

Character Matters

By Sherry Poundstone

“We must choose to become women of strong character. This means we should allow God to work in our lives to develop our character and strengthen us in areas where we are weak.”

I was not concerned with character as I grew up. I was concerned with survival.

I am not even sure that I heard the word character in my family at all. I heard about character in school, but I do not remember ever wondering if I had it.

I grew up in the conservative Midwest, and at a time when family dysfunction of any kind was not talked about. My extended family was one plagued by alcohol, drug, sexual and physical abuse, all stemming from physical depression and spiritual oppression. What I now know to be a spirit of lying, had invaded my family and permeated every nook and cranny of our home. It was a dangerous place for a little girl, but as often is the case, no one on the outside knew.

I gave my life to Jesus Christ at age 14 and right then I made the decision to be different; to purpose to live a life without financial struggle, emotional pain, abuse or heartbreak. Unfortunately, I took the long way around in getting to the life I so desired. I had no idea how to accomplish this life and what I did not understand at the time, was I did not have the character to support a different lifestyle. My character was weak.

My early adult life was earmarked with common mistakes made by a woman growing up in an abusive environment. I found myself choosing the “wrong” man and then fighting to keep him. I struggled with every area of my life: romantic relationships, fiscal responsibility and people skills.

I want to make it clear that I am not placing blame on my parents. Once we are adults, and once we know different, we can make the choice for a better life. My point here is only to show that I lacked character in a big way and why.

What is Character?

Abraham Lincoln said “Character,” is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

Webster defines character as “a moral or ethical quality: Our moral state,” and that is true. But as women following Christ, is there more?

Character is much more than what others see on the outside. It has been said that character is *who we are when no one is looking*, or when there is no one around to judge us, to give us a pat on the back or give us recognition.

Through God’s word, we can come to know His character. His love, mercy, and compassion; His courage and strength; His faithfulness and justice.

As Christ followers, we want our character to match up with who we say we are. We want to develop and display the character of strong, Christ centered women.

Dale Carnegie said, *“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”*

So, what does it mean to become a woman of character? A woman of character means living from a point of authenticity. A woman of character is honest, full of integrity, dependable, loyal, forgiving, kind, and compassionate.

We must seek character traits which reflect Christ in us. God's word makes it truly clear what Christian character traits we are to have. As Christ followers this is our guideline.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. Galatians 5:22 ESV

Does Character Matter?

Susan and Mary had been friends for years. Susan thought she knew Mary to be a woman of character. That is why she was shocked and disappointed to find out that Mary was having an extramarital affair with a co-worker. When confronted, Mary gave every excuse to justify the affair. She expected that her friendship with Susan would continue as always. But character mattered to Susan, and she felt she must end their relationship. Would you have made the same choice Susan did? Do you think she did the right thing? Does character really matter that much?

A few years ago, during a presidential election, one candidate's theme was "Character Matters." The idea was to get Americans thinking about the character of the candidates, as well as their political stance and ideas. Since character is defined as our moral state, then a candidate's character should matter to us.

Does character matter? Character matters to God!

If it were not important to the Lord, there would not be so much instruction in His words regarding character. When God places an emphasis on something we need to pay attention!

Becoming a woman of character may be challenging and, at times, even difficult. There are many influences from society that do not support being a woman of character. What is acceptable in our American culture today does not reflect biblical values or God's instruction. We see that cheating, irresponsibility, a self-focused attitude, and a relaxation of moral values is acceptable to many. We must purpose to take a stand for what is right, and the first step is to become women of character.

Where Do We Start?

We must choose to become women of strong character. This means we should allow God to work in our lives to develop our character and strengthen us in areas where we are weak. Let us look at the steps we should take.

1. Choose to pursue the process of becoming a woman of character.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:9 ESV

Free will allows us to choose the path we are going to follow. Will we take the effortless way out and follow the world's ways? Or will we turn toward God and make the choices He wants us to follow? We face many free will choices every day. But God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

2. Get humble before the Lord.

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. Deuteronomy 8:2 ESV

The Lord tested the children of Israel in the wilderness for forty years. He humbled them and tested their character. As women of character, we must humble ourselves before God and search our hearts. Are we willing to remain humble in all areas of our life? To allow God to teach us the meaning of true character and allow Him to make changes in us?

3. Change Our Thinking

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2

We must change our thinking if we are to become women of character. Changing our thinking will change our behavior. I like to think of this equation: Thoughts=words=actions=outcomes

Our thoughts become our words. We never speak about anything that we have not thought about first. Our words become our actions. Our actions always produce an outcome, good or bad. The outcome reflects our character.

An example that I often use is when we make a *free will* choice to gossip.

4. Allow God to Work

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. John 15:1-2

The pruning process is hard! It hurts. But it is through this process that we will reach our goal of being women of character. We must allow God to trim and prune anything that He does not want in us, and to replace what He pruned with His character.

Live It Out

1. What does character mean to you?
2. What is the difference between character and reputation? How can the two be confused?
3. Think of a person that you believe has character. What traits do you see in the person that makes you believe he/she has character?
4. What are some temptations or distractions that could get in the way of becoming a woman of character?

Prayer Points:

Pray and ask God to help you choose to become a woman of character. Humble yourself before the Lord and ask Him to reveal any areas of your character that need development. Then ask for His guidance as you begin to develop these areas to reflect Christ's character.

Further Study:

The following scriptures give us a picture of the character of Christ. Read each of these verses.

Humble service (John 13:1-5)

Love (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Forgiveness (Colossians 3:13)

Holiness (I Peter 1:15-16)

Righteousness (I John 3:7)

Compassion (Ephesians 4:32)

Purity (I John 3:3)