

# **The Virtues**

**An ESL Curriculum with Life Topics and Biblical  
Content for Use in Churches**

**Southern Ontario Cooperative of ESL Ministries**

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**Fall 2010**

## Introduction

*The Virtues* is a series of ESL lessons designed with ESL programs in churches in mind. They are based on such themes as Love, Hope and Courage - human virtues we all aspire to and possess to various degrees, that are also virtues found and commended in the Bible. Each virtue is introduced and explored in 3 or 4 self-contained lessons. The lessons, as a series, start with a world culture focus, then a North American focus, and finally a Biblical focus. This focus is reflected in the reading text chosen for each lesson, which is usually a tale or a story or a passage from the Bible. The idea is to engage the students using universal themes that relate to their lives, mine the cultural treasures of the worlds they come from, and to show why human aspiration alone is insufficient to experience life in its fullness and reality, which is possible only in Christ. As Christopher Wright puts it in his book *The Mission of God*, "to engage people's own answers to life's questions and then introduce them to how the Bible handles them can be a friendly, nonthreatening way of gaining people's interest in the wider truth of the biblical revelation."<sup>1</sup> The emphasis, then, is on our common humanity, and, through the gesture of welcoming the wisdom of the nations, to build a bridge towards the truth of the Biblical gospel.

The motivation is also to build up relationships in the class by talking about issues that pertain much to life's struggles. Through this, we hope to create an atmosphere that is loving and open, and that can generate discussion of faith issues naturally. We believe that Biblical answers to life's problems need to be arrived at through honest wrestling, and that this may provide a best foundation for a vital relationship with Jesus. Just like the Wisdom literature in the Bible that provides within the entire Biblical testimony a place to express doubts, struggles and pain to a sovereign, loving God in light of life's tough questions common to all humanity, we hope that these lessons will create that same place that eventually leads to an honest faith in our God.

Through all this we hope to help the students to improve their English language skills. Thus behind the design are also language learning principles that state that pragmatic components such as sociolinguistic, interactional and cultural competence are just as important as linguistic components such as grammar and pronunciation. We have tried to attend to both categories, with varying degrees of emphasis depending on the content and the writer of the lesson. Speaking and conversation generally play an important part. Grammar and other formal elements are not dealt with in isolation. Overall, there is an emphasis on relating life to language (while relating life to Bible), and vice versa. This is also meant to address the affective domains of language learning where students are encouraged to lower their inhibitions and risk expressing themselves in a supportive environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 445.

The curriculum is designed for use by church volunteers who may or may not have had training in teaching English. Ease of use is therefore one of our primary concerns. We have designed it so that teachers can simply follow the explicit instructions and suggested time frames in the Teacher's Notes. Student Handouts are included in each lesson for photocopying. Each lesson of 90 minutes follows the same format, in five sections: Life, Life to Topic, Topic, Topic to Life, Life. It always begins with small talk and a review of homework, and ends with homework that is an integral part of the lesson. The Topic is a reading text, including scripture, with discussion questions; while the two other sections consist of a variety of activities including the discussion of quotes and proverbs, pair work or other interactive but thoughtful exercises. The Topic to Life section is, in our mind, at least as important as the Topic, for this is where we try to apply the input of the lesson, whether thematically, scripturally or linguistically.

It is our hope and prayer that the use of this curriculum will open up new possibilities for engaging students in life and in faith, and, more broadly, for contemplating such topics as language learning / teaching and our missional responsibilities. May our Lord Jesus be glorified in the thinking and practice of all that He lays on us.

## ***A Short Note for the Teacher .....***

*The Virtues* is a series of ESL lessons designed with ESL programs in churches in mind. They are based on such themes as Love, Hope and Courage - human virtues we all aspire to and possess to various degrees, that are also virtues found and commended in the Bible. Each virtue is introduced and explored in 3 or 4 self-contained lessons. The lessons, as a series, start with a world culture focus, then a North American focus, and finally a Biblical focus.

