

THE UNITY OF THE VIRTUES

The Christian Teachings of Virtue (Series 5, Part 8, Teaching #40)

Instructions: Read aloud, underline what stands out to you most, discuss



Leader Guide...

See the back page for detailed facilitator instructions.

No virtue stands alone, for each finds its strength in the other—this is the unity of the virtues.

The unity of the virtues is not a collection of separate traits, each functioning independently within the soul; rather, it is a unified, divine harmony in which each virtue strengthens, supports, and elevates the others.

The life of virtue is not about excelling in isolated areas but about allowing all virtues to grow together, forming a character that reflects the image of Christ. Just as a symphony is not a series of disconnected notes but a cohesive masterpiece—where each instrument plays a role in the whole—so too is the virtuous life a work of divine artistry, where each virtue finds its place within the greater order of holiness. “And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14).

The virtues, both theological and cardinal, are like buoys in the water, rising and falling together. When one virtue is strengthened, it naturally lifts the others with it. A person who grows in faith also grows in hope, for they trust more fully in God’s promises. A soul that deepens in charity also strengthens justice, for love demands each person is treated rightly. A person who cultivates prudence sharpens their ability to act with fortitude and temperance, for wisdom enables courage and moderation to be exercised properly. No virtue stands in isolation—each is interconnected, each is dependent upon the others, and together they guide the believer toward God.

Likewise, when one virtue is weakened, the others suffer. A person who lacks temperance will struggle to act with prudence, for without self-mastery, wise choices become difficult. A person without justice will falter in fortitude, for courage without righteousness can become recklessness. When faith wavers, hope dims, and charity grows cold. The truth is, “a slight failing in one virtue is enough to put all the others to sleep” (St. Teresa of Ávila).

Just as the virtues must be united in harmony, so too must the soul be properly ordered—like the charioteer, the reins, and the horses that carry them forward. The intellect—the charioteer—must be enlightened by faith so it sees rightly. The will—the reins—must be strengthened by hope so it holds firm to what is good. The passions—the horses—must be perfected by charity so they are ordered by love rather than led by impulse and pride.

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Unity of Virtues

Faith

Hope

Charity

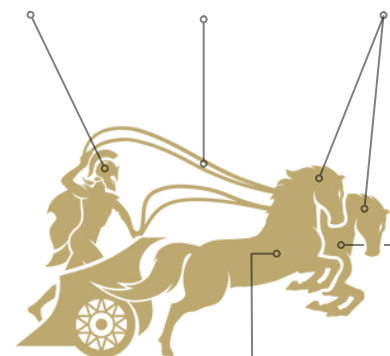
Prudence

Justice

Fortitude

Temperance

Intellect » Will » Passions
Enlightened by Faith Strengthened by Hope Ordered by Charity (Love)



Passions in the face of difficulties and trials

Passions in the face of desires and temptations



Continue Learning: 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/the-unity-of-the-virtues



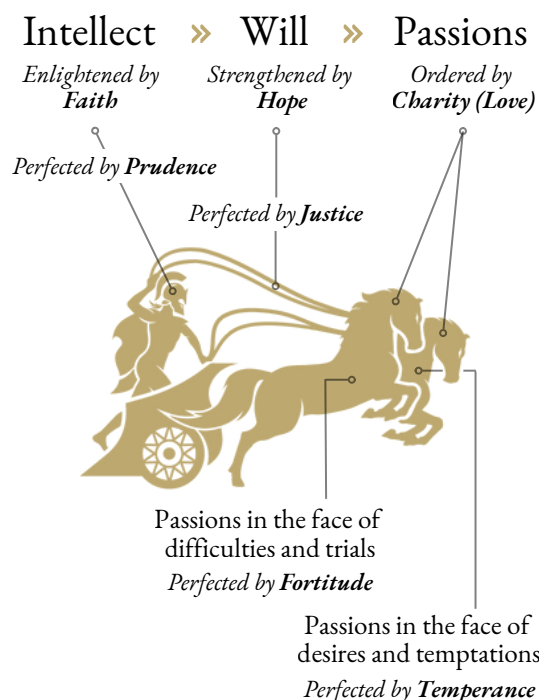
The cardinal virtues refine and direct this process: prudence ensures the charioteer sees the path clearly; justice ensures the reins pull in righteousness; fortitude ensures the chariot endures hardship; and temperance ensures the horses remain balanced and controlled. Just as a charioteer cannot reach their destination if the horses run wild, if the reins are weak, or if their vision is unclear, so too can a soul not reach holiness if its virtues are out of sync.

