

Theological Commentary on Christian Virtues for use in class

What is it that makes values Christian? Many of our values are virtues shared by other faiths and by people of no faith, but they are often interpreted differently. This table tries to give a reasoned account of what makes these values specifically Christian or contain a specifically Christian emphasis that we can use in worship and instruction. **The goal of Christian discipleship is the transformation of our character, will and minds, so that we reflect more closely the image of God as shown to us in Jesus Christ.** We see this very distinctly in the scriptures on *truth*, *peace* and *wisdom*. Some Christians feel that this discipleship is only available for those who have already decided to follow Jesus Christ, but others think that it is in the process of trying to live good lives for others that we discover God in our efforts and learn to know him as we go, realising that we can't do it alone but needing Jesus' help and forgiveness.

They may have started out as values (things we treasure) but a Christian pastor would say that these are meaningless unless the (treasured) values are turned into *lived* virtues. Thus these are closer to being virtues that transform our lives than they are values external to us that "align our lives to".

Virtue	Class	Key scripture(s) from the Bible	How this value is taught within the Christian faith
Friendship	F1 Daisy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (<i>John 15:13</i>) 	<p>The Bible spends more time explaining the ways that friendship is expressed than it does defining it. It uses the Greek word <i>phileo</i> for a brotherly love that is very close to being friendship. Friendship is vital for the unity of a community. When Euodia and Syntyche, two women who worked in Philippi, fell out, Paul pleaded with them and with his friend Syzygus to help fix the friendship, in terms of their cooperative work for the church (Philippians 4:2-4). Friendship, it seems, is forged in the work we do together – thus our value of friendship in Christ the Sower is less something we <i>are</i> than something we <i>do</i>. And the way to build and deepen friendships is therefore <i>doing creative work together</i>.</p>
Peace	F2 Sunflower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (<i>Ephesians 2:4</i>) Live in harmony with one another (<i>Romans 12:16</i>) Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace (<i>Colossians 3:15</i>) 	<p>Peace in the Christian faith is an enormous subject. The way we form our relationship with Jesus is often termed "peace with God". Christians see peace as being won for us on the cross by Jesus, who through the power of his death and resurrection enabled Jewish and Greek (gentile) communities to live together, something completely impossible before. It is God's deepest desire for mankind to live in peace, but to create and maintain it in the face of man's wickedness and greed is hard. Peace in the Christian tradition is very different to Hindu or Buddhist concepts of peace, and is a robust, restorative process that is based on submitting to each other, forgiveness and practising the things that make for peace – speaking well of one another, serving one another, and refusing to take offence or judge. When Paul talks about "letting the peace of Christ rule" he is asking the Colossian church to practise the things that they have learnt make for peace – gentleness, patience, kindness and humility (3:12).</p>
Generosity	F2 Poppy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (<i>Matthew 5:42</i>); Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (<i>2 Corinthians 9:7</i>) 	<p>Like many aspects of Christian discipleship, the virtue of generosity is related in the Bible to God's initial goodness and generosity – <i>we love, because he first loved us</i>. We give, according to the measure we have received from God. Generosity in the New Testament is uncompromising – we give when asked, without compulsion, and without counting the cost. This makes it a very difficult virtue to practice, because it is more about the heart than it is about the wallet. Jesus commented on a woman who put two copper coins in the temple treasury, and praised her because "but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on." (Mark 12:44). Teaching children to give things away to those who need them is deeply counter-cultural, but it is at the heart of discipleship, and proof of it.</p>

Thankfulness	1 Thistle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (<i>1 Thessalonians 5:18</i>) • Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. (<i>Psalms 136:1</i>) • I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy (<i>Philippians 1:4-5</i>) 	<p>Thankfulness is linked in the Bible always to humility and an awareness of our dependence on God. It stems from the conviction that God is good and wants our good. It is a confident attitude and an expression of maturity. If we practise gratitude regularly we become more outward facing, more generous, more willing to share and more interested in the person who gives than the gift they share. The requirement to thank God for his goodness litters the Old Testament, and in the whole bible is linked to praise and worship and the growing awareness that we depend on God for life. Thanksgiving is also an expression towards each other and for each other. The expression of thankfulness or, like Paul, articulating our thanks to God that we have each other as friends, family or a class, keeps us in right relationship with God and with each other.</p>
Servanthood	1 Conker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you’re called upon to serve others, serve as though you had the strength of God behind you. (<i>1 Peter 4:11</i>) 	<p>Servanthood is the key outward expression of humility and thankfulness. Jesus spent a lot of time with his disciples urging them to serve one another and telling them that the “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). The great hymn about Jesus that Paul quotes in his letter to the church in Philippi says “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant) (Philippians 2:5-6). Leading others, in the Kingdom of God, is all about serving them – this is where we get the term <i>prime minister</i> – chief servant (to the King).</p>
Truth	2 Pumpkin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things (<i>Philippians 4:8</i>) • Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ (<i>Ephesians 4:15</i>) 	<p>Truth in the New Testament is often equated with <i>light</i>. The apostle John writes “whoever lives by the truth comes into the light” (John 3:21). Truth is not <i>factual</i> but <i>lived, full of integrity</i>. Jesus once saw Nathaniel before calling him as one of his disciples and commented “Here is a true Israelite, in whom is nothing false” (John 1:47). Christians, like members of many other faiths, want the “inner man” and the “outward acts” to be complementary – having integrity of action is really important. The other aspect is that Jesus said that “I am the truth” (John 14:6) and that “the truth will set you free” – in these he was talking about the truth of God’s love and character, as opposed to the many poor views of God that existed in Jesus’ (and our) culture.</p>
Courage	2 Acorn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be strong and courageous! (<i>Joshua 1:6</i>) • So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (<i>Hebrews 10:35</i>) • Be on your guard: stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love. (<i>1 Corinthians 16:13-14</i>) 	<p>Courage is a virtue that was much prized by Aristotle – the mark of a man! It gave rise to a very warlike view of courage-in-action, whilst not being so respectful of the courage of the person who stands up for the truth, or who seeks to be a peacemaker or who sides with the poor and the outcast. Courage in the Bible and the Christian tradition began with the early martyrs for the faith in the persecutions of Nero (64 – 68 AD) and Diocletian (302-303 AD) but was seen particularly in their choosing to side with the poor and in the way they loved one another. A reference to it is at the end of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (the 3rd scripture listed); this is a different way of looking at the virtue of courage from that of the Greeks, and links courage to love those who may not be that lovely!</p>

