

# ART & VIRTUE

*The Christian Teachings of Virtue (Series 3, Part 1, Teaching #17)*

**Leader Guide...**

*See the back page for detailed facilitator instructions.*

**Instructions:** Watch video, read aloud, underline what stands out to you most, discuss

When it comes to excellence—

*Art represents external excellence, and virtue represents internal excellence.*

It is said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit” (Aristotle). Consider a gymnast. The grace and power seen in their movements are not the result of chance, but of thousands of hours spent falling, failing, correcting, and trying again. The same is true for any great artist, athlete, speaker, musician, salesperson, surgeon, or craftsman. Behind every display of excellence is a life of habitual practice. They didn’t become masters in a single act—they became virtuoso performers through countless acts of effort, repetition, and discipline.

**ART**  
Art represents  
**external**  
excellence.  
(Extrinsic)

**VIRTUE**  
Virtue represents  
**internal**  
excellence.  
(Intrinsic)

The same is true for the soul. The pursuit of moral excellence—virtue—requires just as much practice as any art. The difference is that, while art shapes the body and mind, virtue shapes the heart and soul. To become courageous, you must habitually perform courageous acts. To become patient, you must practice patience again and again, even when it pains you. To become honest, you must choose honesty, especially when it exposes you. Eventually, it becomes second nature—like muscle memory for your character—to the point where not doing what is courageous, patient, or honest when the opportunity presents itself is next to impossible.

This is the path of interior excellence. Virtue, then, is a habitual and stable disposition toward the moral good. It is not something that can be developed overnight—just as you can’t become a world-renowned rock climber overnight. It takes consistent and persistent practice—choosing the good, rejecting the bad, again and again—until it is solidified into your character and stamped upon your soul. It becomes, over time, who you are.

Like a master painter who can create beauty with a single stroke, the virtuous one moves through life with moral precision—not because they are striving to be good in each moment, but because they have become good by nature. Their character is formed in virtue; their soul, moved by grace and strengthened through cooperation with it, reflects the likeness of Christ.

Truly, “The test of the artist does not lie in the will with which he goes to work, but in the excellence of the work he produces” (St. Thomas Aquinas). Thus, the virtuous life is not a performance for others to see—it is the formation of excellence from within. And just as a musician’s hands become an extension of their instrument, so too does your soul—your intellect, will, and passions—become an extension of Christ when perfected by grace, ordered by love, and guided by virtue.

The journey is long. But don’t be discouraged by how far you have to go. Just take the next step. Make the next right choice. Form the habit. Build the spiritual muscle. Forge the character. For if you stay the course, day by day, virtue will not only become your habit—it will become your identity in Christ.

This is the art of a holy life. The excellence of the soul. The path to becoming who God wills you to be.



**Watch Video:** Scan the QR code to access the video for this teaching as well as additional resources such as related Scripture, quotes, and more.  
Or, visit [horseandchariot.com/art-virtue](https://horseandchariot.com/art-virtue)

Art displays external excellence through practiced skill; virtue displays internal excellence through practiced holiness. Just as a master artist trains endlessly until beauty flows naturally from their hands, the Christian must train in virtue until goodness flows naturally from their soul. Virtue is not instant—it is formed by habit, choice, and grace.

**1. Practice shapes character.** What you repeat forms who you become. → What habits are you practicing daily that are shaping your soul?

**2. Virtue requires perseverance.** Excellence comes through repetition, even when it hurts. → Where is God asking you to endure in virtue despite the difficulty?

**3. Goodness becomes second nature.** With practice, virtue ceases to feel forced—it becomes who you are. → Do you live virtue only when convenient, or has it become instinctive?

**4. Interior excellence surpasses display.** True virtue is not for show but for transformation. → Do you pursue holiness for God's glory or people's approval?

**5. Grace perfects practice.** Habit trains the soul, but only grace sanctifies it. → Are you inviting Christ to breathe life into your efforts so your virtue reflects Him?

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A VIRTUOUS SOUL

Those who pursue virtue as the art of the soul exhibit these traits:

**1. Consistency.** They practice what is right until it becomes their nature.

**2. Resilience.** They keep going despite failure, learning from every fall.

**3. Humility.** They see virtue not as their own masterpiece but as God's work through them.

**4. Integrity.** Their outward actions match their inward character.

**5. Holiness.** Their soul, like a finely tuned instrument, resonates with the likeness of Christ.

### Signs of Struggling in Virtue...

- You try to act holy in public but neglect virtue in private.
- You pursue bursts of goodness but lack consistency.
- You become discouraged by failure and stop trying.
- You perform for the approval of others instead of God.
- You rely on sheer willpower instead of prayer and grace.
- You excuse sin as “just who I am” instead of fighting to change.

