

Nine Steps for Living a Moral Life

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

1. Appreciating the gift of being human.

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

2. Using your intellect.

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

3. Looking to the law to guide your freedom.

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

4. Imitating Jesus.

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

5. Forming, informing, and following your conscience.

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

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

6. Repenting and seeking forgiveness when you sin.

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

7. Loving God above all.

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

8. Loving yourself.

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

9. Loving your neighbor.

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

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



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

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CREATIVE LEARNING

1. On four separate sheets of paper, briefly describe these four school scenarios: students see a freshman boy painting graffiti in a locker room; two students tell friends how to rig school pop machines to get free drinks; a boy in your carpool continually uses God’s name disrespectfully; you see an older student steal from a neighboring locker. Ask four students to randomly select one scenario sheet for other students to dramatize. Have the whole class discuss the moral issues involved.
2. Ban the scissors for this project and have students, working in small groups, carefully tear out magazine or newspaper photos, headlines, and articles to create “hands on” collages depicting both the goodness and the evil of the human condition. Display these collages in the classroom during this course.

RESOURCES

Internet Resources

Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* of Pope John Paul II to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year, No. 7, April 1, 1985

www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2YOUT.HTM

Beigel, Father Gerard. “Basic Principles of Catholic Moral Teaching,” *The California Mission*, September/October 2000 issue.

www.msje.org/CaliforniaMission/moralteach.htm

Catholic-pages.com

Check its directory for links to sites on morality.

www.catholic-pages.com/start

Character Counts

A good website with lots of ideas on how to teach values in schools. You can adapt many of their ideas for your morality classes. Check out the various links, especially the excellent article titled “Making Ethical Decisions.” There is much that is useful here.

www.charactercounts.org

Ethics Updates

A great Internet site by Professor Lawrence M. Hinman (University of San Diego) with lots of helpful links to ethical topics. Check the links under Abortion, Punishment and the Death Penalty, Euthanasia, and many others. GREAT teacher resource, including actual class lecture notes and PowerPoint presentations. A must see.

<http://ethics.acusd.edu>

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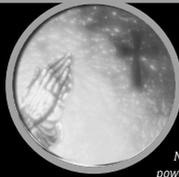


PRAYER REFLECTION

Direct students to the Prayer Reflection on p. 22. Read aloud or have a student read aloud the passage from Ephesians. Allow five to ten minutes of silent time, leading students to reflect on Christ's love for them.

Encourage students to briefly share about some occasions when they felt "the breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love for them. Then, light a candle. Pass it around to each student, asking them to name one thing they are thankful for.

In silence again, have students write their own brief prayers of thanksgiving. Conclude by inviting several students to read their prayers aloud.



FOR PRAYER REFLECTION
or this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:14–21

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

NOTES

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

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RESOURCES

Internet Resources (continued from page 39)

"Living the Good Life: Why Values Matter"

Christopher Newsnote #411
www.christophers.org/nn411.html

Morality in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: A Guide prepared by Gerald Darring.

Helpful references to various topics covered by the CCC.
www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/morality.htm

Moral Issues Catholic links

www.silk.net/RelEd/morality.htm

Stenson, James B. "Overview of the Virtues."

Good list of points that exemplify each of the cardinal virtues.
www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/virtues.html

Test Your Knowledge of the Catechism.

Good NCCB site that students can use.
www.nccbuscc.org/catechism/quizzes/index.htm

Update Your Faith—check Morality questions

www.americancatholic.org/UpdateYourFaith/default.asp#anchor_d

Websites on the Saints

- Catholics Online: www.catholic.org/saints
- Catholic Forum: www.catholic-forum.com/saints/indexsnt.htm
- Theology Library: www.shc.edu/theolibrary/saints2.htm