How are you handling the following recommendations for being frugal?

1. Are you currently living within your means? Are you spending more than what you're earning? Divide your spending into two columns: needs and wants. If you are spending more than you are earning, eliminate items from the 'wants' column.
2. Have you broken the cycle of adding more stuff, by buying only what you need? With your having created those two columns in the previous recommendation, strive to first add only those items that would fall under the 'needs' column before you buy something that falls under the 'wants' column.
3. Can you picture, and then accept, the benefits of frugality? It will be liberating! You don't accumulate what you don't need, you save money, and... you could retire earlier. What other benefits (improve your relationships?) do you think you would realize if you were more frugal?
4. Are you doing the best you can with what you have? Are you truly content? Are you struggling with feeling that you “deserve everything”? Remember, even if you did, you can't afford it. Especially if you're intending to be frugal.
5. Have you experienced “the freedom from frequency”? Remind yourself that you don't have to spend as much, attend as much, consume as much, watch as much, subscribe as much, or upgrade as much as you think you do. Reducing the frequency can help balance the need and want.



INDUSTRY

“LOSE NO TIME; BE ALWAYS EMPLOY’D IN SOMETHING USEFUL;
CUT OFF ALL UNNECESSARY ACTIONS.”

Not Just Productive, But Necessary

Industry.

You don’t hear that word used, the way Franklin described it, anymore. Maybe we should reinstate it. It is so much better than saying, ‘productive’. He packs so much into it. More than the characteristic of working hard, it is laboring “for some useful purpose or the creation of something of value” as the dictionary defines it.

First, consider that there must be no room for waste in being industrious. No minute is left unscrutinized or unaccounted for. If you’re going to spend any time, spend it constructively. Time is not lost or wasted, as long as we’re moving forward on what is worthwhile.

Mind you, he’s not recommending, or even suggesting, that we fill every moment—that’s just being busy. The pruning and honing and shaping of our time is specific, surgical, and life-giving. Not exhausting, but exhilarating, as it is to be purposeful, in creating value. Even relaxation and leisure are on the table.

This level of scrutiny requires a plan.

Making the most of your time doesn’t mean doing the most, but that we get the most out of it. Industry is not so much about time management, as it is about value management.

Necessary or not? That is the question.

Industry requires that we be vigilant as with a machete, whacking away at anything that resembles the unnecessary.

Industry: Getting the Most Out of Our Time

Getting the most out of your time can sound a lot like the current rhetoric around productivity. But again, thanks to Benjamin, we’re focusing on finding that which is most valuable and prioritizing that.



INDUSTRY

“LOSE NO TIME; BE ALWAYS EMPLOY’D IN SOMETHING USEFUL;
CUT OFF ALL UNNECESSARY ACTIONS.”

We get the most out of our time when we do what is most important. So, what should we be doing? What is of value to others? How can we bring out the value that others offer?

At this point, I am assuming that you are able to put the right things on the list. What you need to focus on may be self-evident, or, perhaps you’ve spent time deliberating on what is most valuable to you, and those people that are important to you. So, how do we get the most out of committing our time to what we’ve identified as most important?

Ask the Fundamental Questions

Carthage Buckley, in his article *How to Decide What We Should Be Doing*, highlighted two questions that I think should be part of our making the determination:

First, it is a question of energy. What kind of energy do you have for what you’ve decided to do, and what amount of energy will be required of you to accomplish it?

Our energy levels ebb and flow throughout the day, and it is obvious that when your energy is low, the task at hand becomes harder, but will also most likely take longer. On the other side of that is wasting good energy: “Alternatively, if you have an abundance of energy but choose a task which requires very little energy, you are wasting time and energy which should be devoted to a more demanding task.” We want to match our level of energy to the appropriate task, which will also help us decide on the right time to accomplish it.

The second question I wanted us to consider has to do with payoff. Again, we want to refrain from only considering “what’s in it for me”, and in fact, there may be times that it is most appropriately removed as an option. So, we’ll need to first define, or understand, what we mean by the payoff. But, this question does help us put into perspective the impact of our effort.

Carthage says that “determining importance is easier than you think – you simply need to determine which of the remaining tasks will have the biggest impact on helping you achieve one of your key goals.”



INDUSTRY

“LOSE NO TIME; BE ALWAYS EMPLOY’D IN SOMETHING USEFUL;
CUT OFF ALL UNNECESSARY ACTIONS.”

Adjusting Our Timing of the Important

I had mentioned timing as it related to our level of energy, but there is also the need to determine the level of urgency. We have stated that Industry is about value. Value can rarely be rushed. Especially as we try to maximize quality and outcomes, and minimize waste.

You no doubt are familiar with President Eisenhower’s Matrix, but I think warrants a quick review. Having identified those things that are worthy of our time, how do we stack rank those in order of how to address the most important of the most valuable?

Here is how Eisenhower broke out the four quadrants of his matrix:

- Quadrant 1 (top left): Urgent and Important (do immediately)
- Quadrant 2 (top right): Important, but Not Urgent (schedule later)
- Quadrant 3 (bottom left): Urgent, but Not Important (delegate to someone)
- Quadrant 4 (bottom right): Neither Urgent nor Important (eliminate)

In addition to identifying the right quadrant, the real key is to understand the difference between what is urgent, and what is important.

Mayo Oshin, in his article for Ladders.com, explains that “urgent tasks are typically time-sensitive and require our immediate attention. They force you to be reactive, anxious, and stressed... important tasks put you in a proactive and strategic mode. They contribute to your long-term goals and give you more time to make better decisions—to avoid stupid decisions.”