This is why the path to sanctification is not merely about choosing which virtues to pursue, but about embracing the life of virtue as a whole. You are not called to be partially transformed, but wholly renewed—shedding the old self and putting on the new. As Saint Paul implores, “So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to—the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self, which is created in God’s likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy” (Ephesians 4:22–24). Virtue is not just about moral improvement—it is about becoming like Christ, allowing His life to take form within you so you no longer live for yourself but for Him.

This transformation does not happen overnight. The unity of the virtues is forged in the trials of daily life—in moments of temptation, suffering, and perseverance. Faith is tested in uncertainty. Hope is refined in hardship. Charity is purified in sacrifice. Prudence is sharpened in decision-making. Justice is strengthened through the demands of truth. Fortitude is deepened in adversity. Temperance is perfected in self-mastery. Each virtue is cultivated through struggle, and each struggle, when embraced with grace, shapes you ever more into the character of Christ.

Thus, the virtues are not simply guides for moral living; they are the pathway by which the soul is sanctified. Through the harmony of virtue, you are made fit for Heaven and prepared for eternal communion with God. This is why the pursuit of virtue is not optional—it is essential. Without it, the soul remains fragmented, ruled by passions rather than grace, drifting without direction. But with virtue, the soul is ordered, strengthened, and led ever upward—toward its final and utmost fulfillment in God.

Ultimately, to live virtuously is to live in step with God’s divine order, to participate in the life of grace, and to walk the path that leads not only to holiness but to eternal joy. This is the beauty of the unity of the virtues: they are not merely tools for self-improvement—they are the very means by which you are transformed, drawn into the fullness of God’s love. For “all virtue is ordered toward the love of God, and in love, the virtues find their perfection” (St. Bonaventure).



The virtues do not grow in isolation, nor do they grow by mere effort—they grow in communion. And communion with Christ begins, continues, and deepens through prayer.

Prayer is not just a practice to support the virtuous life—it is the lifeblood of it. Without prayer, virtue becomes performance. But with prayer, virtue becomes transformation. For in prayer, we are united to the One who is virtue Himself.

You cannot strengthen your relationship with Christ if you do not spend time with Him. Just as no friendship can flourish without presence, no soul can flourish in virtue apart from the presence of God. And it is in prayer that this presence is sought, experienced, and cherished.

Not every prayer will feel powerful. Some are dry. Some make you cry. Some are short. Some are long. Some feel the same. Some feel like a strain. But every single one matters. One stacked upon the next, they draw you nearer to the heart of Christ.

It's been said, "The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays" (Søren Kierkegaard). And it's true—consistent, humble, daily prayer reforms the soul. It sharpens the intellect, bends the will, purifies the passions, and anchors each virtue more firmly in God.

Prayer is not just how the soul is formed—it is how the soul is protected. "If we do not fill our mind with prayer, it will fill itself with anxieties, worries, temptations, resentments, and unwelcome memories" (Scott Hahn). The absence of prayer leaves a vacuum the enemy is eager to fill. For, "There is nothing the devil fears so much, or so much tries to hinder, as prayer" (St. Philip Neri). Prayer is spiritual armor. It guards the mind, steadies the heart, and holds back the shadows that seek to distort virtue and discourage the soul.

You will find that the virtues rise and fall with the state of your prayer life. When prayer weakens, virtues wither. But when prayer deepens, the virtues thrive in harmony. Prayer is what aligns the charioteer, reins, and horses—intellect, will, and passions—so that your whole soul moves forward together in grace.

Therefore, make it your aim not to merely pray about your goals, but to make your goal to pray. For, "Prayer is an investment. The time we dedicate to prayer isn't lost; it will return dividends far greater than what a few moments spent on a task ever could. If we fail to cultivate this discipline, prayer winds up being our last resort rather than our first response" (Charles R. Swindoll).

Prayer is not an accessory to the life of virtue—it is its engine. Without it, even the most noble intentions stall. But with it, the soul is lifted, the virtues are quickened, and grace begins to flow like wind through the sails of your soul.

So pray—deeply, frequently, honestly. Pray when it feels easy. Pray when it feels hard. Pray when it feels like nothing is happening, because it is in those hidden moments that God is often doing His deepest work. The more time you spend in prayer, the more the virtues within you will take root, grow strong, and blossom into holiness.

Before you pursue the virtuous life, you must understand this truth: the unity of the virtues, perfected by love, is only made possible by grace. And that grace is accessed, nourished, and sustained through committed prayer. You cannot walk the path of virtue alone. Virtue is not a product of mere willpower, nor is holiness achieved by human strength. If you rely on yourself, your efforts will quickly falter, and pride will trap your soul. Virtue flows not from your own goodness, but from Christ dwelling within you. It is the Holy Spirit who brings virtue to life, transforming your heart from within.

