# VIRTUES FOR EVERYONE

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***A Guy's Guide to the Good Life: Virtues for Men* by Robert Lockwood. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009.**

We are all looking for answers to the same, age-old questions: how can I live my life better? How can I be a better person? It seems we have found a short, enjoyable, and educational volume of suggestions. In Robert Lockwood's book, *A Guy's Guide to the Good Life: Virtues for Men*, he mixes his personal life experiences, a bit of history, and a touch of Scripture to lovingly lecture young men on the virtues of how to live "the good life," or in other words, a life of meaning and purpose.

A book on virtues at first seems rather textbook, boring almost—define the virtue, give an example, suggest we live our lives accordingly. However, Lockwood's memoir-like account gives us much more than that. It gives us great insight into a life well-lived: one of love and joy, of fond memories, and not-so-fond memories, of faith, manhood, fatherhood, but most of all, of happiness. Through these memories he illustrates how he has lived, and continues to live, his life virtuously, and how those virtues have led him to true happiness. He adds some history, biblical events, and occasionally Dante's approach on each virtue, giving an educational lesson while mixing in his interesting, and often funny stories.

The book is organized simply, comprised of seven chapters split into two parts. The first part focuses on the cardinal virtues—prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice, while the second part is dedicated to the theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity.

Before he begins, Lockwood makes a few brief notes in a Foreword where he addresses, rather succinctly, what "the good

life" is all about—happiness. He advises that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, because in the end, we all have the same thing, which is nothing, if not love. He relishes that no amount of money, sex, or power (in no particular order) will ever make you truly happy; they will only satisfy you for a time being, because no feeling of happiness can ever equate to the true happiness generated from love, divine love.

Each chapter is introduced with a definition of the virtue about to be discussed. Prudence, we are told, is the virtue of divorcing personal desire from the judgment of whether an act is right or wrong. The discussion on prudence is opened by use of the example of his first-ever speeding ticket. He recalls, "Like every guy in the joint, I was convinced I was an innocent man, a victim of circumstances." The following day, after retracing his route, he realized he was in fact guilty of speeding, and deserving of the ticket he received.

His point: truth is available—we just have to find it, we must be in constant pursuit of the good. He quotes Frank Conroy, an American writer, who claimed that we could never know the whole truth of anything because, "all we know is what we think we know." Living as Conroy says, without the constant pursuit of truth, gives way for the platform on which the "absurdity of life" lies. It rejects the need for God, the meaningfulness, and purposefulness of life. As Lockwood found when he searched deeper to find the truth behind his speeding ticket, there is always an avenue to truth, and we should make it the road most traveled.

The second chapter opens rather strongly, tugging at our heart strings with the story of Emily, a college basketball player who has cancer. Fortitude, as we learned, means firmness in the times of difficulty and constancy in the pursuit of the good. With fortitude, we face the fearful and live each day in hope. Emily most certainly lives fortuitously. Despite the fact that her wig (which hides her cancer-induced hair loss) has fallen off in the middle of the game—and that she doesn't

even seem to notice—she plays harder and stronger than most of her healthy teammates, determinedly foraging to the bitter end. Lockwood remembers that Emily played with such passion, strength, and courage that were it not for the missing wig he wouldn't have believed his coach friend when he shared this sad information about his player. From this story we learn that living fortuitously is living with courage and bravery. It's about never giving in to our weaknesses because when we do, we fail to be fortuitous.

Temperance, which is discussed in the third chapter, is one of the most important virtues one can follow. It teaches us to live our lives moderately, with balance.  We must learn to rule our passions, and not let our passions rule us. We must learn to prioritize. A light-hearted lesson from Lockwood comes in the form of a conversation he had with a friend at a baseball game. A die-hard fan, his buddy asks him how the Twins are doing. Lockwood quickly responds, "What do I care about the [Minnesota] Twins?  I'm a Mets fan." After a moment, his friend turns and says, "I meant your twin grandkids." Moments like this are common in *Virtues for Men*, and they give it a raw value from a real-life perspective. Here we are supposed to understand that he is passionate about baseball, but he cannot let it consume him. We have to appreciate all aspects of life, and remember our parents' words, "everything in moderation!"