I want us to key in on his main point, and the clarity that this matrix can bring, which is that “the more time you spend on activities that are important but not urgent, the more proactive and productive you will be.”

What Will it Take to Succeed?

The authors of *Deciding How to Decide* talk about having a “causal model.” Which is “a strong understanding of what critical success factors and economic conditions, in what combination, will lead to a successful outcome.”



INDUSTRY

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To get there, they recommend a simple “test of strength” by asking and then being able to confidently answer, a set of “if-then” questions about the decision you need to make.

You essentially are testing the different assumptions you might have, or the expectations you’ll have to meet, by stepping through them by first asking (and answering) “What if?”

The authors provide these three questions to ask yourself when working through the “causal model”:

- “Do you understand what combination of critical success factors will determine whether your decision leads to a successful outcome?”
- “Do you know what metrics need to be met to ensure success?”
- “Do you have a precise understanding of—almost a recipe for—how to achieve success?”

To answer the second question of seeing our way through to the finish line, it helps to begin with a list of possible outcomes. It can be an extension of the previous question, really. Each action you take, or don’t take, leads to a specific outcome.

This way, you can begin to see a range of outcomes that will eventually help you determine which direction you should go with the decision you need to make that fits within the parameters of Industry, and what you have identified as being most valuable.

“Sometimes... under conditions of uncertainty, it’s common for executives not to be able to specify the range of possible outcomes or their probability of occurring with any real precision (even in instances where they understand critical success factors and the model for success).” - authors of *Deciding How to Decide*

For that situation, the authors have two specific questions we can ask to narrow down the range of possibilities or realize the importance of specific outcomes:

- “Can you define the range of outcomes that could result from your decision, both in the aggregate and for each critical success factor?”
- “Can you gauge the probability of each outcome?”



INDUSTRY

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Franklin was as meticulous as he was inventive. Maybe the two are related. Could it be that his mastery of Industry led to his accomplishing not only so much but to the degree it ultimately impacted our country and the world?

Being vigilant with our “value management” is an essential part of our being industrious. Free yourself from the unnecessary, and almost everything you do will be what is most needed.

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Industry

A very simple way of describing Industry is that we should get the most out of what we’ve identified as most important.

Using the following framework derived from the recommendations above, develop your own “value management” system. If you already possess a process of identifying what is important and stepping through a means of accomplishing the task or project, how can these recommendations help you improve upon it?

Evaluate your energy. What kind of energy do you have for what you’ve decided to do, and what amount of energy will be required of you to accomplish it?

Consider the payoff. Have you determined how this will benefit you and others? Again, we want to refrain from only considering “what’s in it for me”, and in fact, there may be times that it is most appropriately removed as an option. Does the payoff legitimize the impact of our effort?

Determine the level of urgency. We have stated that Industry is about value. Value can rarely be rushed. Especially as we try to maximize quality and outcomes, and minimize waste. Consider incorporating President Eisenhower’s Matrix to help you determine urgency.

Asking ‘What if?’ Testing your assumptions you might have, or the expectations by working through the “causal model” questions above; first asking (and answering) “What if?”



SINCERITY

“USE NO HURTFUL DECEIT; THINK INNOCENTLY AND JUSTLY, AND, IF YOU SPEAK, SPEAK ACCORDINGLY”

We Act as We Think

“For as he thinks within himself, so he is. (Proverbs 23:7a)” Actions flow from the mind. That is, we tend to do as we think.

While sincerity is our “being free from pretense, deceit, or hypocrisy”, it can’t happen in the moment. It is somewhat premeditated as Benjamin implies. Decide not to be hurtful, and therefore think innocently—until evidence would suggest we do otherwise.

He does add that we are also to think justly. While we seek to do no harm, our thinking should lead to our understanding of right and wrong about the person, the topic, or the situation. Be genuine, honest, and truthful in your thinking, and speak accordingly.

If we speak.

We do have the option of not speaking. Fewer words are normally more prudent. And, our being “slow to speak” (James 1:19), gives speaking and acting with sincerity its truest aim.

Franklin’s first four words really describe a principle. The foundation on which we should first, govern what we think, and then, guide what may follow from those thoughts.

Sincerity As the Bedrock

It was said that Franklin’s virtues of Sincerity (and Justice), provided him opportunities reserved for the honorable and that he owed to it (sincerity and justice) the collective effect of all the virtues. You could say that it was the means by which he was able to have an influence, where he would otherwise not:

“...the joint influence of the whole mass of the virtues, even in the imperfect state he was able to acquire them, all that evenness of temper, and that cheerfulness in conversation, which makes his company still sought for, and agreeable even to his younger acquaintance.” (emphasis mine)



SINCERITY

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Sincerity was the bedrock that gave who he was the span of influence that was even sought after. It opened doors. And left its mark.

How sincerity penetrates:

- It puts people at ease; they are more receptive to what you’re saying, and hopefully, because you’re telling the truth, they hear what they need to hear.
- People will trust you. Because you are trusted, you will be sought out.
- People are drawn to you. Because you are sincere, you care and are fair. That is very appealing—to everyone.
- People know they will get the truth. Because you are sincere and trustworthy, people can expect to get the “truth in love.” It is what Kim Scott refers to in her book, *Radical Candor*, as being the right combination of “caring personally, and challenging directly.”
- It heals. Just as a genuine apology—sorrow with sincerity—is received, so sincerity mends the relationship and is restorative, accelerating the change or correction intended by sharing the truth.

There are strong similarities between sincerity and love. When you consider the description of love from 1 Cor. 13, we see the correlation to Benjamin’s application of sincerity. Love is... kind, does not envy, boast, or is proud... and *rejoices in the truth*. It guards against the truth not bearing its fruit. It’s how the truth gets through, and has its way.

