

# ☒ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 5, 2022 | Virtue

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven virtues found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter wrote, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of those who have received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibited one of these seven virtues. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these virtues for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine virtue in the lives Caleb and Joshua.

### GETTING READY

Why do people seldom speak of virtue anymore?

Read Numbers 13–14.

Ask God to help you recognize biblical virtue in the lives of Joshua and Caleb.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Virtue is recognizing and following God’s priorities for life.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

By confessing Jesus as Lord, you are committing yourself to a virtuous life.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it” (Numbers 14:24).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the concept of virtue and how tightly it is tied to a biblical view of God.

Q: *How would you define virtue?*

Q: *Who is the first person to come to mind when you think of virtue?*

The Greek work translated “virtue” in 2 Peter 1:5 is aretê. Aretê is used to refer to uncommon character worthy of praise. The concept of virtue rests on two foundations. The first is community. Virtue is always public. Apart from community, a person’s character cannot be praised. The second foundation is a shared understanding of what is praiseworthy.

Both of these foundations are crumbling in modern society. By rejecting absolute truths, we can no longer recognize what is praiseworthy. Instead, every matter is relegated to the sphere of personal preference. In distinguishing between private and public life, we have undercut the foundation of true community. We can be one person at home and another when everyone is looking.

Perhaps this is why the word “virtue” has fallen out of use. From 1770 to 2019, the use of “virtue” in books printed in the United States fell 86%. The most common usage of “virtue” today is in the phrase “virtue signaling,” which is used to describe people or corporations publicly expressing their opinions on an issue to gain moral credibility in society. But virtue signaling is mostly an empty gesture. Those who do it are only saying what they think society wants them to say. This demands little true character. Furthermore, virtue signaling rarely demands any commitment. It is hardly uncommon character worthy of praise.

Q: *Why are the foundations of virtue disappearing?*

Q: *What could be done to prioritize virtue in modern society?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The decline of virtue corresponds to a decline in belief and commitment to God. The mid- to late eighteenth century, when the word “virtue” began declining in use, was the middle of the period

known as the Age of Enlightenment. People had begun to value reason as the primary means by which truth could be known, even over divine revelation (such as the Bible). This was a major shift in how human beings thought. As divine revelation was devalued, belief in a personal God also diminished. It makes sense that a declining belief in God would correspond with a declining appreciation of virtue. Apart from God, there is no standard to which virtue can be tied. Thus, true virtue, the kind envisioned by 2 Peter 1:5, must begin with a commitment to God.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson will examine the lives of two Old Testament figures, Joshua and Caleb, to understand true virtue. These men were the only two Israelites of their generation willing to trust the promises of God. From their lives this lesson will identify six principles of virtue to follow as we seek to lead a virtuous life.

1. VIRTUE WILL NOT COMPROMISE TRUTH TO SATISFY THE MAJORITY OPINION.
2. VIRTUE DOES NOT FORGET THE TRUTH WHEN IT IS INCONVENIENT.
3. VIRTUE IS COSTLY.
4. VIRTUE LAMENTS OVER SIN BUT HOLDS IT ACCOUNTABLE.
5. VIRTUE RESTS ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.
6. VIRTUE LOOKS BEYOND THE SELF TO SOMETHING GREATER.

## GOING DEEPER

+ This lesson will use Numbers 13–14 as a base from which to examine the character of Joshua and Caleb and supplement these chapters with additional texts covering the lives of these two virtuous men.

## 1. VIRTUE WILL NOT COMPROMISE TRUTH TO SATISFY THE MAJORITY OPINION.

### ▣ NUMBERS 13:30–33

**Q:** *How were these men chosen to be spies (Num. 13:1-16)? What does this tell us about the purpose of their mission?*

**Q:** *Why did Moses want to send spies to examine the promised land?*

The people of Israel had left Egypt more than a year before. They were on their way to inherit the land of Canaan as God had promised, and before entering the land, they sent a representative from each of the twelve tribes on a reconnaissance mission to become familiar with the land and the challenges they would face in conquering its inhabitants. The mission was intended to affirm the goodness of God's promises (Numbers 13:17–20), and it did. The spies acknowledged that the land was everything God had promised it would be (Numbers 13:27). But the mission also revealed the frailty of the people's faith. Although He had promised to give Israel the land, they allowed themselves to become intimidated by the imposing stature of the land's inhabitants. Ten of the spies did not believe Israel was capable of occupying the land and argued against the people pursuing the fulfillment of God's promises.

