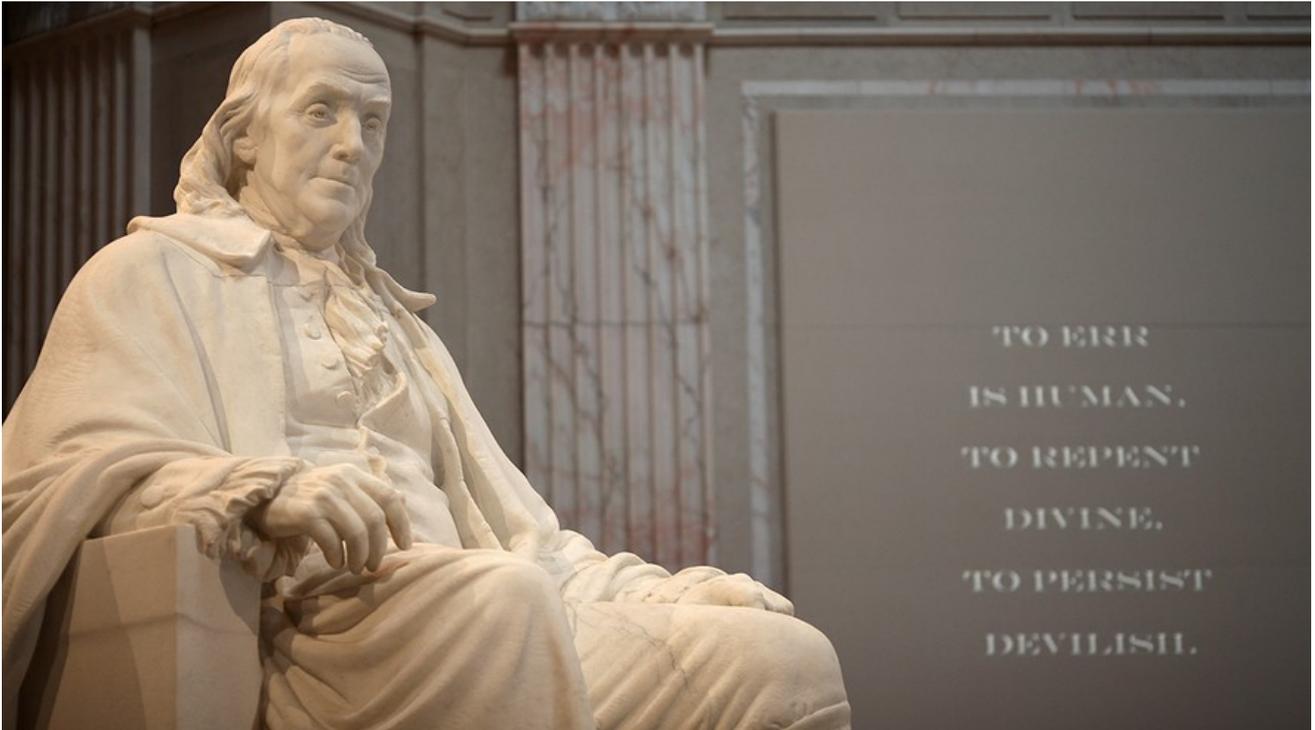


# Primary Sources: Benjamin Franklin lists 13 virtues, tries to live by them

By Benjamin Franklin, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.19.16

Word Count **840**



The Benjamin Franklin Memorial in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Terraxplorer

*Editor's Note: Benjamin Franklin signed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He was also an inventor. Franklin wrote an autobiography, a book about his life. It is commonly called "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin." The book included a list of virtues, which are a good qualities in a person. Franklin tried to practice these virtues. He was in his 20s when he first explained these virtues, but he was 78 when he wrote the following.*

## **"Wanting To Be Good Was Not Enough"**

It was around the year 1728 when I came up with the idea of trying to become morally perfect. I wanted to live without committing any wrongs at any time. Since I knew the difference between right and wrong, I did not see why I couldn't always choose to do what was right.

But I soon found out this task was more difficult than I had imagined. For example, while I carefully guarded against making one mistake, I often surprised myself by making a completely different mistake. I realized that simply wanting to be good was not enough. I would have to break my old habits and create new ones in order to become a better person. For this reason, I put together a list of the moral virtues I wanted to achieve.

### **"It Is Hard To Suppress Pride"**

I thought my list of virtues was complete, until a friend kindly informed me that many people thought me proud, and that my pride often revealed itself in conversation. He added that this quality made me bossy and rude. So I decided to cure myself of this flaw, as well. I added the virtue Humility to my list.

