

FREE TO LOVE

# Making a Big 3 Virtue Plan

## Introduction

In the last discipleship article, we talked about the freedom to love, and how we are called to strive for greater self-mastery to increase our capacity to love God and others. We also talked about the “Big 3” virtues: chastity, sobriety, and excellence, and the key role these virtues play in the Christian life. Today, we’ll make a concrete plan for growth in one of the Big 3 virtues.

When it comes to the Big 3, guilt and shame often motivate us to keep our challenges hidden in a shroud of darkness. Many of us suffer alone. The purpose of this conversation is to invite Jesus into that darkness (John 3:19-21) and, in a spirit of surrender to God’s providence, together commit ourselves to the pursuit of virtue.

## Red, Yellow, and Green Zone Behaviors

When trying to grow in virtue, it can be helpful to think of different kinds of behaviors as falling into green, yellow, or red zones.

“Green zone behaviors” are life-giving actions that strengthen us to avoid sin and grow in virtue.

Some examples are prayer, attending Sunday and daily Mass, confession, friendship/accountability, and life-giving habits such as exercise, journaling, and reading.

“Yellow zone behaviors” are those that place us in the near occasion of sin or may be sinful themselves. If left unchecked, yellow zone behaviors often lead to red zone behaviors. Some examples are binge-watching videos, looking at your ex’s social media profile, and isolating yourself from others.

“Red zone behaviors” are those we should always avoid, such as grave sins that damage our relationship with God (e.g. viewing pornography, masturbation, getting drunk).

Zone Examples	Chastity	Sobriety	Excellence
Green	Using filtering software  Attending 12-step groups such as Sexaholics Anonymous	Abstinence or moderate, of-age drinking  Attending 12-step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous	Keeping consistent, healthy routines (e.g., hygiene, exercise, grocery shopping/ cooking, budgeting, prayer/sacraments, etc.)
Yellow	Tech use late at night  Social media, streaming, or video games alone  No time controls on devices  1:1 time with the opposite sex in private	More than 2 drinks in a night (could be a red zone behavior for some)  Going to bars alone to escape feelings	Over-committing  Procrastination  Sleeping too much or too little  Having poor boundaries  Excessive screen time
Red	Viewing pornography  Masturbation  Sex with non-spouse	Getting drunk  Getting high	Breaking commitments to others (e.g., consistently missing school, work, or personal commitments due to laziness)  Allowing technology use to interfere with life commitments or relationships

# Big 3 Check-In

## Chastity

Chastity is the ability to say “yes” to authentic love. Activities such as viewing pornography, masturbation, sexual activity with anyone other than one’s spouse, and sexting are damaging to our relationship with God and others.

- Q:** In the past two years, what red zone behaviors have you struggled with in pursuit of chastity?
- Q:** What are one or two green zone behaviors that have helped you in pursuing chastity?

## Sobriety

Sobriety is the virtue by which we moderate our consumption of alcohol and other substances. Getting drunk or high inhibits our capacity for reason.

- Q:** In the past two years, what red zone behaviors have you struggled with in pursuit of sobriety?
- Q:** What are one or two green zone behaviors that have helped you in pursuing sobriety?

## Excellence

Excellence is the virtue by which we give the best of ourselves to God and others.

- Q:** In the past two years, what red zone behaviors have you struggled with in pursuit of excellence?
- Q:** What are one or two green zone behaviors that have helped you in pursuing excellence?

# Self-Assessment

To develop our virtue plan, it is helpful to identify our current level of freedom in each area. Based on what we just talked about, where would you place yourself in each of the three virtues? Remember, there is no shame in identifying areas of struggle. Honesty with ourselves is the first step toward growth in freedom.