They were not unanimous in their recommendation, however. Caleb opposed their unfaithfulness and urged Israel to move forward with God's plan (Numbers 13:30). We should infer that Joshua joined Caleb in opposition to the other spies (Numbers 14:6–7). Their opposition to the majority opinion revealed tremendous virtue. They were unwilling to go along with the crowd or fall in line with everyone else. They knew God had promised them this land, and they knew Israel must move forward to remain faithful to His plan. They were unwilling to compromise these truths to appease the majority.

The response of the ten spies is part of a larger biblical theme. Only a small number of these spies remained faithful to God's promises. The rest refused to believe and rebelled against God. These spies are a microcosm of the nation of Israel. Only a remnant of Israel will remain faithful to God and His promises (Isaiah 6:13). The rest will fall away. In a similar way, Israel is a microcosm for humanity. Only a small remnant of humanity will remain faithful to God. The rest will fall away (Matthew 7:13–14).

**Q:** *How are right and wrong moral actions determined in our society?*

**Q:** *What limits must be placed on majority rule?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Joshua and Caleb refused to compromise what they knew to be true in order to satisfy the opinion of other spies. They held to a higher standard of truth than majority opinion. God had promised Israel would inherit the land. His promises meant more to Joshua and Caleb than the opinion of a thousand others. If

we desire to live a virtuous life, we cannot determine right and wrong based simply on what the majority of people think. This is the reigning paradigm for how our culture evaluates morality. If most people say it is okay, then it must be okay. Virtuous Christians must hold to a higher standard for moral truth. They must stand on the truth of God's Word no matter how large a majority opposes it.

## 2. VIRTUE DOES NOT FORGET THE TRUTH WHEN IT IS INCONVENIENT.

### ▣ NUMBERS 13:30–33; JOSHUA 9–10

🔍: *What did the spies mean when they said, “[It is] a land that devours its inhabitants”?*

🔍: *Why did Joshua go to the Gibeonite's rescue when they were keeping Israel from fully inheriting the land [Joshua 10:6–7]?*

After Caleb refused to be dissuaded by the fears of the other spies, they tried a different route. Although they had already verified the goodness of the land (Numbers 13:27), they denied what they knew to be true and delivered a bad report on the land (Numbers 13:32). They knew the result they wanted, and they were willing to tell the people whatever it took to get them to agree. They claimed the land “devours its inhabitants,” meaning the land would be difficult to cultivate for the survival of the nation. This is a negative example of virtue. The spies were willing to tell a lie if it secured what they thought was the right decision.

In Joshua 9–10, Joshua provides a positive counter-example to the lack of virtue seen among the ten spies. This event occurred more than forty years after Numbers 13–14. The people had finally entered the land and were conquering its inhabitants. The Gibeonites, one of the peoples of the land, saw that they would be defeated by the Israelites, so they protected themselves by forming an alliance with Joshua and the Israelites on false pretenses. Claiming they were from a faraway land, they requested a treaty with the Israelites. Rather than consulting God's direction, Joshua and Israel engaged in the treaty with them. But the Gibeonites inhabited a nearby valley within the borders of what was to become their land. Now the Israelites were stuck with the Gibeonites within their borders. When a group of kings learn the Gibeonites had made a treaty with the Israelites, they joined forces and attacked the Gibeonites (Joshua 10). Joshua could have seen this as an opportunity to undo his unwise decision. He could have let the opposition dispose of Gibeon, then defeat the coalition of kings, and everything would have been back to the way it was supposed to be. But Joshua refused to forget the truth even when the truth was inconvenient for

him. Israel had made a pact to protect the Gibeonites, and Joshua was resolved to stand by his word. He refused to compromise what he knew was right even though it would have been convenient for him to do so. This is biblical virtue.

Q: *Describe a time you were tempted to compromise the truth to “make things easier.”*

Q: *Why must Christians be particularly concerned with truth?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Virtuous Christians cannot disregard the truth even when doing so would be advantageous. Our commitment to truth supersedes our personal comforts. It is important for us to remember we serve a Savior who proclaimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). If we compromise truth, we distort the identity of our Savior. Christian virtue demands an absolute commitment to what is true, no matter how difficult.

### 3. VIRTUE IS COSTLY.

#### ■ NUMBERS 14:6–10; JOSHUA 5

Q: *What was Israel’s response to Joshua and Caleb’s virtue?*

Q: *What tasks did Joshua need to accomplish before invading the land?*

The Israelites choose to believe the ten faithless spies and were deterred from entering the land. The scene is eerily similar to what is found in Genesis 3. The spies questioned the goodness of God’s promises (Genesis 3:1; Numbers 13:28–29, 31–33). When the people had to choose between holding fast to the Word of God and listening to the lie, they chose to listen to the lie (Genesis 3:6; Numbers 14:1–4). As a result, God’s land was no longer available to them (Genesis 3:23; 14:30). Furthermore, their actions created conflict between those who were faithful to God and those who believed the lie (Genesis 3:15; Numbers 14:10).

