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Editorial

Character Formation

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through 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. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5: 1- 5).

The character is an interlocked set of personal values *which normally* guides conduct. It is not a fixed set easily measured or incapable of modification and it includes our perceptions, dispositions, intentions, and motivations. It sums up who we are and who we become and our choices about conduct are choices about 'right' or 'wrong' actions and thoughts. Everything we do in life is driven by our character. When a character is acquired and held internally, it leads to a virtuous life, lived for a greater purpose and helps us understand that our choices of actions are an act of self-determination which sets the path for our future. By our actions we not only shape a particular situation, we also form ourselves to meet future situations in a particular way. Thus the concept of character implies that 'moral goodness is primarily a prediction of persons and not acts and that this goodness of persons is not automatic but must be acquired and cultivated' (Hauerwas, 1981).

The rapid and significant change in the society is inevitable and most importantly significant in various areas that are not yet visible or obvious to the community. Along with the usual range of positive developments that accompany such growths, there is a hidden danger that comes along with not knowing the rapidly expanding society. For

example, the changing dynamics of the family, the rapid variability in the attitudes seen in the youth can become dangerous if they are not dealt with properly. Formators and educators feel the need not only to teach the basics but also to meet growing life needs. The feeling increases when one considers the needs of the community within the church of today to whom these future Christian leaders will be called to minister.

There are many outstanding traits that Jesus possessed that would be good for all of us to have as part of our basic character. As a child, He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51; Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). He was about His Father's business at an early age, and He was interested in spiritual things while just a youth (Luke 2:49; Eccl. 12:1). He lived, not selfishly, but for others (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:4). He accomplished God's will in His life (John 6:38). He left an example that all believers can follow (1 Pet. 2:21). The Bible shows four areas of development in which Jesus grew that are revealed as wisdom, stature, favor with men, and favor with God.

To grow in wisdom is to build “the quality of being wise; the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience, understanding.” Stature signifies physical development. Jesus is portrayed as a strong and healthy man and this signifies the need to keep our bodies as instruments of service (Rom. 12:1; 6:12-13) and a temple of God (1 Cor. 6:18-20). Favor with Men signifies the need to develop socially and requires one to know how to deal with one another when living together. Jesus associated with all kinds of people because He loved them (John 3:16). His was an all-inclusive nature and He always tried to influence those with whom He associated to be better people setting the proper example of behavior before them. Favor with God implies spiritual development that ought to characterize every child of God. The importance and value of the soul is seen in Matthew 16:26 where it is shown to be of greater value than all the amassed wealth to be found in the world. While the correct spiritual food is the Bible (Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 2:1-2), spiritual exercise is the application of the word of God to one's life which results in proper character development and worthwhile service to the Lord and others. As the New Testament reveals Jesus Christ to be the perfect standard by which to measure our character and personal growth and development, it also offers some guidelines which will help all of us mold our characters into what our God would have them to be.

There has been a significant ethical development during the past two decades about the concept of the character. The character has been linked with various topics like public life, and decision making. We are coming to see that our societal problems reflect, in no small measure, our personal vices. Scholarly discussion, media analysis, and everyday conversation have all focused attention on the character of our elected leaders, our fellow citizens, and our children (Lickona, 1991).

Ethicists draw a distinction between character formation and decision making. Character formation concerns who we are. Character includes our perceptions, dispositions, and intentions and motivations (Talbert, 2004). Decision making and the resultant action concern what we do. Making a decision involves an analysis of the situation, a method for arriving at the right choice, and the character of the decision maker. Hence, who we are conditions what we do. Nevertheless, most ethical thought tends to focus on decision making instead of on the moral agent who makes the decision.

The Sermon on the Mount functions primarily as a catalyst for the formation of character and also contributes to decision making when it is taken together with the whole of the Gospel of Matthew, the whole of the New Testament. It is assumed that Jesus' disciples are attached to him (Matthew 4: 18-22) and that they resemble the portrait given in Matthew 5: 3- 12 (this is implied in Matthew 5: 13- 16- "you are the salt" and "you are the light"). There is one who by His promises have now undertaken the responsibility to enable the fulfillment of the Beatitudes. The disposition that flows from this insight is to trust him. The character is being formed. From the very first thought unit, Matthew 5:3-12, the Sermon on the Mount functions in the interests of character formation.

The mind is a garden and character of the fruit. The mental and moral powers which God has given us do not constitute character. They are talents which we are to improve and which, if properly improved, will form a right character. In training these powers so that they shall harmonize and form a valuable character, we have a work which no one but ourselves can do.

Character formation is the basis of personality development. To develop a well balanced, harmonious personality, we have to follow a fourfold daily personal action programme based on action, knowledge, devotion, and meditation. If we practice the daily action programme

with patience and perseverance we are sure to have an integrated, all-round personality. Another approach to character development views four essential elements in the formation of character- the stories of influential people, pain and struggle, a greater purpose, and practice. With these elements, the individual can go through the three-step process of character formation which moves from experiencing the growth of the character to internalizing the experiences, and finally the activating to so that it leads to behavior modification and it forms deep and lasting character.

The Biblical view of the person who has to endure through the process of character formation may be in line with the processes that are psychologically defined. The movement of positive psychology is thus essential in understanding what had been known for a long time- the journey of character formation and the concept of ‘suffering’ and ‘endurance’ leads to the formation of character and the ‘hope’ that is the product of the process. The difficulty lies not with having families who are less tolerant to arguments and children who are prone to believing what they see on the internet but with a generation of people who believe that changes through personal growth are not required for them to cope with the new environment. The movement of psychology from focusing on the things that produce suffering to a focus on things that are positive in nature may have marked the era where we would have the knowledge of what to develop in a child rather than what to avoid.

It is important that the concept of character formation be addressed as it can significantly impact the individual and their growth in life. Research and discussion need to be done not only with educators and formators but also with psychologists, especially counseling psychologists on the impact and growth path of character formation. The understanding that precedes the steps in character formation enables the community to accept that they are bringing up a generation of children who will lead the society to a productive and harmonious future.