THE DAILY BREAD

The Creed of the Apostles



The Virtues

Building the Man You Were Made to Be

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

The Man You Are Becoming

There are two halves to the work a man must do on himself. One is to tear down the enemy within, the vices and sins that deform him. The other, which this book is about, is to build the man he was made to be. They belong together, because a man is never merely subtracting evil from himself; with every choice he is also constructing someone, laying down, course by course, the character he will one day be and then be stuck with. You are not a finished thing reacting to circumstances. You are a work under construction, and you are the one holding the trowel, whether you know it or not.

This is the question the previous station could not answer, because it is a different kind of question. It is not enough to ask what a man must stop doing. A man can avoid every grave sin on the list and still be a coward, a bore, a cold and bloodless soul in whom nothing good is actually alive. The absence of vice is not the presence of virtue, any more than an empty field is a built house. The real question, the one that decides what a man's life amounts to, is not only what he refrains from, but what he becomes. What kind of man is taking shape in you? And what has the Church given you to build with?

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, think about these things. — Philippians 4:8

The Church has an entire architecture for the building of a man, worked out over millennia with a precision the modern world has simply forgotten: the virtues. Four of them, the cardinal virtues, a man builds by effort and grace, and they form the frame of a sound human character. Three of them, the theological virtues, God pours directly into the soul, and they lift that character up into the life of God himself. Together they are the blueprint of the man you were made to be. This station is the training ground of the whole trilogy, because everything the Mission will ask of you, to lead, to witness, to suffer well, will require exactly these. We will learn what virtue actually is, and then take up each of the seven and see how a man is built.

CHAPTER ONE

Virtue Is a Habit, Not a Feeling

How a Man Is Actually Built

Before taking up the particular virtues, a man has to correct a misunderstanding so deep in the modern mind that he probably shares it without knowing. We have come to think of goodness as a matter of feelings and intentions: a good man is one who feels compassion, who means well, who has the right sentiments. But this is not what virtue is, and the confusion cripples a man's growth, because feelings come and go and intentions are cheap. Virtue is something far more solid, and far more demanding.

The Modern Confusion

Ask the average man what makes a person good and he will point to the heart, to warmth, to good intentions. But intentions that never become action are worthless, and feelings are the least reliable thing about us, shifting with sleep and weather and blood sugar. A man who is kind only when he feels kind is not kind; he is moody. A man who is honest only when honesty costs him nothing is not honest; he is merely convenient. Real goodness cannot rest on so shifting a foundation. The ancients and the Church both saw this clearly, and located virtue not in what a man feels but in what he reliably, habitually does, regardless of how he happens to feel at the time.

What Virtue Actually Is

Virtue, in the Church's precise definition, is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. Every word carries weight. It is a disposition, a settled inner orientation, not a passing mood. It is firm, holding under pressure, not collapsing the moment it is tested. It is habitual, woven into the character so deeply that the good act comes almost naturally, as the trained man's sword comes up without his deciding. A man has the virtue of courage not when he feels brave, which even cowards sometimes do, but when he reliably acts well in the face of fear, whether he feels brave or not. Virtue is not an emotion a man has. It is a strength a man has built, a reliable capacity to do the right thing, stored up in the character and ready when needed.

This definition is also a great relief, once a man grasps it, because it means his feelings are not the measure of his goodness and their coldness is not a verdict against him. A man may do the right thing while feeling nothing, or feeling the opposite, and the act is not less virtuous for it; it may be more. The father who rises in the night for a sick child he is too exhausted to feel tender toward is more virtuous, not less, than one carried along by warm emotion, because his will is doing the whole work. So a man should stop waiting to feel good before he does good, and stop concluding from his cold or reluctant heart that he is a hypocrite. The feeling is not the virtue. The reliable action is, and a man can begin building it today whether his heart is in it or not.

