



## Wendell Berry's Virtues of Renewal: Teaching the Forms that Sustain Life and Community with Dr. Jeffrey Bilbro

Lecture 9: Conclusion

### Outline:

In this concluding lesson, Dr. Jeffrey Bilbro offers practical advice for integrating the virtues of renewal in your teaching practice.

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### No Simple Solutions

- Wendell Berry's works (poetry, essays, and stories) do not offer simple solutions to cultural or ecological challenges.
- His writings model **virtues of renewal**, helping readers to **tend to the health of their places and communities**.

### Local Adaptations and Analogies

- Sustainable life looks different for people in different places, but these forms of life are **analogous** to each other across various scales.
- There are formal affinities between healthy **persons, households, neighborhoods, schools, churches, and cities**.
- These sustaining forms hold death in place, practice renewal, and give of themselves to others—reflecting the agrarian and theological principle:

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

### Sustaining Forms on the Margins

- Sustainable, life-giving practices exist on the **margins** of industrial culture.



- While Berry is not optimistic about their widespread adoption, he remains **hopeful**, focusing on **practicable examples** of renewal.

## Practical Steps for Teachers

- **Daily attentiveness:** Write out a "litany of attention" to notice and stretch toward the good things around you.
- **Sabbath rest:** Recognize that the fate of the world doesn't rest solely on individual effort.
- **Embrace not knowing:** Place yourself in situations where you can humbly admit, "I don't know!" and joyfully pursue learning.
- **Hold up examples:** Share compelling examples of good lives with students, resisting dystopian fears.
- **Create new rhythms:** Imagine and practice new, embodied liturgies in classrooms or schools, forming a **narrative whole** for students.
- **Revise teaching:** Reinvigorate a long-standing course by deepening love for the subject and students through careful revision.
- **Narrate success differently:** Define success not by individual accomplishments but through **loving responses to community needs**.

## Opportunities for Virtue

- Opportunities to cultivate virtues in oneself and students abound but require intentionality.
- Instead of focusing on distant problems or technological fixes, Berry encourages focusing on **local, practical** work that fosters hope and renewal in everyday life.

