

Foreword on Character Education

There is broad agreement that good character is essential for the happiness and success of any individual and every society. Richard V. Reeves, an Oxford-educated Fellow of Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, asserts: 'The development of character is perhaps the central task of any civilized society and every individual within it.'¹

Sweeping language, indeed. But matched by Yuval Levin, Director for Cultural and Social Studies at the American Enterprise Institute: 'The formation of character and virtue is the foremost work of our society in every generation. To fail to engage in it is to regress to pre-civilization barbarism.'²

Narnian Virtues: Building Good Character with C.S. Lewis is a giant step forward in helping parents and educators lead children in living a life of virtue. The book's authors, Mark Pike in England and Thomas Lickona in the United States, are highly respected pioneers in developing strategies to equip schools and families in the crucial work of guiding our young to become persons of character.

For C.S. Lewis, striving for good character was a moral obligation for all human beings. As a brilliant Oxford and Cambridge scholar, a consummate communicator, and a devout Christian, C. S. Lewis showed that cultivating character does not conflict with God's grace. The twelve virtues discussed in *Narnian Virtues* are all extolled in Scripture. The apostle Peter, in his second letter, makes it emphatically clear that virtue supplements the 'life and godliness' made possible through God's grace.

As I put this book down after reading it, I felt I had spent a

priceless afternoon in conversation with C. S. Lewis as he discussed the character lessons we can learn from the *Chronicles of Narnia*. But Pike and Lickona do much more than give us a window on the genius of Lewis and his wisdom about the importance of character. They also provide practical and enjoyable character-building activities for families and classrooms. Parents and teachers want their children to grow up with good character; *Narnian Virtues* gives them the tools they need.

Narnian Virtues is a cup of pure water in a parched land. May it be an enduring reminder that the character development of our children is the foremost work of our society.

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1 Richard V. Reeves, *National Affairs*, Summer 2014, p. 112.

2 Yuval Levin, *A Time to Build* (New York: Basic Books, 2020) p. 195.

Foreword on *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader begins with one of the best-known opening lines of all time: 'There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.' The two sentences that follow have received far less attention but are equally important to the tale that C. S. Lewis wants to tell. The narrator reports: 'His parents called him Eustace Clarence and masters called him Scrubb. I can't tell you how his friends spoke to him, for he had none.' *For he had none.* This is one of the worst conditions a child can be in, to have no friends. And why is it that Eustace is friendless? Is he new in town or does he live in a place where there aren't any other children? As we quickly discover, the reason Eustace has no friends is because he is arrogant, selfish, and unkind. As his cousin Edmund so aptly puts it, Eustace is a 'record stinker'. Not only does Eustace have no friends, he also has no fun, not the real kind. Eustace's twisted idea of fun is limited to pinning dead beetles on a card and bossing and bullying other children who are either too weak or too well-mannered to fight back.

Philosophers down the centuries have posed the question: 'What is the good life?' By this they don't mean, 'How many expensive cars and large-screen TVs can you have?' but rather, 'What is the best and most fulfilling way to live?' In this book, Mark Pike and Thomas Lickona seek to answer this question by showing the connection between a virtuous life and happiness.

Virtue is a word that has fallen out of favour recently and now for many signifies only boredom and the absence of fun. With help from C.S. Lewis, Pike and Lickona demonstrate that far from being dull and dreary, the virtuous life is an adventure, one that includes hardship and requires effort, but one you don't want to miss because it is the only path that leads to real fulfillment, genuine friendship, and true joy.

After Eustace returns home, Lewis' narrator comments how

‘You’d never know him for the same boy.’ Through the virtues he has acquired in Narnia, Eustace has been saved from a life of loneliness and self-centeredness, and not for his good only, but also to the benefit of others. In *The Silver Chair*, the much-improved Eustace is sent back to Narnia with Jill to find and rescue the missing prince. In the end they help liberate their school from the very gang of bullies Eustace once belonged to.

In *Narnian Virtues*, we are invited to journey with Peter, Susan, Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, and Jill – to travel with them, to see what they see, and to learn what they learn. If we go on the adventure with an open heart, we, too, will return home with a treasure – the kind that will never rust and thieves can never steal.

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