When love plays out, it uses the right words so as to not harm, which flows from a mindset that thinks the better of the other person or group, with the intention of seeing through to what is just.

How can we improve if not for being presented with the truth? And how would we entertain the truth if not for someone establishing the needed trust by being sincere?

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Sincerity

“Use no hurtful deceit.” These four words really describe the intention and motivation for guarding how we think and guiding the actions that may follow from those thoughts.



SINCERITY

“USE NO HURTFUL DECEIT; THINK INNOCENTLY AND JUSTLY, AND, IF YOU SPEAK, SPEAK ACCORDINGLY”

1 Corinthians 13 is commonly referred to as “the love chapter” in the New Testament. In verses 4-8a we can see parallels to Benjamin’s application of sincerity:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

Examine yourself in light of these verses to ensure you are “using no hurtful deceit.”

- Are you patient?
- Are you kind?
- Do you envy?
- Are you boastful?
- Are you proud?
- Do you dishonor others?
- Are you self-seeking?
- Are you easily angered?
- Do you keep “records of wrongs”?
- Do you delight in evil?
- Do you rejoice in the truth?

Follow any of these questions where you responded ‘yes’ back to the thinking that led to your behaving that way. How does your thinking need to be corrected to change your behavior?



JUSTICE

“WRONG NONE BY DOING INJURIES, OR OMITTING THE BENEFITS THAT ARE YOUR DUTY.”

Justice is Our Duty

You'll find in Franklin's description, the essence of justice. The balance of not causing hurt, unnecessarily, and, being sure not to withhold what is good. And neither is without effort or great responsibility.

His description is not only an explanation of justice but the very means of bringing it about. Do not injure, AND, do not withhold good. That is justice—and is how we *do* justice.

However, doing right by someone might bring injury—bodily or otherwise. We sometimes can't avoid it. In order to do right, it may very well be painful to others. And on the other side of that, if we're avoiding doing the right thing because it might bring pain, we will be guilty of withholding good.

We want to avoid going too far, as well as not going far enough. As it is written: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” (Proverbs 3:27)

Franklin's reference to duty is precisely in line with this proverb. Unfortunately, we don't hear much of duty these days. I feel that the idea of duty has been absorbed and used as a form of narcissism. That is, we have a duty unto ourselves to ensure that we get justice.

However, Benjamin rightly prescribed justice as being toward others. The responsibility we have to be “morally right and fair” is outward-facing. What he doesn't state, but I believe he would agree with, is that our duty to others may mean a sacrifice on our part.

Answering Our Call of Duty

Franklin's description of justice gives us two considerations for reflection. On one hand, we are to care for our actions toward others, and on the other, is our duty to not withhold good.

Unfortunately, I too frequently find myself acting or responding more out of obligation than duty. In one sense, we are obligated to care for others simply by virtue of our having been



JUSTICE

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shown such grace by God. But having, and acting out of, a sense of duty, rightly positions our minds and hearts. It is a calling and a charge that should cause us to willingly and sacrificially rise up for the sake of those who can't or won't. Obligation is so short-sighted, and selfish.

You can tell so much about where we're at as a society by doing a simple Google search. Type in “call of duty” and you'll only get results for the video game of that same title. In nearly 10 pages of results, there were only two links that were not associated with the game. It took me a while, but I did find what I was looking for. A description that provides an excellent understanding of duty—which was so glaringly absent from that original search, and, implicates so many:

“Duty is set apart from any other way of acting. You might choose to act for spurious reasons, hateful reasons, deleterious reasons or sheer simple meanness but Duty compels you to do what is only moral and right. No fear of punishment, no hope of reward, or any other reason other than the requirement to do the specified Duty. To hear the Call of Duty is to know that something must be done for the most noble reason and no other reason.”

– Scott Hundley

Immediately when I hear the word duty, I think of our military. To spur on your sense of duty, I commend to you this speech from General Douglas MacArthur. It was delivered to cadets at West Point in 1962, as a result of his being awarded the Thayer Award for “outstanding character, accomplishments, and stature in the civilian community draw[ing] wholesome comparison to the qualities for which West Point strives, in keeping with its motto: “Duty, Honor, Country.”

“Duty, Honor, Country” — those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.” – General Douglas MacArthur

While he is speaking of the military, it certainly has its application to our civilian lives. With our lives, we are to wrong no one by injuring them or omitting any good from them that we have the power to give.



JUSTICE

“WRONG NONE BY DOING INJURIES, OR OMITTING THE BENEFITS THAT ARE YOUR DUTY.”

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Justice

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.”
– Proverbs 3:27

“Wrong none by... doing injuries...”

It goes without saying that our words can, and do, bring great harm to others. That is above and beyond what we may do physically. Ephesians 4:29 directly addresses this, and provides the “duty” our mouths are bound by: “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” In your mind, step through the people you know you’ll interact with today.

Ask yourself, How might I keep from not just injuring them, but specifically, lifting them up with my words? Decide now how you will speak or act toward them that ensures that they not only don’t feel injured but that they are protected and cared for.

“Wrong none by... omitting the benefits that are your duty.”

Just as we are to control our words, we are to conduct ourselves with respect to how what we do will ensure the benefit of others. A popular reference for this is the Golden Rule. However, considering this now, “do unto others, as you would have them do unto you” rings a little too conditional rather than dutiful.

Without regard for it coming back to you in a positive way, are you more inclined to watch out for your own interests, above the interests of others? How well are you doing at making sure you don’t keep back what is right and good for others?