Wisdom	3 Mustard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (<i>Proverbs 9:10</i>) • We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way (<i>Colossians 1:9-10</i>) • Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom (<i>James 3:13</i>) 	<p>The Bible is very clear that wisdom has little to do with being clever. “Wisdom is proved right by her children”, said Jesus in Luke 7:35. It is the actions of those who seek God for understanding that are praised in the book of Proverbs, and wisdom is shown there to be “knowing how to live an upright life, then living it”. Children will enjoy the language of the beautiful poem that constitutes “Wisdom’s Call” in Proverbs 8:1-36. In that poem, wisdom says “I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice” – a good description of those who want to live by this virtue. Becoming wise, in the Bible, is done from a life aware of how small they are by comparison to God’s greatness. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul contrasts the wisdom of man as much inferior to God’s foolishness, and in Jeremiah 9:23, the prophet says: <i>Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom....but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things.</i> Thus the Bible places a limit on wisdom when it is separated out from the knowledge of God and action for the poor and those in need (see the scripture from James 3).</p>
Trust	3 Clover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (<i>Proverbs 3:5-6</i>) • Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods (<i>Psalms 40:4</i>) • Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (<i>Hebrews 11:1</i>) 	<p>Trust is now seen as a key political and business requirement, as hard as it is to attain. A Christian perspective is rooted in the relationship of trust we have with God as creator and redeemer, trusting God for small things as well as greater ones, such as families and the lives of those we love. However, it is also a civic virtue that Christians require in order to be <i>trustworthy</i> in the workplace, home and church. Moses was instructed to find trustworthy leaders with integrity to help rule Israel after leaving Egypt (Exodus 18:21). Jesus underlines this anti-corruption message in Luke 19 in the parable of the talents (Luke 19:17), whilst Paul realised how vital it was that God trusted him with his work and ministry: <i>I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service</i> (1 Timothy 1:12). Trust is similar to a more religious word, <i>faith</i>, and in our relationship to God describes the “certainty of things not seen” (Hebrews 11), the willingness to believe that because God has said something, he will bring it to pass.</p>
Hope	4 Rosehip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength...they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (<i>Isaiah 40:31</i>) • In his great mercy [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (<i>1 Peter 1: 3</i>) • Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment (<i>1 Timothy 6:17</i>) 	<p>For a Christian, hope is definitely not the same as optimism, nor is it the vague wish that “all things will be OK in the end”. It is defined as an attitude of faith, more akin to a certainty, that Jesus will return and establish his rule across the earth and make right all that has gone so appallingly wrong in the world. At the time when Jesus rose from the dead and was being proclaimed across the eastern Mediterranean, hope was a key virtue in the face of much persecution and opposition from Jewish, Greek and Roman authorities. Many Christians misunderstand the Biblical virtue of hope, which is deeply linked to trust and confidence. However, Paul, in his famous passage on love in 1 Corinthians 13, says that “<i>now these three things remain – faith, hope and love,</i>” indicating how vital it is. The scripture in 1 Timothy is important because it shows that hope is to do with the source of our confidence – so learning to place our hope in God, Paul argues here, is more important than placing it in money or property, which can so easily represent financial security in the future. We can hope for many things, but where we place our trust for the security for the future is where we have our hope. A key scripture in the Sermon on the Mount says “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)</p>