The conflict centered on Caleb and Joshua, who urged the Israelites to trust in God's provision, but the Israelites threaten to stone them instead. A virtuous life does not guarantee our safety. In fact, virtue is often costly. The Israelites threatened Caleb and Joshua's lives. Their commitment to truth put them in peril.

Another episode in the life of Joshua reminds us that virtue is costly. In Joshua 5, the Israelites had just crossed over the Jordan River. The entire land lay open before them, including the nearby city of Jericho. They would have been eager to begin conquering the land, but Joshua said they must wait. While they wandered in the desert, the Israelites had not kept up the pattern of circumcision, the sign of covenant membership. Before they could conquer the land, every male had to be circumcised in order to identify with the people of God. Furthermore, upon entering the land, the people celebrated the week-long festival of Passover. These delays allowed the enemies to prepare for their invasion and fortify their cities. As a military leader, Joshua must have cringed at the thought of giving the enemy time to prepare. But he dared not compromise the nation's fidelity to God. He maintained his virtue even when it was costly to him.

Q: Describe a time when doing the right thing was costly.

Q: If virtue is costly, why do it?

**APPLICATION POINT** – Like Joshua and Caleb, we should not be surprised when virtue proves costly. Standing for truth will become more costly as our society becomes more opposed to it. But we should not suppose that abandoning the truth will ever lead to self-preservation, at least not in the long run. The Israelite spies who sought to save their lives ended up losing them (Numbers 14:36–38). Jesus recognized this as well. He called His disciples to “take up [their] cross.” The one who is only concerned with saving his life will lose it, but the one willingly gives up his life will find something far greater (Matthew 16:24–28).

#### 4. VIRTUE LAMENTS OVER SIN BUT HOLDS IT ACCOUNTABLE.

##### ■ NUMBERS 14:6–10; JOSHUA 7

Q: How did Joshua and Caleb respond to the people's lack of faith?

Q: *How did Joshua resolve the sin of Achan?*

When the Israelites lost faith in God and gave up on the hope of entering the land He had promised them, Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes, a sign of deep remorse and anguish in the ancient world. Notice that a virtuous life does not mean a hardness toward sin. These men were deeply grieved by Israel's actions.

Though they were broken over the people's sin, Joshua and Caleb knew it could not be ignored or defended. The price of Israel's disobedience was the promised land. Joshua and Caleb would be the only members of their generation to enter the land. It must have been difficult for Joshua and Caleb to see their contemporaries die one by one in the harsh desert climate over a forty-year period. But they did not reject God's actions. They understood that sin must be held accountable.

The same situation occurs in Joshua 7. After their miraculous victory at Jericho, the Israelites were routed by the next city in their conquest, the city of Ai, because an Israelite named Achan took some spoils of war during the battle of Jericho. God had explicitly forbidden this, and in response to Achan's sin, God made Israel fall in the battle against Ai. When Achan's sin came to light, Joshua oversaw his execution (Joshua 7:25). Although a virtuous person is brokenhearted over sin, virtue cannot be maintained where sin is ignored.

Q: *In what ways do you try to avoid accountability for your sins?*

Q: *How does a concern for community keep the virtuous person from ignoring sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We don't like to be held accountable for our mistakes. We like receiving recognition for our achievements, but we hope our failures will slip by unnoticed. In fact, we often attempt to wiggle out from under them by blame shifting or making excuses. Virtue will keep us from trying to escape accountability. When we make mistakes, moral or otherwise, we should be ready to own them. There is nothing virtuous about ignoring sin or pretending to be perfect. Furthermore, an unwillingness to acknowledge our own mistakes and shortcomings takes away our ability to lament over them. Joshua and Caleb were driven to virtuous lament over the people's unfaithfulness.



## 5. VIRTUE RESTS ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.

### ▣ NUMBERS 14:21–24; JOSHUA 1:1–9

Q: *Why were Joshua and Caleb confident that God would give them the land?*

Q: *Why could God command Joshua to be strong and courageous?*

In a final effort to keep Israel from rebelling against God, Joshua and Caleb appealed to the promises of God. They affirmed the goodness of the land in contradiction to what the other ten spies had said (Numbers 13:32). They affirmed the land as “exceedingly good” and flowing with milk and honey (Numbers 14:7–8), exactly how God described it to Moses in Exodus 3:8. Furthermore, Joshua and Caleb remained confident, despite the size of their opponents, that God was able to deliver the land to them. They were unsuccessful in persuading the Israelites, but they succeeded in proclaiming the promises of God for all to hear. Virtue is possible when we depend more on God’s promises than personal effort.

