

Virtue

It was about this time I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employ'd in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping; and that the contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct. For this purpose I therefore contrived the following method

Temperance first, as it 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

[F]rom the Proverbs of Solomon, speaking of wisdom or virtue:

*Length of days is in her right hand,
and in her left hand riches and hon-
our. Her ways are ways of pleasant-
ness, and all her paths are peace.*
iii. 16, 17.

. . . It may be well my posterity should be informed that to this little artifice, with the blessing of God, their ancestor ow'd the constant felicity of his life, down to his 79th year, in which this is written I hope, therefore, that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit.

— Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*

1. **TEMPERANCE.** Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. **SILENCE.** Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. **ORDER.** Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. **RESOLUTION.** Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. **FRUGALITY.** Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. **INDUSTRY.** Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. **SINCERITY.** Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. **JUSTICE.** Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. **MODERATION.** Avoid extreams; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. **CLEANLINESS.** Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.
11. **TRANQUILLITY.** Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12. **CHASTITY.** Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. **HUMILITY.** Imitate Jesus and Socrates.