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Last but not the Least

There was once a man who in his early adulthood went through years of personal struggle at work and home managed to be patient and humble as life taught him lessons of perseverance, hard work, faith, servitude, and the ability to enjoying the simple joys of life. The man later turns out to be a successful businessman and was able to manage a beautiful home with healthy educated children. During his funeral service, his family and friends remembered his journey and talked about the character that impacted them so positively that they too were motivated to change their lives.

This may look like the gist of the stories of many successful men and women around the world. It motivates us and may even kindle some hope in us that after all the ‘unsuccessful’ hard-work there is good in the world. Yet with the increasing number of people turning to suicide or trying to find answers through counseling, it may seem that listening to stories is not the only thing required for the development of character. There needs to steps and certain goals to be achieved in the process of character formation.

Learn the Art of Self-Discipline. Learn to say “no” to self, friends, evil ways, bad habits, etc. Jesus taught self-denial (Matt. 16:24). The apostle Peter taught that “self-control” is to be added to our faith (2 Pet. 1:5-7). A lack of self-discipline is one sure sign of immaturity.

Be Selfless. Selfishness, the seat of all sins and wrongdoing, is having too much concern with one’s own welfare. It is illustrated in Scripture by both Lot (Gen. 13:8-13) and the rich fool (Luke 12:16-20). It is impossible to make a right decision and be selfish. Moses, in choosing

to lead the children of Israel, acted selflessly (Heb. 11:24-26), while, on the other hand, Lot, acting in a purely selfish manner, made a terrible choice which led to tragic consequences (Gen. 13:8).

Be and Do Your Best. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” (Eccl. 9:10). Develop strong beliefs on all important issues. Convictions, whether right or wrong, create respect. No one respects a person who is “wishy-washy.” Stand with your convictions even if you must stand alone.

Use Pure Speech. “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). Learn how to communicate. A lack of communication causes many problems. Express yourself properly and well. Do not use filthy or profane language (Eph. 4:29). Profanity is scorned by all right-thinking people. In reality, it is a sign of stupidity. The tongue may be hard to control (Jas. 3:1-12) but it can be and must be controlled.

Behave Appropriately. “Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). This teaching is primarily aimed at youth since the apostle Paul told Timothy to conduct himself properly so that no one would “despise his youth.” Young people need to behave properly in the home by respecting parents (Eph. 6:1), in school by respecting the rules and teachers and in public by conforming to established rules. Those who are older need to set the example for the young and be consistent- not requiring of young people what they do not require of themselves.

Develop an Aim and Purpose. God created everything for a definite purpose. Being purposeful in living and having an aim in life does not mean that one should be stubborn when circumstances turn around. Having an open mind and being flexible with life’s challenges help us to be more in turn with the bigger purpose. “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ ” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Be Christ-like. An individual need not be a Christian to be Christ-like, and one needs to understand the character of Christ to understand that Christ did not bother himself with the tangible pleasures of the Earth and this resulted in His more purposeful and fruitful life. The character may be seen as more spiritual in these terms and it is hence not necessary that we separate the Christian religion from its spiritual

form. It can also imply that a person who seeks to develop their character needs to have a role-model and among the many like Nelson Mandela, Gandhiji, St Chavara, Mother Teresa, Christ is a good role-model to have.

You cannot dream yourself into a character;
You must hammer and forge yourself into one.