



## Reviving the Virtues, Part 1: What a Character

Chuck Colson | First Published: May 15, 1995

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You might not expect many sales of a volume called *The Book of Virtues*. From the title alone, the book sounds like a quaint Victorian volume, full of stories about good little children wearing knickers and pinafores.

But, surprisingly, William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* has been on the best-seller list for more than a year, with almost two million copies in print. Why are modern Americans going out in droves to buy a book about virtue, of all things?

The answer is, we're finally realizing that our most intractable social problems stem from moral choices. Things like crime, illegitimacy, and drug abuse are not the result of faulty social structures; nor can they be solved by social engineering. Instead they're the result of moral choices—and can be solved only through moral renewal.

But moral renewal is no easy task in the modern world. Our intellectual elites insist that there is no absolute truth in morality—no map to guide us. Ever since the scientific revolution, we've been told that the only real world is the one revealed by science—that statements about goodness and morality are merely private opinions.

No wonder so many people are confused, lost in a moral wilderness. To help them find their way, we must first insist that modern ideas are wrong: There is a moral road map, revealed by God in Scripture.

But merely knowing about the map is not enough. We must also be living demonstrations of where that map leads—the virtuous character it produces. And that takes practice.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis says becoming virtuous is like becoming an athlete. Even a bad tennis player might make a good shot now and then by sheer luck. But a truly good player, Lewis writes, is someone who has practiced making good shots for years: "whose eye and muscles and nerves have been so trained . . . that they can now be relied on."

In the same way, someone who perseveres in doing what is right develops a reliable character. That's virtue: choosing to do good with such consistent discipline that it becomes second nature.

When the children of Israel were poised to enter the Promised Land, Moses said to them, "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil . . . . Therefore choose life . . . [by] loving the Lord your God and obeying His voice." Our earthly life is a journey, and every few miles you and I face a fork in the road: a choice between good and evil, between life and death. Becoming virtuous means knowing the right road to take at each fork, and actually taking it.

We live in an age where people are desperately searching for life's road map. Bennett's *Book of Virtues* has climbed the best-seller lists, the president has proclaimed a National Character Counts Week, and *Newsweek* ran a cover article on recovering a sense of moral shame.

This is a unique opportunity for Christians, and in the next several commentaries I'll be talking about how we can take advantage of it—how we can bring people God's road map and show them a way out of the moral wilderness.



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