



# Family Values

## Virtue Realities

### Persuasiveness

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Not every character trait is by definition a virtue. For some it depends on how they are used before they would qualify for this category. Paul makes this distinction when he reminds the Corinthians, *“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”* (1 Cor. 8:1) If we do something that offends people, even if it is right, we risk becoming a stumbling block to the weak. Paul insists that God gives His people gifts *“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:12) When pointed in this direction, a neutral characteristic becomes a virtue.

The power of persuasion is one such quality. It can be used for good or for evil. Think back for a moment on the persuasive techniques used by Satan in the Garden of Eden. He first asks: *“Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”* Of course he knew the answer and when Eve confirmed it, he quickly responds, *“You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* (Genesis 3:1-7) She and Adam ate of it. Their eyes were opened and suddenly they felt ashamed, vulnerable and afraid. They gave into temptation and compromised who they were.

On another occasion Jesus finds himself in the desert without food for forty days, when he is tempted by the devil. Once again the devil unleashes his persuasive powers, even quoting Scripture to make his point. He prefaces his challenges with, *“If you are the Son of God, “then command this stone to become bread or throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. The devil also promises to give Jesus authority over the world if he would abandon his mission and worship him. Jesus does not give in, reprimands him and reminds him that one should worship the Lord God and not put him to the test. (Luke 4:3-12)*

Throughout the Old and New Testament there are examples of people using their persuasive powers for good. When the Lord tells Abraham about the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham is quick to advocate on behalf of the righteous.

*“Suppose there are fifty righteous . . . forty-five . . . forty . . . thirty . . . twenty . . . ten?”* The tragedy was that not even ten righteous could be found. (Genesis 18:22-33) Later Job also argues with God. He passionately asserts his innocence and questions the validity of his suffering. In the end, he acknowledges his humanity, while affirming his allegiance to God.

Jesus admires people who are persistent and genuinely persuasive. Initially he ignores the Canaanite woman who demands that he have mercy on her and heal her daughter. She is not deterred even when he reminds her that he was sent *“only to the lost sheep of Israel.”* She continues to ask for help. Jesus insists *“It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”* She convincingly responds, *“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”* Jesus respects her argument. He is impressed with her faith. *“And her daughter was healed instantly.”* (Matt. 15:21-28) In another instance the Samaritan woman at the well is so awestruck by what Jesus knew about her that she cannot help but tell others. As a result, *“many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.”* (John 4:7-39)

Persuasiveness is a powerful tool for sharing our convictions. When we do it in a way that respects the beliefs of others, is consistent with what we value and is tempered with love, then our testimony has credibility. That is Christian witness at its best.

The following are ways to put persuasiveness into practice:

1. **Stand up for what you believe.** Resist the temptation to compromise who you are.
2. **Live your convictions.** Pray for the power to be persuasive.
3. **Encourage others to be persuasive.** Provide a safe place for people to share what’s important to them.

Affirmation: Today I will accommodate but not capitulate!

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