

The Word Goes Forth

Pastor Tim Peterson's Blog

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Character and Discipleship

Over the years of meeting with many families, it appears fewer and fewer discuss the topic of character; our own character and that of loved ones. One family admitted they had never discussed character with their children. In fact when one of their own children was experiencing major behavior issues the parents had never considered the issue of character.

As we grow in our walk with Jesus Christ we will have to face our own character issues and love others as they work on their character issues. Character is defined by who we are in the dark when no one is watching. Paul commends the Philippian's for obeying when he is not there and encourages them to continue to work out their own issues with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). In helping others with their character flaws we must remember that we are responsible to others not *for* them.

Please read carefully the Psalm of David (18:20-28):

Psalm 18:20-28 (ESV)

- ²⁰ The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.
- ²¹ For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
and have not wickedly departed from my God.
- ²² For all his rules were before me,
and his statutes I did not put away from me.
- ²³ I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from my guilt.
- ²⁴ So the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.
- ²⁵ With the merciful you show yourself merciful;
with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;
- ²⁶ with the purified you show yourself pure;
and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.
- ²⁷ For you save a humble people,
but the haughty eyes you bring down.
- ²⁸ For it is you who light my lamp;
the LORD my God lightens my darkness.

Oswald Chambers says of this Psalm, "Our character determines how we hear the Word of God." When I am facing difficult things in my life or walking closely with someone I love who is facing a difficult issue, my character is exposed. Sometimes the thoughts that I have in my mind are shockingly opposed to truth.

In my own life, I know that if I had more of the character of Jesus Christ I would never had a drinking issue. I know it is hard to come to the point and acknowledge that I personally have character issues. In Romans 5:1-4 Paul says,

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which

we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

Paul tells us that as we pursue Jesus Christ we will suffer and as we walk closely with HIM, enduring character will be produced by the Holy Spirit.

Last year I was reminded of the importance of teaching our children about character. I asked a young man, who had several behavioral failings which involved legal implications, about his character. My question was “do you believe that Jesus Christ can rewrite your character?” To his parent’s surprise, he said, “no”. He explained that he was too far gone. How could Jesus ever be with him with all that he had done? He explained that Jesus was out there away from him, but the shame of what he had done was bigger and that Jesus could not be close with him anymore.

I was able to share with this young man 1 John 2:12 which says, “I am writing to you, little children because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.” I love this reminder. How often I have needed this reminder, I am forgiven. In order for character to grow we need this reminder and those willing to faithfully remind us.

I read a post by Tim Challies on www.challies.com reminding us to go and make disciples. He had three great points. First he said, Jesus never looked at a video and told it to go and make disciples. Videos about discipleship are good but are we never to depend on a video to do what Jesus told us to do. Second, Jesus never looked at a curriculum and told it to go and make disciples. Again there is nothing wrong with Bible based curriculum. If we only point people to a curriculum we are at risk of creating a poor balance based on knowledge which misses the command to serve and obey. Third he said, Jesus never looked at a particular philosophy or program and told it to make disciples. Many in our culture are fascinated by the newest strategy that has worked in another church believing that this strategy is the magic pill for their church.

“None of these three things are wrong in of themselves, and yet none of them can be trusted to do what Jesus has uniquely called and equipped His people to do.”

It is beautiful thing to witness parents actively disciplining their children. This is exactly what happened in the story that I shared. This young man’s parents have begun to and will continue to speak into their son’s life of the love and forgiveness of Christ.

We are to be a disciple and make disciples...are you?