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness. — 2 Peter 1:5-6

Built by Repetition

And here is the crucial and bracing truth: a virtue is built the way any strength is built, by repetition. A man becomes brave by doing brave acts, honest by telling the truth when it costs him, temperate by saying no to the appetite again and again until the no comes easily. This insight, as old as Aristotle and taken up by the whole Christian tradition, is the opposite of the modern hope that we might become good by a single dramatic decision or a powerful experience. We become what we repeatedly do. Each act of virtue lays down a little more of the habit, and each act of vice lays down its opposite, until a man has, without ever quite deciding to, made himself into one kind of man or another by the accumulated weight of a thousand small choices.

This is why a man cannot count on rising to the occasion when the great test comes. Under real pressure a man does not suddenly become better than his training; he falls to the level of it. The courage he needs in the crisis is the courage he built in the thousand small moments no one saw, and the honesty he needs when the truth is dangerous is the honesty he practiced when it was merely inconvenient. The virtues are not emergency equipment a man grabs when he needs them. They are the slow accumulation of who he has made himself into, and the emergency only reveals what was already there. Which means the time to build is now, in the small and unwatched choices, long before the hour that will demand them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Four Hinges

The Cardinal Virtues, and Prudence

The Church groups the virtues that a man builds by effort around four great ones, and calls them cardinal. The word comes from the Latin cardo, a hinge, and the image is exact: these four are the hinges on which the whole moral life of a man swings, and every other human virtue depends on them. Get these four right and the rest follow; neglect them and nothing else will hold. They are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, and a man serious about being built should learn them as a carpenter learns his tools.

And if anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice and courage. — Wisdom 8:7

Why These Four Are the Hinges

These four are cardinal because they govern the four great arenas of a man's moral life. Prudence governs his mind, his power to judge rightly what to do. Justice governs his dealings with others, his will to give each what is owed. Fortitude governs his response to difficulty and danger, his power to pursue the good when it is hard. And temperance governs his appetites, his mastery of the pleasures that would otherwise master him. Nearly every particular virtue a man might name is really one of these four at work in a specific place. They are not four items on a longer list; they are the four structural pillars under the whole house of a man's character.

It is worth noticing that these four were not discovered by Christians. The best of the pagan philosophers, centuries before Christ, identified exactly these as the pillars of a good human life, which tells a man something important: the cardinal virtues are written into human nature itself, available in some measure to any man who seriously pursues them, Christian or not. The Church did not invent them; she received them, confirmed them, and then did something the philosophers could not do. She showed how grace takes these natural virtues and elevates them, so that the same prudence and justice and courage and temperance, lived now in a soul filled with God, are lifted beyond mere human decency into the material of holiness. Nature builds the four pillars; grace makes them bear the weight of heaven.

Prudence, the Charioteer

First among them, and the one that guides all the rest, is prudence, which the modern ear hears wrongly as timidity or caution. It is nothing so small. Prudence is right reason applied to action, the practical wisdom to see what is truly good in a concrete situation and to choose the right means to it. It is the virtue of good judgment, of the man who sees clearly what ought to be done here, now, in this tangle of real circumstances, and does it. The tradition calls prudence the charioteer of the virtues, because it steers all the others: courage without prudence is recklessness, generosity without prudence is folly, even justice without prudence can miscarry. Every other virtue waits on prudence to tell it what the good actually requires in the moment, and so a man cannot be truly virtuous in any respect without this one.

Prudence is also the great answer to the modern confusion that treats the moral life as a matter of looking up rules. Rules are necessary and real, but no rulebook can cover the infinite particularity of an actual life, the specific decision with its specific people and stakes and shades of gray. Prudence is the virtue that applies the unchanging good to the unrepeatable situation, and it is built like the others, by practice, by seeking counsel from

wise men, by learning from one's own misjudgments, by the patient accumulation of experience weighed honestly. A man grows in prudence every time he stops to ask not what he feels like doing or what he can get away with, but what a good and wise man would actually do here, and then does that.

CHAPTER THREE

Justice, Courage, and Self-Mastery

The Other Three Pillars

With prudence steering, the other three cardinal virtues do their work in the three great arenas of a man's life: his dealings with others, his stand against difficulty, and his rule over his own appetites. These are the virtues the world still half-remembers and secretly longs to find in a man, and their scarcity is felt everywhere.