Compassion	4 Teasel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therefore, as God’s chosen people... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (<i>Colossians 3:12</i>) • The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion (<i>Psalms 116:5</i>) • Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another; be compassionate and humble (<i>1 Peter 3:8</i>) 	<p>Compassion is, for Christians, the driver for good works and service. The Latin root means to “suffer with” whilst the Greek word used in the New Testament (splanchnizomai) means “to be moved in the inward parts.” It is something to ask God for in prayer, and a virtue that was practised daily by the early church (150-350AD), which was famous for providing a social service for those who were sick, in poverty, homeless or otherwise in need. For children, who have a natural compassion for those who suffer, this is a virtue which needs nurturing. Part of what Jesus meant when he said “unless you come as a little child, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven” is to do with this capacity for children to understand the suffering of others. When God revealed himself on Mount Sinai to Moses he declared his name to be <i>The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God</i>, showing early on in the biblical narrative what God was shown to be. Again it is one of those virtues where God shows himself to be compassionate and therefore bids us to be the same.</p>
Forgiveness	5 Sycamore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (<i>Matthew 6:14</i>) • Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (<i>Colossians 3:13</i>) • As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (<i>Psalms 103:12</i>) • If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (<i>1 John 1:9</i>) 	<p>Forgiveness in Christian thinking is the key to our relationship with God. Admitting, confessing and turning from the things we have done wrong makes it possible for us to love God with a whole heart. It is the same for people and Jesus intends it to be like that (see the first scripture). We are called to “live in the light” with our Christian family and others (<i>1 John 2: Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness</i>). To enable this to happen, the apostle James asks us to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (<i>James 5:16</i>). This is why restorative practice is so useful to us. God’s desire for us is to <i>live in harmony with each other</i> (<i>Romans 12:16</i>) so to make this happen, we need to be clear about how to deal with the problem of broken relationships. Offering and receiving forgiveness from each other, and teaching children to use that language, will help them in later life when it is so hard, often, to forgive those who hurt us. Thus forgiveness is a virtue we practice until it becomes part of the reaction we have when hurt. It is deeply counter-cultural, as shown by Gordon Wilson after the Enniskillen bombing in November 1987 when he forgave the killers of his daughter Marie, and by Robin Oake after his son Stephen was killed in Manchester in 2003.</p>
Respect & Reverence	5 Catkin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show respect for the elderly; revere your God. (<i>Leviticus 19:32</i>) • Encourage an older man as if he were your father. Respect younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters. (<i>1 Timothy 5:1-2</i>) • Give to everyone what you owe them: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour (<i>Romans 13:7</i>) 	<p>Respect, by itself, is one of the most important universal values in Britain today, much better than the terrible word “tolerance.” Reverence we generally show toward God, the King or the elderly. A word that combines both of these ideas with equal force is “honour”. This is more of a value than a virtue, though the Bible commands honour toward parents (<i>Exodus 20:12</i>), towards God (whether with our wealth, with our bodies, or with our words), towards each other (<i>Romans 12:10</i>), in our sexual relationships (<i>Hebrews 13:4</i>) and towards our children (<i>Ephesians 6:4</i>). Honour is due to creation and the created order, to our elders, and to the government (<i>1 Peter 2:17</i>). It is a founding value of respectful societies and a mutual submission in any community leads to careful consideration of everyone in that community. Interestingly, the Bible is clear that God honours us too! (<i>Psalms 8:5; Psalm 84:11</i>). Teaching children to honour their parents, to honour each other and to honour their own bodies is vital in a society that often rejoices in dishonour and in its newspapers enjoys pulling down those whom others have honoured.</p>

Justice	6 Wheat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (<i>Amos 5:24</i>) • He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (<i>Micah 6:8</i>) • Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness/justice in place (<i>Ephesians 6:4</i>) 	<p>In the Old Testament, the Hebrew language had separate words for righteousness and justice, and most of the scriptures that mention justice are from the OT. The New Testament has a single word that covers both (<i>dikaioné</i>), and so many Christians have not understood that social justice is at the heart of the Christian message. The Greek word refers to both God's righteous character, and the justice in the heart of the Trinity, but also to how that is lived out by disciples. So when we see the word righteous or righteousness in the Bible, we must always think <i>socially</i>. How does what I am doing impact on the poor and the oppressed? This is why Jesus was so undermining of Jewish ideas about righteousness – because they obeyed the letter of the law without coming close to its heart for the weak and the marginalised. Justice is more than a legal word for Christians, but it means restoring the right relationship between powerful and powerless.</p>
Perseverance	6 Barley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (<i>James 1:4</i>) • We...glory in our sufferings, because we know...suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope; and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (<i>Romans 5:3-5</i>) 	<p>Persevering is the quality that ensures that all the other virtues are embedded in our lives and that we cooperate with the action of God the Holy Spirit to transform us bit by bit, closer to the character of Jesus. Perseverance is a virtue of the will and comes from training ourselves not to give up. Of all the virtues, the Bible tells us it is one that requires constant practice. It has "work to do" in us and we must let it do that work so we can grow in maturity. Children need to understand that giving up easily, whilst not "wrong," does hinder their maturing as humans. Perseverance produces character – character in Greek means "proof of genuineness, after testing and trial". The image for somebody who has it is "if you knock this glass, what spills out?" In other words, it is how we respond to pressure that often determines whether perseverance has resulted in a grounded and true character. Governments like to talk about resilience but the biblical word is more focused and is related more to the whole of life than specifically to learning.</p>

References:

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