The discussion on justice is a rather powerful end to the total discussion of cardinal virtues. To live justly is to live by acting accordingly to our basic beliefs. It is to seek "the good" for all of God's creatures by creating harmony and peace. He reminds us that we should, "give unselfishly to the poor in the hardest of circumstances," something that Mother Teresa constantly taught us through example, "because [Christ] is in each and every one of them." To illustrate this, Lockwood remembers attending a New York Knicks basketball game as a child with his father. After the game they encountered a

panhandler whose legs were missing from the knee down. Lockwood commented that he couldn't imagine living life without his legs, to which his father responded, "Legs don't make the man. You'd be surprised what you could live without." He ends the segment with a final thought, "Justice is the faith lived, no matter the conditions, no matter what appearance it might take on, no matter how the story ends in the human condition."

Faith marks the fifth chapter and the start of the discussion of theological virtues. Though he relates a few occurrences in his life to give an illusory definition, it is his frank statement on faith that sums the virtue up best. He says, "People today have a need for 'sense' and 'meaning' in their lives, but they are lost because they no longer believe in truth, particularly religious truth." This point is made clearer when he says that years ago people, "accepted the basic principles of their faith," whereas, "today, the theory goes, religious doubt is the new intellectual standard." Faith, he says, is not a blind leap but rather, since it is based in God and from God, belief with certainty. He notes that although our faith is from God, it also requires us to grow, especially when understanding the truth. We must always be working at our faith because this is the only way to grow and wholly pursue the truth. The loss of traditional acceptance of faith in contemporary society will eventually derail our pursuit of the truth, and jeopardize our true happiness. We're reminded that faith is what binds us to God. And in faith, we will find happiness; after all, achieving true happiness is impossible without faith.

Hope, we learn, is having the confidence that God will never abandon us. It is the longing for the familiar, and the expectancy of future bliss. Lockwood begins the chapter with his first encounter with death as a boy—a little old lady who was a parishioner at his church had passed away. Being a young child he was confused as to where the woman had gone when he

no longer saw her. He didn't understand when his mother told him the woman was now part of the "eternal celestial choir." Bemused, he asked his mother if the church would still be there even if she wouldn't be able to attend church. His mother responded, "The church will always be there." He ends the chapter with a reflection of an old man's funeral—the father of a dear friend. Towards the end of the funeral mass, he noticed a lonely Cheerio hiding underneath a pew. It was the remnants of Sunday Mass; a toddler had undoubtedly been persuaded to keep quiet with the "old Cheerios bribe." This meant that there was hope that the church would always be there, and the young folk were keeping that hope alive.

The final chapter of the book is a discussion on charity, the virtue commonly referred to as love, the most important virtue of all. Love, especially divine love, is what makes this world go round because God is love. It frees us from the pains and sorrows in life. There are certainly touching moments in this chapter, ones that illustrate true love: the unbreakable bond between father and daughter, or the love of a dying mother caring for her dying son is included among them. It is moments like the time he drove through the night to be at his daughter's hospital bedside as she delivered twins, his first grandchildren, which identifies the type of love he is trying to illustrate—the kind life would be meaningless without. He closes with one final thought from the immortal words of Dante, "I felt my will and my desire impelled/ by the love that moves the sun and the other stars."

His memories, which seem abstract at first, always have an obvious message at the end. Each tale, whether it is from his personal life, the Bible, or from Dante, somehow seamlessly correlates to the description of the contending virtue. The common thread among all of the virtues is to live in constant pursuit of truth, the good. This pursuit is what gives each life purpose and brings us closer to true happiness and divine love. Happy, love-filled lives are proof that life is not

absurd; each life has purpose, and it has meaning and value. It is when we do not live virtuously that our lives become meaningless, because they fail to pursue the good.

*A Guy's Guide to the Good Life: Virtues for Men* is a recommended read for all, not just young men. It is a soulful reflection of a happy life lived with love. It urges us to search inside ourselves to find happiness within, and to realize that truth and "the good" are the means to the ultimate end of happiness and love.  Truth, we must remember, is always available, sometimes it just requires searching. We must never settle for mediocrity, because when we do so, we deny ourselves happiness. These lessons transcend age and gender, they are lessons we can all benefit from.  Lockwood's book is by no means groundbreaking, but it is a necessary and enjoyable read for all.

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