

### LESSON THREE: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S MORAL PERFECTION PROJECT

Directions: Read the following with your child and then talk about it. Unless otherwise indicated, these words are taken directly from *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (pages 89-90).

"Benjamin Franklin (January 17, 1706 – April 17, 1790) was one of the most important and influential Founding Fathers of the United States of America. A noted polymath [person with much knowledge about many subjects], Franklin was a leading author and printer, satirist, political theorist, politician, scientist, inventor, civic activist, statesman and diplomat. As a scientist he was a major figure in the Enlightenment and the history of physics for his discoveries and theories regarding electricity. He invented the lightning rod, bifocals, the Franklin stove, a carriage odometer, and a musical instrument. He formed both the first public lending library and fire department in America. He was an early proponent of colonial unity and as a political writer and activist he, more than anyone, invented the idea of an American nation and as a diplomat during the American Revolution, he secured the French alliance that helped to make independence possible" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin\\_Franklin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin)).

Franklin's historical reputation has been largely shaped . . . by his account in his autobiography of the famous project he launched to attain "moral perfection." . . . Franklin began his quest around the time he ended his unsatisfactory visits to Presbyterian services and started spelling out his own religious creed. The endeavor was typically pragmatic. It contained no abstract philosophizing nor any reference to religious doctrines. As he later noted with pride, it was not merely an exhortation to be virtuous, it was also a practical guide on how to achieve that goal.

First he made a list of twelve virtues he thought desirable, and to each he appended a short definition:

*Temperance:* Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

*Silence:* Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.

*Order:* Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

*Resolution:* Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

*Frugality:* Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; (i.e. waste nothing).

*Industry:* Lose not time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.

*Sincerity:* Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

*Justice:* Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

*Moderation:* Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think

they deserve.

*Cleanliness:* Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.

*Tranquility:* Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

*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.

A Quaker friend "kindly" informed him that he had left something off: Franklin was often guilty of "pride," the friend said, citing many examples, and could be "overbearing and rather insolent." So Franklin added "humility" to be the thirteenth virtue on his list. "Imitate Jesus and Socrates."

(The World Union of Deists does not agree 100 percent with Ben Franklin on imitating Jesus, since Jesus was very superstitious and believed in Satan, demons, the Passover horror story that degrades God to the level of a mass killer and baby killer, etc.)