Both as a citizen, and especially as a Christ-follower, answering the call of duty echoes the words of General MacArthur to those young cadets on that historic day in 1962: “Duty, Honor, Country... create in your heart the sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what next, and the joy and inspiration of life. They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.”



MODERATION

“AVOID EXTREMES; FORBEAR RESENTING INJURIES SO MUCH AS YOU THINK THEY DESERVE.”

Moderation In All Things

If you were to read further about how this virtue played out in Franklin’s life, you would find that it may have had more to do with moderating the expression of his opinion, than with the abuse of things like alcohol or gambling. For Franklin, the application was transformative. Indeed, you could describe it as an early version of “how to win friends and influence people”:

“This habit [of being too positive or negative when sharing his opinion], I believe, has been of great advantage to me when I have had occasion to inculcate my opinions and persuade men into measures that I have been from time to time engaged in promoting; and, as the chief ends of conversation are to inform or to be informed, to please or to persuade, I wish well-meaning, sensible men would not lessen their power of doing good by a positive, assuming manner, that seldom fails to disgust, tends to create opposition, and to defeat every one of those purposes for which speech was given to us, to wit, giving or receiving information or pleasure.” – Benjamin Franklin

It might seem impossible that you could describe achieving moderation in just one word. But I think Cameron Gunn may be on to something. When you think of someone who is moderate, it is certainly fair to describe them as being polite. And certainly, you would call Benjamin’s urging a call to be polite.

“I think that the core of Franklin’s moderation boils down to a quality identified by Alan Houston: politeness. Houston notes that Franklin sought to emulate the sensible man who was “moderate, cultivated, sociable, and self-disciplined”. This “man of sense” was, in short, polite.” – Cameron Gunn

His efforts toward moderating the expression of his opinions align with how the dictionary defines moderation: “the avoidance of excess or extremes, especially in one’s behavior or political opinions.”

However, in this way, both Merriam-Webster and Franklin are in direct opposition to the mindset, and behavior, of exactly where our culture has been tracking for some time. Now, moderation is what you avoid, while extremes are what you embrace, pursue, and live for—as if to argue that moderation is an extreme to be avoided.



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More to the point is that moderation is to be applied broadly. That is, we are to moderate the expression of our opinions, just as we moderate the consumption of ice cream.

Living in Moderation

Moderation is about choice. What we choose, or not choose, is key to avoiding unnecessary and undesirable consequences. It is a proper understanding and balance of our wants and needs.

The Way Through to Moderation

No surprise, it is living with intentionality. Intend to live inside the edges. Draw the lines on this side of the extremes. Stay in bounds. It is why good golfers take such time and care to make the right shot.

But our lives shouldn't be lived by being overly aware or too deliberate about what NOT to do. Instead, decide what you should do, and you won't be unnecessarily distracted by the extremes. The golfer isn't just trying not to hit into the pond, or the bunker, or the gallery, but is focused on where he wants the ball to go—not where he doesn't want it to go.

So it is with living a life of moderation. When we focus on what we can't or shouldn't do, that is all we think about. Rather, after intentionally laying out appropriate and helpful boundaries, you'll be able to roam and frolic freely within. In this way, moderation is freeing! We are free from the burden of the pursuit and consequences of excess.

Living Ben Franklin's 13 Virtues: Moderation

O Be Careful Little Eyes What You See

If “we are what we eat”, then we do as we see. This can either be a good thing or a potentially hazardous thing. When we're unsure of how to do something, we can look to others to 'see' how it is done. But unfortunately, when we want to fit in, we can be too willing to do as others are doing.



MODERATION

“AVOID EXTREMES; FORBEAR RESENTING INJURIES SO MUCH AS YOU THINK THEY DESERVE.”

Given the power of what we view to persuade, it is crucial that we scrutinize what we allow ourselves to see, just as we should do with what we eat. The abstract, *The Factors Affecting the Life of Moderation*, bears out this point, in particular to living a life of moderation:

“The sole negative driver of living a life in moderation was the exposure to advertising through the media.” – Orose Leelakulthanit

How careful are you to scrutinize what you see or decide to watch? What do you need to stop watching because it is not profitable, even though it is permissible?

Monitor Your Stimulation

If we chase what we feel, it will only lead to wanting more stimulation, which in turn can quickly lead us to extremes. Moderating how often, how much, and by what we are stimulated can be both a barometer of, and protector from, the extremes we need to avoid.

“Too much stimulation overloads our sensory circuits. It is thus essential to unplug and get away. The best thing to do is to periodically tear out into the outdoors. Leave your phone and computer behind.” – Brett McKay, *The Art of Manliness*

Are you listening to yourself more than you should be talking to yourself? That is, are you following where your feelings lead you or are you telling yourself to stop when you find yourself doing something too easily, too often?

Delay Your Gratification

Planning, saving, and waiting. When we think through what we want to do, work toward it over time, and simply just deny ourselves the temporary pleasure that immediate gratification provides, we experience a greater depth of satisfaction.

Putting off the pay-off will optimize our experience with whatever it is we desire, and, allow us to have a proper and healthy relationship to it.



MODERATION

“AVOID EXTREMES; FORBEAR RESENTING INJURIES SO MUCH AS YOU THINK THEY DESERVE.”

“The more you hold out for something, the greater the pleasure you’ll experience when you finally attain it. Have you ever noticed that the anticipation of a holiday can be just as good and sometimes better than the actual holiday itself? Hold out for things and enjoy the exquisite pleasure of anticipation.” – Brett McKay, The Art of Manliness

How are you short-circuiting true pleasure (and long-lasting benefit) by running at what you desire rather than patiently waiting until the time is right for it to be enjoyed?

