

Polishing Personality or Building Character?

The integrity of the upright shall guide them... —Proverbs 11:3

It has been said, “Character is either something you *have* or something you *are!*” Rather than being a character we should all strive to be a people OF character.

The word “character” does not occur in the Bible. Two Bible words for character are:

(1) **INTEGRITY**. *Webster* defines integrity— “An unimpaired condition or sound adherence to a code of moral values, and the quality or state of being complete and undivided.” Example: The integrity of the Bible (Whole, complete). The integrity of a building (structurally sound).

➡ Our text says integrity **guides** a person. He makes decisions based on the integrity of his heart—not the company he keeps or the circumstances he is in. Example: Joseph (Gen. 39). See also Prov. 19:1; 20:7.

- Former Senator Alan Simpson said: “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters.” (*Reader's Digest*, March 2001)
- Charles Colson said, “The three most important ingredients in Christian work are integrity, integrity, integrity.”

(2) **VIRTUE**—Proverbs 31:10 refers to “*a virtuous woman*”—A woman of character.

We all have a certain type of personality (sometimes called “temperament”). But, character (virtue) is something you must acquire (2 Pet. 1:5). If you don't add character to your life, you won't have it.

➡ Never confuse someone's character with their personality.

I. The DIFFERENCES between character and personality:

- Character is **built**—Personality is something we are **born with**.

➡ I went to college at Midwestern in Pontiac, MI (1969-'74 when Dr. Tom Malone was it's president. Midwestern was advertised as “A Character Building Factory.” It lived up to it's advertising! That was what I needed most at that point in my life—Character! Much of who I am today I owe to God using

Midwestern to instill discipline... diligence... duty... and determination into my life.

- Character is **developed**—Personality is who we are **inherently**.
- Character may be **lost** or **regained**—Personality is never lost because it is part of who you are. But it may become either tarnished or polished.
- Character is a matter of **choice**—Personality is a matter of **heredity**.
- Character is both Godward and manward—Personality is primarily manward.
- A person may have a shining personality, yet be devoid of inward character. Example: Saul (see 1 Sam. 9:2).
- We have many shiny personalities in America, but I'm afraid there is a dearth of character.

II. The **DEVELOPMENT** of character.

- **Our focus** should be to **build character** in our lives. Sometimes people try to cover their lack of character by merely polishing their personality.
- A. **Character is developed in a closet**—what a person does when he knows no one is watching him. D.L. Moody said, “Character is what you are in the dark.”
 - However, personality is **polished so others will view the person publicly** in a positive light (Mt. 23:27).
- B. **David** (Ps. 26:1—*Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity...*). David's character was developed as he fled from a jealous king and lived in the wilderness. Character is rarely formed with one has a life of comfort or pleasure.
- C. David's son, **Absalom**, had an attractive personality, but lacked inward character. **Absalom** polished his personality to improve his outward persona for selfish advantage (see 2 Sam. 15:2-6).
 - Some may display a measure of kindness, like Absalom, but it is only a *facade*, shown to gain acceptance or approval (2 Pet. 2:3). Politicians are experts as this.

- Polished people are agreeable and pleasant as they mingle with other like-minded people. But, their personality changes when they're around people who disagree with them.
- D. Character does not change regardless of circumstances. Character will keep a commitment even when the circumstances surrounding my commitment may have changed.
- E. Character does not give in to peer pressure (Dan. 1:8; 3:16-18; 6:10).

III. The **DISPLAYING** of character.

- The Bible gives many **examples** of men and women of moral character versus those with polished personalities.
 - Job was a man of integrity (Job 2:3; 27:5; 31:1). Ruth was woman of character (Ruth 3:11).
- A. Men of character, like David, are **not easily offended** when they are falsely accused (1 Sam. 17:28-29).
- B. Men of character **do not seek revenge** when they are wronged (e.g. Joseph). A man of character will **extend grace** to those who have wronged or offended him (Gen. 50:20-21; 2 Sam. 9).
- C. **Men of character are not perfect.** They sin! But, when they sin, they will own up to their sin, confess it, and repent (2 Sam. 12).
- Men of character, like David, will accept the full responsibility for their foolish actions (1 Chron. 21:8).
 - However, **men of personality will blame others** for their mistakes, like King Saul (1 Sam. 15:13-15, 20-21).

SUMMATION: Make sure you are **building character into your life and not merely *polishing* your personality**. While polish may be good, it is worthless unless there is strength of character to back it up. When polish becomes an end in itself, it is only pride—**And that is SIN**.

Remember, *“The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance [personality], but the Lord looketh on the heart [character]”* (1 Sam. 16:7).