Remember, your soul is like a ship upon the waters: living virtuously lifts your sails, allowing the Holy Spirit—the winds of grace—to move and guide you. When you choose sin and vice, you lower those sails, resisting the very grace that seeks to carry you forward. The key is humility—acknowledging that every good within you is God’s gift, not your own achievement.

It is said, “Few souls understand what God would effect in them if they should give themselves entirely into His hands and allow His grace to act” (St. Ignatius of Loyola). Strive to be one of these few. The unity of the virtues thrives when you surrender your heart fully to grace. As you cooperate with God’s grace, faith deepens, hope strengthens, and love becomes the bond that unifies every virtue within your soul. You are not striving by yourself; you are partnering with the God who made you, who knows your weaknesses, and who patiently sanctifies you day by day.

So, with humble trust, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you gently toward holiness. It is by God’s good grace that virtues flourish together, uniting your heart ever more perfectly with the heart of Christ. Once you grasp the truth —“Grace is the voice that calls us to change and then gives us the power to pull it off” (Max Lucado)—the path of virtue stands open before you.

Seeker of virtue, you stand at the edge of the path that leads to your highest calling—the way of virtue, the road to sanctification, the journey to true fulfillment. This path is not for the fainthearted. It is steep, demanding, and filled with trials that will test your resolve. It will require you to abandon the easy road, to reject the comforts of complacency, and to embrace a life of discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance. But do not fear—for though this path is difficult, it is the only one that leads to the fullness of life, the only one that draws you ever closer to God, and the only one that will satisfy the longing in your soul.

The way of virtue is not a series of disconnected lessons or moral improvements—it is a complete transformation, where, ever so slightly, “love transforms one virtue into another, making them all one and the same in the soul” (St. Catherine of Siena). It is the road by which the old self is stripped away, where selfishness, pride, and weakness are left behind, and where the new self, strengthened by grace, is forged in the image of Christ. With every step forward, you will become more than you once were. With every struggle endured, every temptation resisted, and every sacrifice made, you will be reshaped into something greater—someone holier, someone stronger, someone freer.

But do not be deceived—this path is long, and it will test you. There will be moments when you falter, when weakness overtakes you, when temptation whispers, “Virtue is too difficult.” There will be times when you grow weary, when you wonder if the pursuit of holiness is worth the effort, when the world mocks your resolve and urges you to abandon the struggle. You will face opposition from without and from within. The world will tell you virtue is foolishness, that self-indulgence is freedom, and that pleasure is the highest good. Your own heart will resist discipline, seeking the ease of comfort rather than the trials of growth. You will be tempted to justify small compromises, to tell yourself virtue is for saints, and that holiness is beyond you.

But press on. Do not turn back. For though the way of virtue is demanding, it leads to life. It leads to peace. It leads to a joy the world cannot give and cannot take away. It leads to a heart that is strong, a soul that is devout, and a life filled with purpose. Those who walk this path do not live in regret, for they have chosen what is lasting over what is fleeting, what is true over what is convenient, and what is for the glory of God over the glory of self.

And you will not walk partnerless. The same God who calls you to this path will sustain you on it. His grace will strengthen your steps, His wisdom will illuminate your way, and His mercy will restore you when you stumble. He does not ask for perfection; He asks for faithfulness. And if you remain faithful—if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if you keep your eyes fixed on Him—He will lead you home. “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. If these are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5–8).

The way of virtue is the way of faithfulness. It is a journey that is hard and a road that is narrow. Your faith will be attacked, tested, and questioned—oftentimes, by your very self. You will travel through periods of dryness, darkness, cold, and silence. But if you don’t give up—if you continue walking in faith, standing in virtue, clinging to Christ even when you do not feel Him, see Him, or hear Him—you will eventually walk through seasons of profound spiritual abundance, growth, and the warmth of divinely infused grace, love, and enlightenment.

“Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness. Tie them around your neck; write them on your heart” (Proverbs 3:3–4)—and wholeheartedly commit to the path of virtue, the way of faith. Be not one of the many who remain uncommitted simply because the fear of what they might lose outweighs belief in the immeasurable gift they will gain if they give their life totally and completely to Christ. Commit.

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Wayfarer of faith, if you should fall—repent, rise, and recommit to the way. If you fall seventy-seven times, be remorseful, but don't relent; reflect, atone, and return to the way. If you fall seventy-seven thousand times, do not desert the way in despair—resume it in hope, seventy-seven thousand times over if that's what it requires. For once the way of faith is entered, sweet salvation is certain if faith is not wholly and entirely abandoned.

This is the path of virtue—the road to holiness, the process of sanctification, the journey that makes saints of sinners and transforms weakness into strength. It is the narrow road few choose, but those who do will find it leads to the only thing that has ever mattered—the eternal embrace of God Himself.