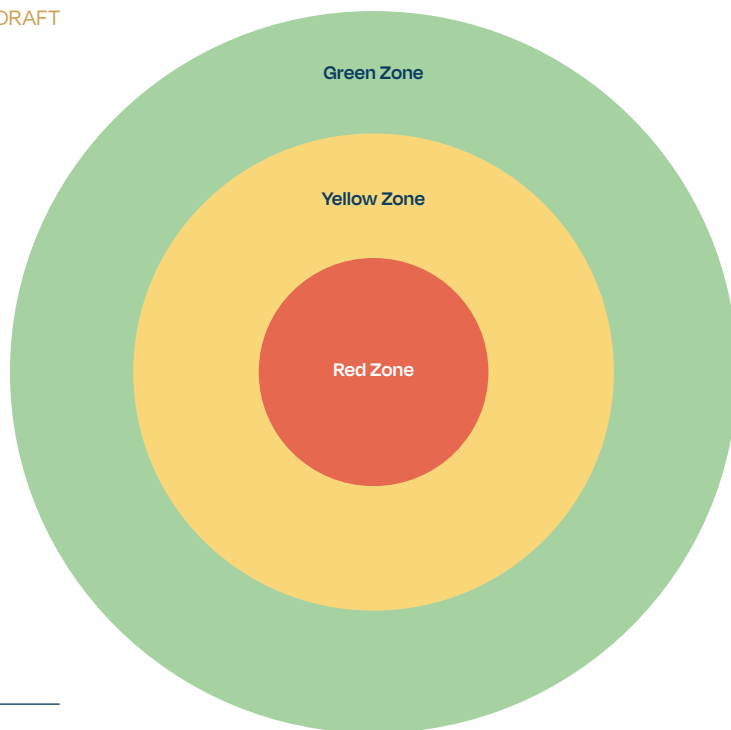
	Chastity	Sobriety	Excellence
<b>Major struggle / not free</b>	Very frequent (weekly or more) grave sin against chastity (viewing pornography, masturbation, sexual activities with non-spouse, etc.)	Very frequent (weekly or more) grave sin against sobriety (getting drunk or high)	Very frequent (weekly or more) sin against excellence (failing to follow through on commitments to God and others, consistently wasting time on unimportant things, etc.)
<b>Significant struggle / limited freedom</b>	Frequent (monthly to weekly) grave sin against chastity	Frequent (monthly to weekly) grave sin against sobriety	Frequent (monthly to weekly) sin against excellence
<b>Moderate struggle / limited freedom</b>	Occasional (every six months to monthly) grave sin against chastity	Occasional (every six months to monthly) grave sin against sobriety	Occasional (every six months to monthly) sin against excellence
<b>Some struggle</b>	Very rare (1x/year to never) grave sin against chastity; regular venial sin against chastity (e.g., deliberate impure thoughts)	Very rare (1x/year to never) grave sin against sobriety; regular venial sin against sobriety (e.g., placing oneself in the near occasion of sin)	Rare (1x/year to never) sin against excellence
<b>Freedom</b>	No grave sin against chastity for at least 1 year; makes frequent confession re: venial sin against chastity	No grave sin against sobriety for at least 1 year; makes frequent confession re: venial sin against sobriety	Very rare (1x/year to never) sin against excellence

Now, work together to identify one virtue to focus on for the remainder of this conversation (chastity, sobriety, or excellence). Here are a few principles to guide you:

If there is a moderate, significant, or greater struggle in either chastity or sobriety, then these virtues should be prioritized.

If there are multiple significant struggles, then the one causing the most severe limitations on freedom to love should be prioritized.

Write down some of your most common green, yellow, and red zone behaviors on the image on the right side. This should reflect a snapshot of your habits over the past two years.



Virtue to focus on: \_\_\_\_\_

## Developing Your Big 3 Virtue Plan

We are now going to develop a virtue plan for growth in the Big 3. Here are some green zone behaviors to draw from as you create your plan.

For Everyone:	For Some:
Prayer Mass Confession Friendship/accountability Life-giving habits (e.g. working out, playing sports, volunteering, journaling)	Spiritual direction Filtering software Individual therapy Group therapy Peer-led recovery groups Inpatient treatment

Additional resources and ideas for green zone behaviors can be found in the appendix.

Take a moment to review the instructions and example below together. Then, drawing from what you've discussed so far, create a Big 3 virtue plan on the following page.

Step 1: Clearly Identify Area of Growth	Step 2: Set Your Goal	Step 3: Actions for Growth	Step 4: Accountability
Write down the top area in which you desire to grow.	How do you want to grow? Make sure your goal is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound).	What actions will be required for you to achieve the goal above?  Ideas to consider:  What steps will truly lead to freedom in these areas of your life? Who do you need to get involved? What can you do today to begin?	How will you ensure that this plan is completed?  Accountability should be proactive rather than reactive. Frequent check-ins when you're doing well are more effective than waiting until after a red zone behavior occurs.
E.g., chastity	Reduce frequency of pornography use from twice monthly to zero times per month by replacing yellow and red zone behaviors with green zone behaviors.	Additional green zone behaviors: pray daily for 30 minutes, attend daily Mass, install filtering software on all my devices, attend a monthly 12-step group	I give John permission to hold me accountable. He and I will check in once per week, and I will call him when I am tempted to place myself in the near occasion of sin.

# My Big 3 Virtue Plan

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## My Area of Growth:

(e.g., chastity, sobriety, or excellence)

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## My Goal:

(Make it SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound)

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## Actions for Growth

(e.g., additional green zone behaviors I will add)

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## Accountability:

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## Additional Notes:

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**\*NOTE:** Keep in mind that growth in virtue requires not only education and deliberate acts, but also perseverance in struggle. You are encouraged to rejoice in small victories and to view falls as opportunities to re-commit yourself to the pursuit of virtue. Remember also that God's grace and mercy know no bounds and that in God, holiness is attainable even for those who have struggled for many years.