**Think:** Virtue is the art of the soul. Just as a painter perfects their craft through countless strokes, I am called to perfect holiness through countless choices. Each act of patience, courage, and honesty is a brushstroke forming Christ's likeness in me. The masterpiece of my soul is not for display but for God's glory.

**Pray:** Lord, train me in the art of virtue. Help me to practice what is right until it becomes part of me. Strengthen me when I fall, humble me when I grow, and sanctify me by Your grace. Form my soul into a masterpiece of holiness—not for my recognition, but for Your glory. May my life reflect the excellence of Christ. Amen.

## SELF-EVALUATION &amp; ACTION STEP

Of the areas you underlined throughout this teaching, which stood out to you most and why?  
(Reflect, write down, discuss)

Rate yourself from 1-10

1 = I rarely practice virtue with consistency

10 = Virtue flows naturally from my daily choices

|   |   |   |   |              |   |   |   |   |    |
|---|---|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | <del>5</del> | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|----|

← (avoid 5) →

Why did you give yourself this rating?

(What virtue do you most need to practice right now, and what habit will help you grow in it?)

What benefits will you obtain from raising your rating? (Consider your spiritual life, relationships, work life, how you use your time, and beyond)

Where are you tempted to “perform” goodness outwardly while neglecting inward transformation?

What specific action step will you take this week to better form habits of virtue in your life?

**Daily Affirmation:** Today, I will practice virtue as the art of the soul. Each small choice is a brushstroke of holiness. With grace, I will shape my character in Christ until virtue becomes not just my habit—but my identity.

## FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

### Courageous Facilitator,

Your willingness to step forward and lead is a gift of grace to your community and a brave act of faith. God bless you for answering the call to inspire others to grow in virtue and pursue the character of Christ.

The Holy Spirit thrives in fellowship and community, working powerfully through the connections and shared experiences of small groups. That's why these lesson plans are designed to cultivate genuine relationships, inspire meaningful conversations, and foster a spirit of transformation through shared wisdom and grace.

Facilitating these lessons is both simple and impactful. While many forms of teaching rely on one-way communication, where one person speaks and others listen, true transformation happens through two-way communication. In this format, ideas aren't merely taught—they're explored together. You'll guide, but everyone will share and learn from one another, creating a rich environment where the Holy Spirit can move and grow each mind, heart, and soul.

These lesson plans succeed because they:

- **Encourage connection** in a collaborative small group setting that fosters action and accountability
- **Empower every voice** with opportunities for each participant to share and contribute
- **Inspire growth** through educational, inspirational, and transformational teachings

Your role as a facilitator is to:

- **Follow the instructions and trust the process**—the wheel is already built, you're here to guide it.
- **Honor the schedule** by being punctual and respecting the time of your group.
- **Lead with love** and rely on God's grace to inspire, guide, and uplift everyone in the group.

Your courage to create a space for growth and fellowship will not only bless others but will deepen your own journey of faith and virtue. Together, with God's help, lives will be transformed.

*To God be the glory!*

## FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

### 1. Getting Started (5-10 mins)

- ☐ Give everyone a few minutes to join before getting started. Be friendly and greet people as they arrive. Get them talking! Come prepared with some good ice-breaker questions you can ask during this time.
- ☐ 3-5 minutes in, do quick introductions for anyone new to the group. What brought them to the group? Spend a moment getting to know them.
- ☐ Open with a short prayer (facilitator or volunteer).

### 2. Watch & Read the Teaching (5-10 mins)

- ☐ Watch the video of the teaching as a group.
- ☐ Have a volunteer read all of page 1. Have others follow along and underline what stands out to them most.

### 3. How it Applies (5-10 mins)

- ☐ Have a volunteer read all of page 2. Have others follow along and underline what stands out to them most.

### 4. Reflection & Discussion (20-30 mins)

- ☐ Have everyone quietly take 5 minutes to complete the "Self-Evaluation & Action Step" on page 3.
- ☐ Then, going around the group, have each person take a minute to share what stood out to them most about the teaching and why.
- ☐ If time allows, continue the discussion using the remaining self-evaluation questions as a guide.

### 5. Wrap Up (5 mins)

- ☐ Remind everyone to do the daily affirmation until you meet again next time.
- ☐ Ask for any prayer requests from the group.
- ☐ Close with a short prayer (facilitator or volunteer).