Thoroughly Enjoy “The Few”

Our pleasure or satisfaction is not in “the many”, but in being thoroughly satisfied with “the few”. This might be the other side of the coin to monitoring our stimulation. Rather than seek more things, it will be most gratifying to us if we are more meticulous about our enjoyment of what we currently have or are doing. There may be more “juice left in the lemon”, so to speak, that requires another long squeeze rather than tossing it for another.

“When we feel unhappy and bored there are two ways to revive our feelings of enjoyment and pleasure. One is to seek new things and more stimulation. You can start going out more, and buying more new things and experiences. But the pleasure you get from ratcheting up the intensity of these experiences will eventually end in a plateau. The alternative is to cultivate the virtue of moderation by seeking greater enjoyment and pleasure in things you are already doing now.” – Dr. Andy Garrett

This too is the abundant life God has called us to. “Abundant” doesn’t sound moderate, when we think of “abundant” in terms of quantity. Living an abundant life is experiencing the depth of the few–right–things.

What should you eliminate from what you are pursuing? Does it promise a deep satisfaction?

Warning: Don’t Misapply Moderation

All this talk about avoiding extremes can also be an extreme to avoid. There may be times that we use the idea of “all things in moderation” to suppress a very bold step we are being asked, or required, to take.



MODERATION

“AVOID EXTREMES; FORBEAR RESENTING INJURIES SO MUCH AS YOU THINK THEY DESERVE.”

“I worry that many Christians have subconsciously taken this to heart and live in agreement with the statement “moderation is best in all things...” letting the idea of staying in the middle becomes as formational to our identity as our devotion to Christ Himself.” – David Wetherell

From Christ’s sacrifice for us to our call to resist sin to the point of bloodshed, God’s response to sin, and subsequently what ours should be, is anything but moderate.

The paradox is that the better life is a life lived in moderation, not in excess. We are most fulfilled when we fill up on a few things. When we are intentional about deeply nurturing those key soul-satisfying, world-changing characteristics, behaviors, and interests.



CLEANLINESS

“TOLERATE NO UNCLEANLINESS IN BODY, CLOTHES, OR HABITATION.”

Time For a Good Cleaning

“Okay, boomer.”

My oldest son used that phrase the other day. I knew he was kidding when he said it, so I let him say it twice before I “shut ‘er down.”

But I have to say, that is the response that comes to mind when I read Benjamin’s statement on cleanliness. In fact, he probably couldn’t even finish the word “cleanliness” without getting a resounding “okay, boomer!” Never mind the fact that he doesn’t seem very tolerant.

But like so much of what we hear from our elders, it is simple and true.

Clean up your room. Clean up your mess. Keep your nose clean.

While I wouldn’t go so far as to say it is “next to godliness”, I will admit that I would probably like you more if you kept things clean.

Clean, like, really clean—the way mom would clean something—is clean in the back, and underneath, not just where someone might see. To do that, you need to pick up whatever you’re cleaning and inspect it. Cleanliness is being thoughtful, meticulous—and thorough. A quick dusting just doesn’t cut it.

Be Seen as Clean

While most of the virtues are applicable across our lives, I find that this one, in particular, is made for “wisdom in all things”. It necessarily applies to our minds, bodies, and souls. But more than a virtue, it might be better called a principal or discipline.

Cleanliness extends from our hearts to what surrounds us. And just like spring cleaning, requires physical, mental, and emotional energy but yields that proud moment when you can finally get your car parked in the garage.



CLEANLINESS

“TOLERATE NO UNCLEANLINESS IN BODY, CLOTHES, OR HABITATION.”

“Spring cleaning requires Industry and Resolution, as well as a healthy understanding of Moderation. It also leads to virtues like Order and Tranquility, and study after study shows that cleaning can make us happier and healthier. Tending to our homes and inventorying our belongings can generate gratitude for what we have, remind us of those with less, prompt empathy for others, and humble us profoundly all at once.” – Chelsea Samelson

And I would add, spiritual. Cleanliness of mind stems from our cleanliness of heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” There is profound clarity in cleanliness.

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Cleanliness

Mind

Ordering your private world. That is not only a phrase, but the title of the book I read years ago by Gordon MacDonald. You may know it. His book is a book about spiritual disciplines, but that title captures the approach we should take when surveying the cleanliness of our minds.

We need to bring order, and cleanliness, to the privacy of our minds. Like an upstairs bedroom that has become the catch-all for unwanted furniture, clothing, and “who knows what?”, we need to open the door, let in the light, and remove what isn’t absolutely necessary.

Don’t allow the disorder to persist.

Body

What people see can quickly give them a right or wrong first impression of us. However, how we decide to present ourselves can communicate far more loudly than anything we say, regardless of the setting, audience, or our intention.

Grooming, clothing, exercise, hygiene—it all speaks. I have found that what I am most comfortable wearing probably isn’t probably what my wife would have me wear in public—at least when I’m with her.

What do you want your physical appearance to say?



CLEANLINESS

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Soul

We homeschooled our boys for a number of years. Early on, my wife taught them a simple way to understand 1 John 1:9. That verse says that if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse our hearts. The phrase my wife taught our boys was “clean heart, fresh start.”

It is the pure in heart that are not only blessed but see God. The goo and muck of unforgiven sin keep us from the most vibrant, satisfying relationship we could possibly have. Be free from the burden of unforgiven sin. Clean heart, fresh start.

