

Character Helps

To help encourage each other to practice good character monthly so that we, and all those whose lives we touch, may experience its valuable benefits.

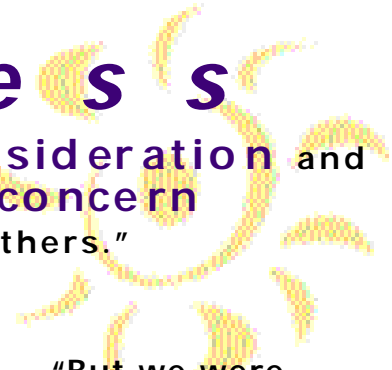
March 2002

Thoughts ⇨ Actions ⇨ Habits ⇨ Character ⇨ Destiny

Gentleness

A character quality is a usual pattern of thinking, speaking or acting - a habit. Good character qualities, like any habits, can be developed by making decisions and taking actions that reinforce those habits. Practicing the "I Wills" of a character quality help develop it as a habit.

"Showing consideration and personal concern for others."



I WILL . . .

Show good manners

Gentleness and manners go together. Through simple practices we can clearly and effectively demonstrate consideration and personal concern for others. For examples: Don't interrupt another but wait your turn to speak. Hold the door for others. Open doors for the elderly, and men open them for women. Arrive at meals and appointments on time. Wait for the hostess to start eating before you do. Remain at the dining table until all have finished eating. Offer the best seats and first choices to others. Thank people when they serve you and show you kindnesses. Greet others cheerfully. In these simple ways we honor and help others, model and encourage manners for others, bless the Lord, and grow in the practice and habit of gentleness.

Reject violence as a solution to my problems

Physically or verbally abusing or injuring another is not a Christlike pattern for solving problems. This pattern goes against the nature of God and His Spirit. Violence tends to be a reaction - a lack of self-control. Typically violence is not a solution, but rather, a

contributor to compounding the problem. Better, rather than responding in violence, count ten to give the surge in adrenaline time to pass and emotions to subside; then think through the problem and respond on the basis of reason. Avoid the damage of hurt feelings, broken spirits, fractured relationships and other negatives. Focus on God if you are prone to think or act in violence. Ask Him to help you count ten and control your responses. Ask Him to help you solve your problems. Ask Him to help you replace habits of violence with habits of gentleness. He is the Gentle Shepherd. He can and desires to lead you into peaceful pastures.

Look for ways to ease the pain of others

"...be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath." (James 1:19b.) There is great truth in these few words. A listening heart is the key to discerning the pain of another. We cannot understand or sympathize with someone who's hurting if we are not truly listening to his or her heart. Many times people hide behind a front when they are hurting. The front could be humor, silence

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**"But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."
1 Thessalonians 2:7**

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Character Council
of Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky

A publication of the Faith Committee of the Character Council of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. Reproduction and adaptation is encouraged.

or busyness. Gentleness is looking past these fronts and seeing the delicate spirit inside. People often ask, "Why does God allow suffering if He loves us so much?" Our minds can not comprehend all the works of the Lord, but He tells us that one reason He allows us to go through specific things is so that we can express gentleness to another who is hurting through similar circumstances. (2 Corinthians 1:4.) "I understand what you're going through." In other situations, gentleness may possibly be saying, "I truly do not understand what you are facing, but please know I am praying for you and I am here if you need me." What a comfort these words can bring. Let us ask the Lord to help us grow in discerning pain in others, and to show gentleness to them by treating them the way we would like to be treated. Even just one kind word or small kindness can ease another's pain and brighten their day. Let us ask the Lord to help us start today, and to become experts!