The first part of each lesson is the **Life section** and it focuses on Community Building and Review. By this we mean that teachers work to *create a non-threatening and warm learning environment*. Learning a language can be very intimidating, so let's welcome the students and make them feel at home. One way is to provide tea/coffee and biscuits or other *small snacks* to *show hospitality*. During the first 10 minutes of class teachers can inquire about students' previous week/weekend or discuss something about daily life. Teachers can also introduce *PAN (Project /Activities Notebook)* and encourage them to keep a notebook to record new words and ideas related to their language learning as they come up during the week. They can then discuss them at the beginning of each class. Finally, the teacher can follow up and check the homework during the beginning of the lesson.

The second part is called the **Life to Topic section**. The goal is to *introduce the topic and make it relevant to the student's life*. We're trying to 'warm' students up to the virtue by activating their prior knowledge about the topic. Their real lives and the virtue blend together here. Typical learning activities found in this section include *class discussions and definition clarification*.

The next part is entitled the **Topic section**. This section begins with *pre-reading activities* that possibly include class/partner discussion or the teacher giving background knowledge. The chosen readings are one-half to three-quarters of a page in length. Teachers may consider giving readings for homework the week prior to studying it in class to avoid spending time in class reading. *Effective reading* can be done as students first *silently read* the stories. Teachers can have students practice reading aloud, or teachers can read the stories aloud for the students to hear the correct pronunciation. Finally, *post-reading activities* include comprehension and discussion questions. Both pre- and post-reading activities are important for students to engage and understand the topic.

The fourth part is a second **Topic to Life section**. This section goes further into deepening the student's connection and exploration of the virtue. It attempts to apply the Topic to life. Engaging *discussion questions* for class or pairs are included in this section. We aim to see the student's reaction to the virtue and to probe a little more through thought-provoking discussion questions. *Optional questions* are included to be used at the teacher's discretion for she/he truly knows the students and what is important for them. *Mini grammar lessons* review grammatical points and allow for practice. *Class writing assignments* are sometimes included. *Proverbs or*

*quotes* allow students to further discuss the virtue and further develop their ideas. *Role-plays* are fun and engaging. Students use their language in real situations. Fun *match up activities* provide interesting ways of using the language.

The last part is the second **Life section**. Homework is an important part of this section. Students are encouraged to take their learning home and to ‘the real world’. Sometimes they need to *memorize quotes or scriptures* and sometimes they need to reflect and apply the virtue to their lives. It is important for the teacher to follow up with the homework activities the following week.

## **‘The Virtues’ FAQ section**

### ***What if there is not enough time to cover everything in one lesson?***

There are many possibilities. “Optional” questions or activities were designed to be just that - optional. Teachers could select quotes and proverbs instead of using them all. They could also assign some activities as homework. For the reading, they could ask students to read silently instead of reading aloud. All in all, use your best discretion and let your lesson reflect your unique style as a teacher. Respond to the needs and preferences of the students. We do, however, recommend that sufficient time should be left for the Topic to Life section.

### ***What if we want to use two sessions to cover the material for one lesson? What is the best way to do this?***

We suggest going through Life, Life to Topic and Topic in one session. Then during the second session, review Topic, and take time to complete Topic to Life. If there is extra time, some of the homework assignment can be done in class.

### ***My students will not do homework. What should I do?***

The homework is an integrated part of the lesson and is designed to encourage the students to reflect on and remember what was learnt during the lesson. For the Biblical lessons, it often invites them to consider the Bible or to take small steps towards a relationship with Christ. None of these can be forced: we do our best to encourage them out of love.

### ***What if there are too few students for pair work or students are not willing to do pair work?***

Teachers are encouraged to use their discretion in such situations. Pair work or group work could be done as a whole-class activity instead. At all times, remain sensitive to the students’ needs and preferences and conduct your lesson accordingly.

### ***Our class is a conversation class. Do we still do the writing activities?***

The writing activities are included because writing is an important skill. Explain this to the students and perhaps assign the writing as homework.