When was the last time you scrubbed and scoured your life? Grab a brush, and look deeply into these areas of your life. It may not be spring, but we certainly don't have to wait to do an inspection and tidy up where necessary.



TRANQUILITY

“BE NOT DISTURBED AT TRIFLES, OR AT ACCIDENTS COMMON OR UNAVOIDABLE.”

Tranquility or Perpetual Perturbation

Keep Calm and Carry On.

Those words made up a poster created by the British government in 1939. They were meant to inspire courage in English citizens preparing for the onslaught of World War II.

Surprisingly, they were not used extensively. It wasn't until 2000 that they were rediscovered in a bookstore in Northern England. Since that time, they have taken on a life of their own and hardly reflect the history and conviction for which they were conceived.

While World War II was no trifling matter, the admonishment given to those facing that overwhelming situation is really good advice for any circumstance, especially those of little or no consequence.

Keep Calm and Carry on.

We shouldn't get too shook by a trifle. Something that is “of little value or importance” should not be worried about, or be allowed to interfere or distract.

A friend and I had spent a week working at a camp in Bemidji, MN. If you've ever been to Minnesota in the summer, you are probably well acquainted with our state bird: the mosquito. One early evening, we wanted to have some fun after a day's work and decided to go golfing. I only lasted two holes. The air was so thick with gnats and mosquitoes, I simply could not bear the psychological warfare.

Sure, they're pretty harmless, unless you let them get to you. First, they break you mentally. Not too long after that, they have you convulsing and flailing your arms in the air like one of those inflatable tube people.

However, my friend was able to ignore them. Crawling in his nose, ears, and eyes, he had the remarkable ability to just play on. Evidently, he was blessed with the superpower of being imperturbable.



TRANQUILITY

“BE NOT DISTURBED AT TRIFLES, OR AT ACCIDENTS COMMON OR UNAVOIDABLE.”

Franklin’s admonition is to “keep calm and carry on”. We can’t allow trifles and those events and circumstances that are common and unavoidable to trip us up or pull us away from what is actually important. The inability to find tranquility can develop into a perpetual state of being perturbed.

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Tranquility

Being Undisturbed by Trifles

There are a number of questions or areas to investigate as we deal with the ways the trifling matters of life get to us. From understanding what you’re feeling and considering others’ perspectives, to overthinking things and beating yourself up. However, I want to focus on two areas specifically.

The first is to try and quickly dispel our lunacy. I know that for me, things become much larger than they actually are, and far more dangerous in my mind when I detach from reality. The little things get to me and reality is distorted.

The second is a caution about dealing with anger. Whether you have a quick fuse or your anger is always on simmer, handling the “little things” can spare you and others unnecessary harm.

Less like Kirk. More like Spock.

Reality is pretty important. Spock is always good about pointing to those instances of reality we mere humans like to skip past.

“Insufficient facts always invite danger.” – Spock

Captain Kirk, on the other hand, is, well, the opposite. Reality doesn’t seem to stop him from going where his heart leads him. It’s pretty easy to see who would be the “arm flailer” and who would just simply move to an area that had no gnats.

Here’s how we can apply more reality to trifles, and keep from overreacting emotionally and letting them drive us nuts.



TRANQUILITY

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- Identify what is true in the situation. What is true of you, God, and elements of the (trifling) situation?
- Is this one of life’s trifles? Can I change it or avoid it
- What will happen if I explode? That is, what will be the outcome if I don’t deal with reality, and begin flailing my arms?

You can only manage what is in your control. Set aside the rest.

“When you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” – Spock

Let logic “take the wheel”. When you skip past some logical considerations, you become a little too much like Captain Kirk, and not enough like Spock.

Less like Hulk. More like Banner.

Seeing the Hulk puts the need for anger management into perspective. Though we don’t turn green, and burst out of our clothing, when we erupt it can be deadly if not at least extremely painful. People run in fear for their lives and property damage is exponential.

Steve Rogers: “Doctor Banner, now might be a good time for you to get angry.”

Bruce Banner: “That’s my secret, Cap: I’m always angry.”

– From The Avengers

If you’ve reached that point, or can quickly get there, hopefully, you can learn to “walk it back” to where you “left logic behind.” Additionally, here are a few steps to take to manage the “inner monster” with help from The Comic Vault:

- Recognize your monster. And what triggers it. Why are you angry? What “takes you there”? Can it be diffused, or can you distance yourself from it?
- Talk to the monster, and make it your ally. The monster can be put to good use when it is controlled and directed.



TRANQUILITY

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- Identify the “something positive” you can channel that anger toward. When feeling like you need an outlet, determine how you can direct that emotion in a way that something good will result from expressing it.

We cannot avoid the unavoidable. But we can avoid what is. Remember: more like Spock and Banner, less like Kirk and The Hulk.

Being calm, cool, and collected means you will avoid the tendency to be perpetually perturbed.

Keep Calm and Carry On.



CHASTITY

“RARELY USE VENERY BUT FOR HEALTH OR OFFSPRING, NEVER TO DULLNESS, WEAKNESS, OR THE INJURY OF YOUR OWN OR ANOTHER’S PEACE OR REPUTATION.”

More Leads to Less

Don’t worry, I had to look it up too. Essentially, venery is “sexual indulgence.”

Living when he did, you’d expect Franklin to hold what some would call a prudish view of how we should express ourselves sexually. But even his explanation could be taken to be a little on the progressive side. He doesn’t exactly prohibit indulgence but instead warns of its implications.