This idea also appears in the initial verses of Joshua. Twice in Joshua 1:1–9, God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. These qualities are closely connected with virtue. Around these commands to be strong and courageous are God’s promises. He promised not to forsake Joshua. He promised Joshua success. Joshua’s virtue rested on the promises God made to him.

Q: *What promises of God are most significant to you?*

Q: *What guarantee do we have that God will keep His promises?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Our virtue begins with believing the promises of God. If we base our life on anything else, we will only be disappointed. If we base our life on the promises of God, we can live with confidence in all things because God is sure to be faithful to His promises. God’s promises give us the freedom to confidently pursue virtue. God’s commitment to His promises is the same as His commitment to the Son (2 Corinthians 1:20).

## 6. VIRTUE LOOKS BEYOND THE SELF TO SOMETHING GREATER.

### ❏ NUMBERS 14:21–24; JOSHUA 15:16–19

❏: *On what did God base His determination to not let this unfaithful generation into the promised land?*

❏: *Why did Caleb give his daughter additional land blessings?*

In condemning the unfaithful generation of Israelites, God alluded to the earth being filled with the glory of God (Numbers 14:21). This is a programmatic vision in the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:14). God's glory will one day fill every inch of this globe. Joshua and Caleb were able to see this vision. They were also able to see the joys of living in the land God had promised them (Numbers 14:24). They were virtuous because they were able to look beyond themselves to something greater. They yearned for the day the earth would be filled with God's glory. This yearning created virtue within their character.

Caleb's virtue is also evident in his interaction with his daughter (Joshua 15:16–19). Caleb arranged for his daughter to marry Othniel because of Othniel's courage in battle. He then gave his daughter and her husband an allotment of land. Caleb's daughter, Achsah, knew the land would be barren for most of the year without an abundant water supply. When she asked her father to provide the water necessary to farm the arid land, he agreed and gave generously. He was willing to invest his land with his daughter and son-in-law because he looked beyond himself to the future of his family—his children, grandchildren, and the generations that would follow. Such a perspective created the capacity to act with virtue in regard to his daughter.

❏: *How do the ministries of Oakwood look beyond the church itself?*

❏: *What in your life shows that you believe in something more important than yourself?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Healthy churches understand that the mission of the church is greater than the church itself. God yearns for His glory to be evident in every part of the globe, and local churches are the mechanism

by which this mission will be achieved. Since this is the case, it is alarming when most of the budget in most American churches never has an impact beyond the four walls of the church. Churches need to constantly examine how they use the resources entrusted to them. Of course, it is necessary for a church to invest in itself. The church is part of God's mission. A church must invest in the discipleship and growth of its own members. It is right for a church to support its staff and the ministries they lead. At times, churches must invest in buildings and capital improvements. But churches must always be mindful that they are a part of a greater work God is doing that encompasses all of creation.

This is not a concern only for budget committees and leadership teams. Every church member has a part in helping the church look beyond itself to God's greater mission. For church members, it may mean dealing with a degree of discomfort. It may mean accepting inconveniences. Your willingness to make these sacrifices will encourage your leadership to invest the church's resources beyond itself in God's larger mission.

## NEXT STEPS

This lesson has discussed six principles of biblical virtue. Each one pertains to specific situations in which you could act with virtue or fail to do so. Identify an area of your life in which you are failing to act with biblical virtue. In college, I hung around a close knit group of guys. There was one guy we all tended to pick on. For some reason, he wanted to be part of our group even though he did so at his own expense. As you can imagine, a group of college boys can be quite ruthless. We were all trying to one up each other in how we picked on him. We could be quite emotionally abusive. I knew at the time that what I was doing was wrong, but I could not bring myself to go against the majority. I'm thankful some of the guys in our group did. Years later, I look back on my actions with utter shame. I completely lacked any godly virtue in my treatment of this young man. Nothing I do now will change what I did then. The opportunity for virtue in that situation has passed. Do not let the opportunity for virtue pass you by. What majorities do you need to resist? What truths are you compromising? What promises are you ignoring?

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, thank you for Joshua and Caleb. May you raise up men and women who are committed to godly virtue the way they were in Numbers 13–14.*



*-Lord Jesus, every promise God has made will be fulfilled in you. Hold me close to you so I may live with virtue.*

*-Father, show me the instances in my life in which I need to act with virtue.*

*-God, forgive me for the times I have failed to act with virtue. Convict me of sin, and make me rest on the all-sufficient grace of my Savior.*