

Character Development

by Paul Meier, M.D.

1. Rather than your primary goal in life being to be married to a certain person, to have a certain job, to earn a certain amount of money, or to be the best piano player on the planet, make your primary goal character development--which is really learning to love and be loved like Jesus loved and was loved. Romans 8:29 says that "Whom God foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." God's goal for that person is to become more and more conformed (become more like) the character qualities of Christ, His Son. God still wanted emotional Peter to be emotional Peter, but a Christ-like emotional Peter. He still wanted a perfectionist named Paul to be a Christ-like Apostle Paul. He wants you to keep your basic personality and just make it better--more able to genuinely love and be loved.

2. Pray each day, when you first wake up that God will help you to experience some growth that day in developing Christ-like character. To develop character, God may need to send you some pretty rough times. And when things do go wrong, thank God for whatever went wrong because it will help you in your primary goal in life, which is to develop character. When the Apostle Paul, who had been Saul, dedicated his life to Jesus, God took Paul on missionary journeys that included being shipwrecked, being stoned almost to death a couple of times, going hungry some times, a split with his partner (Barnabas), and dying a martyr's death in prison.

3. If I was told to serve God and practice spiritual disciplines, like Bible reading, prayer, witnessing, etc., because I was SUPPOSED TO, I would never do it. I practice these disciplines because I WANT TO. I enjoy chatting with Jesus, and even arguing with Him at times. I love to understand people, understand God as much as possible, understand myself as much as possible, and to experience the awesome feeling of loving and being loved. Meditating on scripture daily makes this all happen. I don't recommend that you get legalistic on yourself and promise that you will read a certain number of chapters per week or anything. Be spontaneous. Be creative and vary it up.

4. Remember that you cannot work your way to Heaven, or earn God's acceptance. All of us had imperfect parents. When we were children and we said our "goodnight prayers," we were all subconsciously thinking, "Dear Heavenly Version of my Earthly Father..." Read Psalm 103 in which thirteen aspects of God's character are described and see how many of them you have trouble accepting as true deep down in your emotional gut. Resolve all the repressed anger you may hold toward your parents. The payoff for you personally will be a deeper relationship with the real God.

5. You need accountability; you cannot grow alone, and you cannot sit around and wait for God to grow you either. God wants teamwork. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." Paul did NOT say that he can do all things by himself. Neither did he say that Christ would do everything for Paul, with Paul just being a passive "vessel." Paul said he can DO all things with the help of Christ. The Bible also says over and over again, in both the Old and New Testaments, that God wants us to gather a support group, a "family," around us to help us grow. As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens the countenance of his friend. James said (James5:16) that we should confess our faults to each other so we can be healed physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I had the same prayer partner for thirty years, and we confessed sins to each other. When he died in 2003, I got another prayer partner. My character grows little by little when I know I have to tell all my secret thoughts and actions to somebody.

I recently bought groceries at a Tom Thumb Grocery Store, and when I walked to my car, I realized the clerk had accidentally given me \$20.00 too much in change. So I marched back in and returned it, and she looked astounded. But I ask you, what would you rather have, the \$20.00 or the good feeling that you are an honest person? Give me the character any time.

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