When it comes to living life, I like to think that the older something is, the more likely it is to be right. It has had time to be tested and proved. After all, wisdom does not have an expiration date. Consider this argument from over 1700 years before Franklin:

“Abstain from casual sex and particularly avoid sexual intercourse before you get married. This may sound prudish or old-fashioned, but it is a time-tested way by which we demonstrate respect for ourselves and others. Sex is not a game. It gives rise to very real enduring emotional and practical consequences. To ignore this is to debase yourself, and to disregard the significance of human relationships.” – Epictetus

More than a prudish decree, chastity has broad and deep implications. Both Franklin's and Epictetus' arguments for chastity find their basis in what God had said of sexual immorality millennia before them both.

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God.” – Leviticus 18:1-4

The chapter goes on to describe the specific ways the Israelites are to behave as God’s people. Imagine what our culture would be like if we were to have abided by God’s mandate of purity. People not debasing themselves, and, having a high regard for the significance of human relationships would be pretty fantastic.



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While Franklin and Epictetus are good at pointing out the consequences of rejecting chastity, they miss an important part of the equation. Everything has a purpose—and a place (or timing). Especially venery. When it comes to our sexual expression, purpose, and place are inextricably tied together.

Marriage was designed as the sole place for the purpose of venery to be satisfied. At least what Franklin points out—personal health and the well-being of a family—are realized when the expression of our sexual desires remains within the context of marriage.

If not for chastity, our unbridled expression leads to depletion. We’ll have less excitement, strength, peace, reputation, and most discouragingly, less to offer our spouse in marriage.

Identify the Warning Signs

While venery is certainly one area that we need control over, it by no means is the only area where we need to exercise restraint. The essence of chastity—“the practice of refraining from”—can be applied throughout our lives. We can use the four areas Franklin pointed out as a means to identify wherever we’ve unwittingly blown through a barrier.

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Chastity

Is life seeming a little dull?

Dullness can lead either to idleness or, to us exploring things that ought to need to be explored. Both are cul de sacs of misery.

When something is dull, it has lost its flavor, or we have lost sight of its value.

- What part of your life has lost its flavor? What are some good ways to make it flavorful again?
- Is there an area that you need to rediscover “for the first time”, that will remind you of its worth and value?



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Where are you weak or vulnerable?

We are weaker when we indulge but grow stronger through restraint. Weakness leaves us vulnerable.

With our strength depleted, we expose ourselves to being undermined or exhausted by having given ourselves away to something unworthy of any attention.

- Where are you exerting the most effort? Are you able to justify that level of effort in that area?
- Where has excess or indulgence left you vulnerable? How can that revelation motivate you to rebuild your defenses?

Where is there conflict, tension, or lack of harmony?

Peace of mind. Peace with others. Peace is so... peaceful. No good thing comes from chaos. Peace allows us to see clearly and to take the necessary time to find the right path forward.

- What areas or people are robbing you of order?
- What things do you need to let go of, or, that you need to decide to make progress on correcting?
- Where have you allowed disorder or discord to linger?

What are you known for? How is your life viewed by others?

This is a little tricky. We don’t want to be too concerned with what other people think. I was intentionally trying to avoid that by the way I asked the questions.

We need to care about how we communicate and, to a degree, how we’re understood. Our ability to persuade and influence is largely based on the reputation we have cultivated. Not having the right reputation can be very limiting.

- Would others describe you as someone who is in control of themselves?
- Is there a sense on the part of others that you take things too far?
- What parts of your reputation need repair?



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Indulging ourselves ultimately leads to diminishing returns. Our impulses, when pursued in excess, lead to dullness. When life becomes dull, we become weak and vulnerable. We give in too easily, we can’t defend ourselves, and we can’t pursue what is best for us. Being unable to defend or control ourselves for a lack of resolve, it is hard to maintain peace. A life of dullness, defenselessness, and discord is disastrous—who wouldn’t hold a dim view of such a person?

These are unintended consequences of “all gas, no brake.” When we let loose, we are certain to injure ourselves and others. As we all know, it’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye.



HUMILITY

“IMITATE JESUS AND SOCRATES.”

Have an Honest View of Ourselves

Are you as struck by Franklin’s recommendation as I am?

Why *both*?

If you’re going to include Jesus on any list, there really isn’t any need to include anyone else. It was curious to me what Franklin might have been thinking that would lead him to include these two people specifically, and only these two people. Perhaps it was this prompting from a personal friend of Franklin’s:

“My list of virtues continued at first but twelve; but a Quaker friend having kindly informed me that I was generally thought proud, that my pride showed itself frequently in conversation, that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing and rather insolent, of which he convinced me by mentioning several instances, I determined endeavoring to cure myself, if I could, of this vice or folly among the rest, and I added Humility to my list, giving an extensive meaning to the word.”

Humility is “a modest or low view of one’s own importance.” It may well be that you are important, or the best, but humility moderates a balanced view of how *you* should view yourself. God opposes the proud just as all others are repulsed by them.

Humility ensures there is room for others to weigh in; the final arbiters are those who see more of us than what we see in the mirror. Self-awareness is met by a jury of our peers that helps silence the internal voice of pride.

“A great man is always willing to be little.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is no “littler” person than Jesus, and it doesn’t take much to make that case. With just these several verses from the Bible, the magnitude of his humility is put in view:



HUMILITY

“IMITATE JESUS AND SOCRATES.”

“...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” – Philippians 2:5-8

The One who is the most, living as the least. The Highest, living as the lowest. There simply is no better example of humility.

When it comes to earthly examples of humility, one would do well to consider the observations of Socrates. This light overview is only meant to expose the idea of humility in a couple of key points.

We get a good understanding of Socrates through Plato, in particular with *The Apology*, which Plato wrote based on the trial of Socrates for “not recognizing the gods recognized by the state, inventing new deities, and corrupting the youth of Athens.”