It is hard to suppress pride, though. You may try to hide it or fight against it. But it is still alive and will every now and then show itself. Maybe you will see it in this history.

On my list, I included those virtues which seemed most important to me, and added to each a short idea that expressed its meaning. The virtues were:

### **"Everything In Its Place"**

Temperance. Do not eat or drink too much.

Silence. Only speak when what you say will benefit others or yourself. Avoid silly, meaningless conversations.

Order. Put everything in its place and stick to a schedule.

Resolution. Decide what you need to do, and then make sure you do it.

Frugality. Spend money carefully and waste nothing.

Industry. Do not waste and try to always be working on something useful.

### **"Do Not Harm Others"**

Sincerity. Do not use hurtful lies or tricks. Think fairly and justly and speak truthfully.

Justice. Do not harm others, and do not avoid your responsibilities to others.

Moderation. Avoid extremes and don't overreact.

Cleanliness. Keep your body, clothes, and home clean.

Tranquility. Do not be upset by little things or common accidents.

Humility. Try to be less proud and more like Jesus and Socrates.

## **"A Cool, Clear Head"**

My plan was to develop all of these virtues, but I decided it would not be best to work on them all at once. Instead, I would focus on one of them at a time. Then, after I had achieved one, I could move on to the next.

Temperance is first because it tends to result in a cool, clear head. This is very helpful when you're trying to break an old habit. This being done, it would be easier to practice Silence.

I expected that Silence and the next virtue, Order, would give me more time to work on my projects and studies.

## **"Focus On One Virtue A Week"**

Resolution, once it became a habit, would help me focus as I worked on all of the other virtues.

I decided that daily record keeping would be important for tracking my progress.

So, I made a little book, in which I set up a page for each of the virtues. I drew seven columns on each page, one for each day of the week. If I failed to practice a virtue on a given day, I could mark that day with a little black spot.

I decided to focus on one virtue a week at first. In the first week, I worked only on Temperance. If I could keep my first line, marked T, clear of spots, I would be ready to turn my attention to Silence next.

## **"I Never Did Achieve Perfect Behavior"**

In the end, I had the most trouble with the virtue Order. I also found that, as a businessman, it was not always possible to practice all of the virtues while mixing in the world of business.

In truth, I could not change myself when it came to the virtue Order. Now that I am older and my memory is bad, I wish I had been better at this virtue.

However, though I never did achieve perfect behavior, and in fact fell far short of this goal, still I was a better, happier man than I would have been if I didn't try at all.

## Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Focus On One Virtue A Week" that explains how Franklin knew he was ready to practice a new virtue.
  
- 2 Which selection from the article shows that Franklin was not able to perfect all the virtues he listed?
  - (A) I thought my list of virtues was complete, until a friend kindly informed me that many people thought me proud, and that my pride often revealed itself in conversation.
  - (B) On my list, I included those virtues which seemed most important to me, and added to each a short idea that expressed its meaning.
  - (C) My plan was to develop all of these virtues, but I decided it would not be best to work on them all at once.
  - (D) In truth, I could not change myself when it came to the virtue Order. Now that I am older and my memory is bad, I wish I had been better at this virtue.

- 3 Read the selection below from the section "Do Not Harm Others."

*Tranquility. Do not be upset by little things or common accidents.*

Based on the selection, what is another word that means "tranquility"?

- (A) calmness
  - (B) fairness
  - (C) slowness
  - (D) kindness
- 4 Read the sentences below from the section "It Is Hard To Suppress Pride."

*It is hard to suppress pride, though. You may try to hide it or fight against it. But it is still alive and will every now and then show itself.*

What is the BEST substitute for the word "suppress" in the first sentence?

- (A) practice
- (B) develop
- (C) prevent
- (D) discover

## Answer Key

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Focus On One Virtue A Week" that explains how Franklin knew he was ready to practice a new virtue.

**Paragraph 24:**

**I decided to focus on one virtue a week at first. In the first week, I worked only on Temperance. If I could keep my first line, marked T, clear of spots, I would be ready to turn my attention to Silence next.**

- 2 Which selection from the article shows that Franklin was not able to perfect all the virtues he listed?

- (A) I thought my list of virtues was complete, until a friend kindly informed me that many people thought me proud, and that my pride often revealed itself in conversation.
- (B) On my list, I included those virtues which seemed most important to me, and added to each a short idea that expressed its meaning.
- (C) My plan was to develop all of these virtues, but I decided it would not be best to work on them all at once.
- (D) In truth, I could not change myself when it came to the virtue Order. Now that I am older and my memory is bad, I wish I had been better at this virtue.**

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