You can do this. Not by your own power, but by His. By grace. The way of virtue is the hardest path you will ever walk—but it is the only path that leads to the ultimate fullness of life. You are not alone. Lift the sails of your soul so the Holy Spirit can fill you, and the winds of grace can move you to walk with faith, endure with hope, love with charity, and live each day with prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. For in the end, you will see that the way of virtue is the path to fulfillment—and those who walk it will never walk in emptiness.

This teaching on the unity of the virtues calls every Christian to embrace a fully integrated life of holiness—where no virtue is pursued in isolation, and all are ordered in harmony through grace.

1. Live a whole, not a partial, life of virtue. The pursuit of holiness should support growth in all virtues. → Are you pursuing a single virtue while neglecting others?

2. Order your soul—intellect, will, and passions. Each part must be disciplined by grace and rightly directed. → Do you recognize when you are ruled by emotion, stubborn will, or misguided thinking?

3. Let prayer unify your virtues. Prayer aligns the heart with God and nourishes every virtue. → Is your prayer life deep enough to sustain and balance your pursuit of virtue?

4. See failure in one virtue as a call to wholeness. A stumble in one area often reveals imbalance elsewhere. → When you fall, do reflect on where your soul as a whole needs healing and growth?

5. Seek transformation, not performance. The goal is not moral perfectionism but becoming like Christ. → Are you striving to appear virtuous—or to be genuinely sanctified from the inside out?

6. Let love be the bond of every virtue. Charity is the form and fulfillment of all virtues. → Do you practice each virtue out of duty—or out of love for God and others?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FAITHFUL

A Christian who lives in the unity of the virtues walks with integrity, harmony, and grace:

1. Integrated. Their intellect, will, and passions work in harmony.

2. Rooted. They are grounded in prayer and moved by grace.

3. Whole. They do not compartmentalize holiness but seek to be virtuous in all things.

4. Balanced. No virtue overshadows the others; they grow together in harmony.

5. Resilient. When one virtue falters, the others support them until they rise again.

6. Transformed. They reflect Christ not by isolated effort, but by integrated grace.

Signs of struggling in unity of virtue...

- Praying inconsistently and noticing virtues rise and fall with it
- Pursuing virtue by willpower alone, not grace
- Excelling in one virtue while ignoring or downplaying others
- Seeking discipline but lacking love
- Living with disorder—passions dominate intellect and will
- Lacking awareness of how weakness in one area affects others
- Experiencing burnout, inconsistency, or spiritual pride

Think: Living a virtuous life means allowing every virtue to work together—strengthening, balancing, and completing one another by grace. As I grow in one, I lift them all. The virtues are not separate steps—they form one sacred path leading me to holiness. In their unity, Christ reshapes my character. By grace, my soul becomes a symphony of virtue in harmony.

Pray: Lord, make me whole. Don't just strengthen one part of me—sanctify all of me. Unite my mind, my will, and my passions in Your truth. Let my faith deepen, my hope endure, and my love overflow. Bind prudence with justice, fortitude with temperance, and all the virtues together in harmony by Your grace. When I stumble in one, lift me with the others. When I grow in one, let it lift them all. May I live as one wholly transformed by You. Amen.

SELF-EVALUATION & ACTION STEP

Rate yourself from 1-10

1 = I struggle to consistently live a fully virtuous life

10 = I consider the virtuous life one of my strengths

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|----|

Struggle ←

(avoid 5)

→ Strength

Why did you give yourself this rating?

(In what areas do you struggle the most?)

What benefits will you obtain from raising your rating? (consider all aspects of your life)

What significance does prayer and grace have in your life? Do you have a daily prayer habit? If so, explain. If not, how might you develop one?

Of the areas you underlined throughout this teaching, which stood out to you most and why?

What specific action step will you take this week to grow in virtue as a whole?

Daily Affirmation: Today, by God's grace, I seek wholeness. I do not pursue virtue in parts, but allow every virtue to grow together in harmony, ordered by love and sustained by grace.

NOTES

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

Note: Because this is a longer teaching, consider sending it to the group in advance so they can reflect more deeply and come prepared to discuss.

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 or Read the Teaching (15-20 mins)

- ☐ To stay within the allotted time, either watch the video of the teaching as a group (if video available) OR have a volunteer read each page aloud.
- ☐ Have everyone note what stands out to them most.

3. How it Applies (5-10 mins)

- ☐ Have a volunteer read all of page 7. Have others follow along and underline what stands out to them most.

4. Reflection & Discussion (15-20 mins)

- ☐ Have everyone quietly take 5 minutes to complete the "Self-Evaluation & Action Step" on page 8.
- ☐ 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).