From that trial comes the famous quote from Socrates: “an unexamined life is not worth living.” Considering that, it can be easy to see how the Socratic Method would be valuable for examining one’s life and driving us toward humility. The examination of one’s beliefs or values to see if they are correct is absolutely worth imitating.

One other point from Socrates worth noting is the idea that: one is wise when they realize they are not wise. He was someone who knew a great deal, but yet it led him to conclude how little he ultimately knew. However, our willingness to acknowledge this possibility puts on a dangerous precipice, teetering between accepting the fact that we can’t, and won’t, know everything and, swelling with pride over the perception of how humble we are.

No doubt Franklin admired Jesus for the fact that there was no teetering. He was wise and lived out humility perfectly. Socrates most likely shared the challenge Franklin, and for that matter, every one of us faces in dealing with “being great at being least”. Benjamin describes it this way:



HUMILITY

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“In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself; you will see it, perhaps, often in this history; for, even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.”

Living Ben Franklin’s 13 Virtues: Humility

Factors in living humbly

Franklin characterizes the struggle for humility accurately as an ongoing wrestling match. We need to get our hands around its neck and squeeze for all we’re worth, being careful not to ever let up. Let’s consider how that death grip might be possible:

Stand Guard

Awareness is one thing, but being alert—ready to engage—is another. Actively guarding our hearts will allow us to become aware more immediately, and render the necessary response. That is captured in Psalm 119:9: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.”

The purity of mind, body, and soul is possible through the proper response to the very counsel of God. He will help identify pride and lead us to extinguish it.

Administer Frequent Examinations

It is true, an “unexamined life is not worth living”. Which is to say that we are to live an “examined life.” This goes beyond being on alert, to conducting frequent and in-depth scans of all areas of your life.

Which, has been the focus of this blog. To consider how we can apply wisdom in our lives, mind, body, and soul. That pretty much covers it all. What are you feeding those areas? How are they responding? Are you exercising what is good for those areas at the right frequency and intensity?



HUMILITY

“IMITATE JESUS AND SOCRATES.”

First, Be Grateful

Starting with gratitude can help push pride away. Now, I say grateful because I don't mean thankful. You can be thankful too, but I want us to avoid being thankful for something rather than being grateful to someone. Pharisees had the tendency to be thankful.

Gratitude is a better expression of humility. We are not ultimately responsible for what we have, or who we are, because that is owed to the Creator. That you're taller, faster, or mightier than others should not be first attributed back to you.

Interestingly, where we end with the list of virtues, is probably the best place to start. Humility is not just a result, it is a pathway to fully realizing the virtuous life.

I close this Wisdom In All Things special series with this final quote from Benjamin Franklin:

“Revolving this project in my mind, as to be undertaking hereafter, when my circumstances should afford me the necessary leisure, I put down from time to time, on pieces of paper, such thoughts as occurred to me respecting it...”

“That there is one God, who made all things.

“That He governs the world by His providence.

“That He ought to be worshiped by adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving.

“But that the most acceptable service of God is doing good to man.

“That the soul is immortal.,

“And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here or hereafter.”



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S 13 VIRTUES

VIRTUE #1: "TEMPERANCE. EAT NOT TO DULLNESS; DRINK NOT TO ELEVATION."

VIRTUE #2: "SILENCE. SPEAK NOT BUT WHAT MAY BENEFIT OTHERS OR YOURSELF; AVOID TRIFLING CONVERSATION."

VIRTUE #3: "ORDER. LET ALL YOUR THINGS HAVE THEIR PLACES; LET EACH PART OF YOUR BUSINESS HAVE ITS TIME."

VIRTUE #4: "RESOLUTION. RESOLVE TO PERFORM WHAT YOU OUGHT; PERFORM WITHOUT FAIL WHAT YOU RESOLVE."

VIRTUE #5: "FRUGALITY. MAKE NO EXPENSE BUT TO DO GOOD TO OTHERS OR YOURSELF; I.E., WASTE NOTHING."

VIRTUE #6: "INDUSTRY. LOSE NO TIME; BE ALWAYS EMPLOY'D IN SOMETHING USEFUL; CUT OFF ALL UNNECESSARY ACTIONS."

VIRTUE #7: "SINCERITY. USE NO HURTFUL DECEIT; THINK INNOCENTLY AND JUSTLY, AND, IF YOU SPEAK, SPEAK ACCORDINGLY."

VIRTUE #8: "JUSTICE. WRONG NONE BY DOING INJURIES, OR OMITTING THE BENEFITS THAT ARE YOUR DUTY."

VIRTUE #9: "MODERATION. AVOID EXTREMES; FORBEAR RESENTING INJURIES SO MUCH AS YOU THINK THEY DESERVE."

VIRTUE #10: "CLEANLINESS. TOLERATE NO UNCLEANLINESS IN BODY, CLOTHES, OR HABITATION."

VIRTUE #11: "TRANQUILITY. BE NOT DISTURBED AT TRIFLES, OR AT ACCIDENTS COMMON OR UNAVOIDABLE."

VIRTUE #12: "CHASTITY. RARELY USE VENERY BUT FOR HEALTH OR OFFSPRING, NEVER TO DULLNESS, WEAKNESS, OR THE INJURY OF YOUR OWN OR ANOTHER'S PEACE OR REPUTATION."

VIRTUE #13: "HUMILITY. IMITATE JESUS AND SOCRATES."

WISDOM

NOTHING WE DESIRE CAN COMPARE WITH HER. -Pr. 8:11

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