

# Ben Franklin's Virtues



## The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio Committee on Education and Information 2014 Mandatory Education Program

### Preparation:

LEO should review the material contained here prior to the presentation. Pass out copies of Franklin's chart and ask the Brethren to consider attempting the project.

Materials: This presentation on Brother Ben Franklin's 13 Virtues is taken from The Art of Manliness blog, which is authored by husband and wife team, Brother Brett and Kate McKay. Their blog features articles on helping men be better husbands, better fathers, and better men. [www.artofmanliness.com](http://www.artofmanliness.com)

### Demonstration:

This program provides insight into Brother Franklin's attempt to make his rough ashlar more perfect, and his thirteen virtues fit well within the framework of Freemasonry.

### Presentation

#### Franklin's Quest for Moral Perfection

(Brother) Benjamin Franklin is an American legend. He single handily invented the idea of the "self-made man." Despite being born into a poor family and only receiving two years of formal schooling, Franklin became a successful printer, scientist, musician, and author. Oh, and in his spare time he helped found a country, and then serve as its diplomat.

The key to Franklin's success was his drive to constantly improve himself and accomplish his ambitions. In 1726, at the age of 20, Ben Franklin set his loftiest goal: the attainment of moral perfection.

"I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into."

In order to accomplish his goal, Franklin developed and committed himself to a personal improvement program that consisted of living 13 virtues. The 13 virtues were:

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 extremes; 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 dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation."
13. "HUMILITY. Imitate Jesus and Socrates."

In order to keep track of his adherence to these virtues, Franklin carried around a small book of 13 charts. The charts consisted of a column for each day of the week and 13 rows marked with the first letter of his 13 virtues. Franklin evaluated himself at the end of each day. He placed a dot next to each virtue each had violated. The goal was to minimize the number of marks, thus indicating a "clean" life free of vice.

Franklin would especially focus on one virtue each week by placing that virtue at the top that week's chart and including a "short precept" to explain its meaning. Thus, after 13 weeks he had moved through all 13 virtues and would then start the process over again.

When Franklin first started out on his program he found himself putting marks in the book more than he wanted to. But as time went by, he saw the marks diminish.

While Franklin never accomplished his goal of moral perfection, and had some notable flaws (womanizing and his love of beer probably gave him problems with chastity and temperance), he felt he benefited from the attempt at it.

"Tho' I never arrived at the perfection I had been so ambitious of obtaining, but fell far short of it, yet I was, by the endeavour, a better and a happier man than I otherwise should have been if I had not attempted it."

|                    | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|--------------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| <b>Temperance</b>  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Silence</b>     |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Order</b>       |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Resolution</b>  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Frugality</b>   |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Industry</b>    |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Sincerity</b>   |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Justice</b>     |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Moderation</b>  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Cleanliness</b> |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Tranquility</b> |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Chastity</b>    |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| <b>Humility</b>    |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |

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