

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 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.”

➡ Our text says integrity **guides** a person. It directs and influences a man’s choices. His decisions are based on the integrity of his heart, not the crowd he is in or the circumstances he is in. Example: Joseph (Genesis 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.)

Everyone has a certain kind of personality (sometimes called “temperament”), but character is something that must be **acquired**. If you don’t add virtue (character), you won’t have it (2 Pet. 1:5).

➡ 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**.
- Character is **developed**—Personality is who we are **inherently**.
- Character may be **lost** or **regained**—Personality is never lost, but may become either tarnished or polished.

Chuck Swindoll said, “Reputation is what people think you are. Character is what you are regardless of what people think.”

- 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. Saul *“a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he...”* (1 Sam. 9:2).
- We have a lot of shinny 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.
 - ➔ I went to college at Midwestern in Pontiac, MI when Dr. Tom Malone was it’s founder and 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 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).
 - 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.
 - David’s son, **Absalom**, had personality, but lacked 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 someone's acceptance or approval (2 Pet. 2:3). Politicians are experts at this.
 - Polished people are agreeable and pleasant as they mingle with other like-minded people. Their personality changes when they're around people who disagree with them.
- D. Character does not change regardless of circumstances. Character does not succumb 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 men 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 wronged (e.g. Joseph). Instead a man of character will extend grace to those who have wronged him (Gen. 50:20-21; 2 Sam. 9).
- C. **Men of character are not perfect.** When they sin, they will own up to their sin, confess it, and repent (2 Sam. 12).
- Men of character, like David, will accept full responsibility for their foolish actions (1 Chron. 21:8).
 - However, **men of personality will seek to 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).