Justice: Giving Each His Due

Justice is the constant and firm will to give to each what he is owed, and it is far larger than the courtroom sense of the word. A just man gives God what is due to God, which is worship, obedience, and thanks, the first debt of every creature. He gives his neighbor what is due to him, honesty, respect, the wages earned, the promise kept, the good name unslandered. He gives his family, his employer, his community, and his country their due. Justice is the backbone of a trustworthy man, the virtue that makes his word reliable and his dealings clean, and a culture starved of it can feel the lack in every broken contract and every betrayed trust. The just man is the one others can build on, because he reliably renders what he owes whether or not anyone is watching and whether or not he can be made to.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? — Micah 6:8

Justice in a man reaches first and highest toward God, and this is the part the modern mind forgets entirely. Before a man owes anything to his neighbor he owes everything to his Creator, who gave him his existence and sustains it moment by moment; and the name for rendering God his due is religion, the virtue by which a man gives God the worship, gratitude, and obedience that are simply owed. A man who is scrupulously fair in business but renders God nothing is not, in the full sense, a just man; he has paid his smaller debts and defaulted on the largest. This is why the just man worships, why he

keeps the Lord's Day, why he prays, not as optional extras to his decency but as the first and foundational act of justice, the paying of the debt that comes before all others.

Fortitude: The Courage to Pursue the Good

Fortitude is firmness of soul in the face of difficulty, the courage to pursue the good even when it is hard, dangerous, or costly, and to endure what must be endured without abandoning the right. It has two faces, and the harder one is often overlooked. There is the courage to attack, to take the risk, to speak the hard truth, to stand up when standing up will cost something. And there is the courage to endure, to bear suffering, injustice, and the long grind of faithfulness without giving way, which is the rarer and often greater form. Fortitude is what carries every other virtue through the moment of cost, for every virtue eventually becomes expensive, and in that moment it is fortitude that decides whether a man holds or folds. A man with every other good quality but no courage will betray them all the first time it is dangerous not to.

Temperance: The Mastery of Appetite

Temperance is the virtue that orders a man's appetites and brings his desires for pleasure under the governance of reason, and it is the one the present age has most completely abandoned. It is not the hatred of pleasure, nor a grim suspicion of the good things of creation; food, drink, rest, and bodily pleasure are genuine goods, and temperance does not despise them. It governs them. The temperate man is the master of his appetites rather than their servant, able to enjoy good things freely and to set them down freely, never owned by them. In an age engineered to inflame every appetite and sell a man the means to gratify it instantly, temperance is the virtue of the free man, and its absence is visible everywhere in the soft slavery of men who can no longer say no to anything they want. A man without temperance is not free, however much he congratulates himself on his liberty; he is led by whichever appetite is loudest.

What makes temperance so difficult now is not that men are weaker than their fathers but that the pressure against it is greater than any generation has faced. Never before has an appetite been so relentlessly provoked and so instantly fed: food engineered to override fullness, entertainment designed to be unquenchable, the whole apparatus of a screen that delivers any pleasure a man craves in seconds, and a thousand interests profiting from his inability to say no. A man who wants temperance today has to build it against an undertow that earlier men never felt. This is not a reason for despair but for strategy and seriousness; the virtue is more necessary now, not less, and the man who achieves even a measure of real self-mastery in such an age possesses a freedom that will astonish the slaves around him and draw them to ask how he came by it.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Virtues Only God Can Give

Why the Theological Virtues Are Different

The four cardinal virtues can carry a man a long way; they can make a decent, admirable, trustworthy human being, and the pagan world at its best produced such men by the force of them. But they cannot, by themselves, reach God, and they cannot be the whole of a Christian's building. For that a man needs three more virtues of an entirely different kind, and the difference is the most important thing to understand about them.

Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. — 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Infused, Not Built

The cardinal virtues a man builds, slowly, by his own repeated effort assisted by grace. The theological virtues he cannot build at all. Faith, hope, and charity are not achievements a man works up from within; they are gifts, infused directly into the soul by God, poured in with sanctifying grace at Baptism. This is why they are called theological: they come from God, they are directed toward God, and they have God himself as their object. A man cannot make himself believe, or hope, or love God, by sheer willpower any more than he can make himself the son of a father not his own. These virtues are a participation in the life of God, and only God can give a share in his own life. They are received, on the knees, as gifts, not forged in the gym of the will.

This is a humbling and a liberating truth at once, and a man needs both edges of it. It is humbling, because it means the highest and best things in him are not his own accomplishment but sheer gift, and he can take no credit for the faith, hope, and love that are the glory of his soul; they were poured in. And it is liberating, because it means a man who finds these virtues weak in himself is not condemned to manufacture them by force of effort, which is impossible, but may simply ask for them, as a beggar asks, and receive. The father in the Gospel who cried out, I believe, help my unbelief, had exactly the right instinct: he brought his weak faith to Christ and asked him to increase it. A man grows in the theological virtues less by striving than by asking, and then by living in a way that does not quench what he has been given.

Why a Man Still Must Cooperate

And yet, once given, they must be exercised, strengthened, and protected, or they wither. This is the paradox of the theological virtues: a man cannot generate them, but he can grow or shrink them by how he lives. Faith is infused, but it deepens when a man acts on it and starves when he neglects it. Hope is given, but it is strengthened by prayer and weakened by the habits that breed despair. Charity is poured in, but it grows by being exercised in love of God and neighbor and dies in a soul that chooses grave sin. So a man's part is not to manufacture these virtues but to cooperate with them, to fan into flame what God has given, to live in a way that lets the divine life in him grow rather than smothering it. The initiative is entirely God's. The response is really the man's.

The Frame and the Fire

The two sets of virtues are meant to work as one, and the picture a man should carry is of a house. The cardinal virtues are the frame, the sound human structure of a well-built character, strong, square, and reliable. The theological virtues are the fire on the hearth and the life in the rooms, the presence of God that makes the house a home and lifts it from being merely a good building into being a dwelling of the divine. A man needs both. Cardinal virtue without the theological is a handsome house, cold and empty, a merely natural decency that never reaches heaven. Theological virtue without the cardinal is a fire with no proper hearth to hold it, grace poured into a disordered and undisciplined character where it is constantly spilled and quenched. The fully built man has both: the frame and the fire, nature made solid and then lifted into the life of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Eyes and the Anchor

Faith and Hope

Take up the three theological virtues now one by one, for each builds something in a man that nothing else can. The first two, faith and hope, are the virtues by which a man sees and by which a man stands, the eyes that let him perceive what is real and the anchor that holds him steady in the storms that would otherwise sweep him away.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. — Hebrews 11:1

Faith: The Eyes of the Soul

Faith is often misunderstood, even by believers, as a leap in the dark, a willful belief in things against the evidence. It is the opposite. Faith is the assent of the mind to everything God has revealed, on the authority of God who reveals it, and it is better understood not as blindness but as a new power of sight. By faith a man sees what is really there but invisible to the natural eye: that the world is created and sustained by love, that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, that his own soul is of infinite worth, that behind the visible surface of things runs the whole drama of grace and eternity. The man of faith is not the one who believes without seeing; he is the one who has been given eyes to see what is most real and most hidden. And like the other virtues it grows with use: a man's faith deepens each time he acts on it, trusting God's word over the appearances, and dims each time he lives as though only the visible were real.

Faith is not opposed to reason, and a man should never let the culture tell him it is. Reason can carry a man a long way toward God, to the knowledge that he exists and something of what he is; faith then receives what reason alone could never reach, the inner life of God and his plan of salvation, revealed because he chose to speak it. The two are allies, not enemies: faith builds on reason as grace builds on nature, and the same God is the author of both. A man of robust faith is therefore not a man who has switched off his mind, but a man who has let his mind be completed by a light higher than itself, accepting on God's word truths his reason could confirm as reasonable to believe even where it could not have discovered them alone.

