

Character Development

Good character is usually hard and painful to achieve. Many shy away from it, having faced pain and negativity in the past. This results in considerable weakness in the church.

The difficult thing with character is that you don't know whether you have the character to cope with a hard situation until you have faced it.

“Life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it”

What is character?

The Greek meaning of the word “character” is the same as used for an embosser or stamp for making coins. It is a distinctive mark formed by some force upon an individual.

This agrees with biblical definition which views *suffering and trials* as factors which moulds us.

Rom 5:3 *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

James 1:2 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Character is reflected by the inner life of man and includes a person's thoughts, motives, beliefs and attitudes. Good character consists of a whole range of very different attributes: high morals, responsibility, commitment, stamina, selflessness, sensitivity, consideration, generosity etc.

Character Development

Some character development comes through understanding biblical principles. However it is only when we face difficulties that we discover how much of us is just theory. Much of character development involves just pulling our weight when we don't feel like it. There are a number of ways in which character is developed:

1) Face hard situations What are the hard situations in your life? Are you facing up to them?

God's development consists of:

- **Refining** - made pure, changed by heat. *Psalm 12:6* - Sufferings of Paul
- **Cleansing** *Malachi 3:1,2*
- **Pruning** *John 15:1-3*
- **Moulding** - the potter and the clay. *Isaiah 45:9*

All of the above processes involve internal and external forces which bring to the surface and then remove or change. Some of the forces God will use include events, circumstances, relationships and change. Joseph faced ridicule, rejection, abuse, false accusation, imprisonment, abandonment and opportunity for revenge.

The difference between the believer and elements such as silver, clay or vines is that the believer has free

choice as to how he will respond to the pressures. Our attitude and choices will determine whether we accept God's dealings and mature into the image of Christ or reject His dealings and remain stunted and deformed in character.

2) Be a learner Not all character development has to come the hard way. Examine men of God in the scriptures, learn 'the easy way' from their experiences. David poured out the water when men risked their lives to get some for him in battle. Mix with people of sound character – bad company can so easily corrupt good character.

3) Correct negative thoughts Many people develop all sorts of ungodly beliefs in the quiet moments of their lives as a result of the negatives. For example many people think - at some point in time, *does God really care about me, considering the negatives that I face?* This needs processing but is easily lost in business.

Being too busy is one of the main reasons why we fail to develop character. We don't get round to thinking through our problems. Periodically we need to write out a list of the negatives we are facing, look for solutions to the things we can change and for ways of coping with the things that we can't. Writing out a list of the positives may help you to cope with unchangeable negatives. Decide how often you need to do a review.

James 1:2-4 challenges us regarding our attitude and choice when responding to the process of character development. Our attitude defines the manner in which we respond and our choices will define the methods we use to respond. James tells us to have an attitude of "joy" and choose "to persevere".

4) Know Yourself We need to establish the principles by which we live. Decide what our general responses are going to be **before** situations occur. Jonathan showed he was a man of character by recognising that David was called to be King. Naturally he would have been heir to the throne but he recognised God's purposes and saw past the selfish-power-grabbing that many would fall for. Similarly John the Baptist humbled himself, recognising the ministry of Jesus as above his ministry. These two showed how they were *selfless*. We all need a well balanced view of ourselves.

Rom 12:3 *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Questions

- 1) What are the main ways in which your character has developed so far?
- 2) Which areas of character are more difficult to develop?
(eg high morals, responsible, commitment, stamina, consideration, selflessness, sensitivity, generosity)
- 3) To what extent has your character been developed through studying rather than facing circumstances?