Hope: The Anchor of the Soul

Hope is the virtue by which a man confidently expects both eternal life and the help of God to reach it, trusting not in his own strength but in the promises of Christ. Scripture calls it the anchor of the soul, and the image is precise: an anchor holds a ship steady against the currents that would otherwise carry it onto the rocks. Hope is what holds a man steady against the two great currents that wreck souls, and they run in opposite directions. One is despair, the loss of confidence that God's mercy is enough and heaven is reachable, the quiet conviction that a man is finally beyond saving. The other is presumption, the lazy assumption that salvation is automatic and requires nothing of him, so that he need not actually strive. Hope holds the narrow line between them: it is certain of God's mercy and promises, and therefore never despairs, and it knows that mercy must be freely received and cooperated with, and therefore never presumes. The man anchored in hope is unsinkable, not because the seas are calm but because he is held.

These two virtues together remake a man's whole experience of his life. Without faith a man is trapped in the flat and brutal world the natural eye reports, a world of matter and

chance and eventual death, and his best efforts are finally a rearranging of deck chairs. Without hope he is at the mercy of his circumstances and his moods, lifted by good fortune and crushed by bad, with nothing to hold him when the storm comes. But a man who sees by faith and is anchored by hope walks through the same world an entirely different creature: seeing its hidden depth, steadied against its worst, able to suffer without despair and to wait without bitterness, because he knows where it is all going and Who holds the end of it.

CHAPTER SIX

The Greatest of These

Charity

And then there is the third, the greatest, the one that gives all the others their life. Paul, having surveyed faith and hope, says that these three abide, and then names the greatest without hesitation: love. Charity is the summit and the soul of the whole moral life, the virtue toward which all the others tend and without which, Paul says plainly, a man is nothing, however much else he has.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. — 1 Corinthians 13:13

Not a Feeling, but a Willing of the Good

Charity must be rescued at once from the thin thing the modern world means by love, a feeling, a warmth, an emotion that comes and goes. The love that is the greatest of the virtues is not primarily a feeling at all. It is an act of the will: to love, in this deepest sense, is to will the good of another, to desire and to work for what is truly best for them, for God's sake. This is why Christ can command love, which would be absurd if love were a feeling, since no one can command a feeling into being. He commands the will, which a man governs. A man can love his difficult neighbor, his enemy even, not by manufacturing warm emotions toward him but by genuinely willing and seeking his good. The feelings may follow or may not; the love is real either way, and it is often most real precisely when the feelings are absent and a man wills the good of someone he does not even like.

The Form of All the Virtues

The tradition calls charity the form of all the virtues, the soul that animates the whole body of them, and the phrase repays thought. Without charity, the other virtues are real but lifeless, a body without breath. A man can have courage in the service of a bad cause, justice without mercy, temperance out of mere vanity about his health, faith that is only cold assent and hope that is only self-interest. Charity is what orders all of them to their true end, which is God, and fills them with his life. Courage animated by charity becomes the laying down of one's life for others; justice animated by charity becomes generous and merciful; even faith, Paul says, though it move mountains, is nothing without love. Charity does not replace the other virtues; it perfects them, turning a merely good man into a holy one, and a holy man is simply a man in whom charity has taken over everything.

And charity is the one virtue that does not end. Faith will pass into sight when a man sees God face to face, and hope will pass into possession when he holds what he hoped for, but love will not pass away, because love is the very life of heaven and the very life of God, who is love. To grow in charity now, therefore, is to begin already the one activity that will fill eternity. Every act of real love a man performs, every genuine willing of another's good for God's sake, is a small rehearsal of heaven and a real increase of the only thing he will carry through death. This is why charity is the greatest: it is God's own life in the soul, the goal of all the rest, and the single thing that lasts forever.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Scarcest Thing in the World

The Virtuous Man and the Mission

Draw it all together now and look at the man these seven virtues build, because he is the point of the whole station, and he is rarer than a man might think. A culture can produce clever men, successful men, powerful and charming and capable men, in great numbers. What it cannot seem to produce, and what it is dying for lack of, is the virtuous man, the man of solid character lifted by grace. He is the scarcest and most needed resource in the Church and in the world, and this station exists to help make one of you.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. — Matthew 5:16

What a Virtuous Man Looks Like

Picture him concretely, because the virtues are not abstractions but a specific kind of man. He is prudent, so his judgment can be trusted and he is not blown about by every feeling or fashion. He is just, so his word holds and his dealings are clean and the people under him are treated rightly. He is courageous, so he can be counted on when it costs something, and does not disappear the moment loyalty becomes expensive. He is temperate, so his appetites do not run his life and he is free in a way most men are not. And beneath it all he believes, and hopes, and loves, so that his natural strength is lit from within by the life of God and bent toward ends higher than himself. Such a man is a rock in his home, a leader others instinctively follow, a steadying presence in every room he enters. Everyone who meets him senses it, even those who could not name what they are sensing. They are sensing virtue, and they are starved for it.

And here is the quiet power of such a man: he evangelizes before he ever opens his mouth. In a world loud with words and short on example, the sight of an actual virtuous man is an argument nothing can refute. People have heard every claim and grown deaf to them, but they have rarely seen the thing itself, and when they do, it stops them. The colleague who cannot be corrupted, the father whose children are secure because he is steady, the friend whose word has never once failed, raises in everyone around him a question he never had to ask aloud: where does that come from, and can I have it? This is why the virtues are missionary long before the mission formally begins. A man's built character is the most persuasive sermon he will ever preach, and the only one the modern world cannot talk its way out of.

Virtue Is the Training Ground of Mission

And this is precisely the man the Mission needs, which is why this station is the training ground of the whole trilogy. Everything the next program will ask of a man rests entirely on these virtues. To lead his family and others in the faith will require prudence and fortitude. To witness to Christ in a hostile setting will require courage and justice and a faith that actually sees. To suffer for the Gospel without breaking will require hope and the endurance that is fortitude's hardest face. To love the difficult and the unlovely into the Kingdom will require charity, the willing of their good at a cost to himself. A man cannot give what he does not have. The Mission will send him out to pour himself into the world, and the virtues are what fill the vessel. Build them now, in the unwatched moments, and you will have something to give when you are sent.

Begin Where You Are

Do not be daunted by the height of the thing. No man builds all seven virtues at once, and no man finishes the work in this life. A man begins where he is, with the one virtue he

most lacks and the one small, repeated choice that builds it: the truth told today when a lie would be easier, the appetite denied this once, the hard duty taken up instead of shirked, the prayer that fans the gift of faith, the act of love toward the person right in front of him. Each small act lays down a little more of the man he is becoming. The virtues are built the way a cathedral is built, one stone at a time, by men who will not see it finished, and the only question that matters is whether a man picks up a stone today. Pick one up. Build.

CONCLUSION

The Blueprint of a Man

You have been handed a blueprint, the oldest and truest in the world, for the building of a man. Four virtues to frame a sound human character: prudence to steer, justice to deal rightly, fortitude to hold under cost, temperance to master the appetites. Three to lift that character into the life of God: faith to see, hope to hold, and charity, the greatest, to animate and crown them all. This is not a vague aspiration to be a better person. It is a precise and buildable architecture, and the Church has handed you both the plan and, in grace and the sacraments, the materials.

Remember what kind of thing you are building, and how. Virtue is not a feeling you wait to have but a strength you construct, by the repetition of good acts, in the small and unwitnessed choices that are quietly making you into one kind of man or another right now. You will not rise in the crisis above the man you have built in the calm. So the work is today, and it is ordinary, and it is entirely real: every honest word, every denied appetite, every act of courage and love lays down another course in the man you were made to be.

A man who builds this way becomes the rarest and most necessary thing in the world, and the Mission that is coming will need exactly him. You have studied the enemy to be torn down and the man to be built. The hearth of the faith is now raised, framed, and lit. What remains is to be sent out of it, into the world, to give away what you have been given. That is the last station, and the beginning of everything after.

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