Not annoy or irritate others

Some things must be done that others may not appreciate. However, there are those things that can be left undone or eliminated. Gentleness is purposing to not annoy or irritate others. For examples: Don't belittle or make jokes about another. Don't tease about sensitive issues. Let them be by themselves or in a serene setting when they need peace and quiet. Don't impose on them loud conversation, music, TV or other intrusions when it disturbs them. Be especially

considerate and soft when they are hurting. Don't nag. Don't be late. Clean up after yourself and not leave the task to another. Don't wait for others to remind you to fulfill your responsibilities. Let us thank the Lord when others are gentle with us, and ask Him to help us be sensitive to others and purpose to not irritate or annoy others. Let us be a blessing to them, the Lord and ourselves as we commit today to practice and develop this habit further.

Be a peacemaker

Many times throughout our lives we will have opportunities to be a peacemaker - to help make and maintain harmony in personal relations among people. When we are children we can choose to avoid an argument with our siblings or friends. As we grow older, we can avert or quench a quarrel with or among our family, co-workers or friends. Peacemakers are very important. "*Blessed are the peacemakers*", says the Lord (Matthew 5:9). Especially important in light of eternity is the peacemaker who brings others to the Lord of Peace (2 Thessalonians 3:16) for reconciliation with Him. For He is able to free individuals from disquieting inner thoughts and emotions, and provide peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Commit to practicing and growing as a peacemaker. And be a blessing and be blessed. The outcome of your choice to be a peacemaker will be worth it.

G e n t l e n e s s i n N a t u r e

When we think of gentleness in nature we think of things that come naturally. It is natural for a mother to love and care for her young child. It is natural for a bluebird to care for its young. The Eastern Bluebird is amazing in that it feeds its hatchlings six to ten times in one hour. Because of this, the hatchlings are able to gain stability and independence in as little time as two weeks. Imagine what it would be like if we cared and nurtured our young after this pattern - spiritually. How often in the day do we speak of spiritual things to our children and encourage them in things of the Lord? To other children? To the next generation? To anyone of any age who are young in the Lord? In our caring and nurturing we are impacting not just this life but

also their life to come - that is, for ever and ever and ever! (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Let us be diligent like the Eastern Bluebird - for with our young it is also a matter of life and death!



G e n t l e n e s s



Gentleness

in History

Gentleness is taking a personal interest in the needs of others. It is getting actively involved in the welfare of another less fortunate. Roberto Clemente (1934-1972) is a noble example from recent times. Roberto grew up in Puerto Rico as the son of a sugarcane farmer. He experienced firsthand the lifestyles and difficulties of poverty. As a result of his experience he purposed to help those of his homeland living in poverty. When Roberto became a young adult he was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates to play baseball. Using the influence he gained in baseball he started 17 medical clinics for the Latin American people. And for years, during his off-season, he would return back to his native land to teach young boys at a baseball

camp he established. Then, being willing to get involved in the lives of his people, he was moved to gather food, clothing and medicine to take to the Nicaraguan people after the 1972 earthquake that took the life of 6,000 people. Roberto was so moved by the survivors' needs that he chose to personally take the relief supplies. Tragically, his plane crashed on the way to Nicaragua. Roberto showed the ultimate consideration and personal concern for others when he gave his life to meet their needs.

[Story adapted from *Achieving True Success*, International Association of Character Cities, Oklahoma City, OK, 2000]

Gentleness

in Daily Life

At Home

Gentleness in the home is very important because the home is the refuge from the storms of life, the battle of time and its pressures, and the place to get recharged and refocused. Gentleness seeks to provide each person "his or her space" free from infringement and intrusion, freedom from belittlement and teasing and nagging, freedom from harshness, sensitivity to pains. Are you helping to make your home a haven for everyone through your consideration and concern for the others? Are you a good example to the others of gentleness? Are you exhibiting this character quality of Jesus Christ, showing forth what His power in a life can do and encouraging trust in Him and thirst for Him? Purpose to create an attitude of gentleness and rest in your home. Ask the Lord now to help you practice and develop the habit of gentleness further, and to thereby be a blessing.

At Work

The workplace needs people who are gentle: supervisors, supervised, owners, suppliers, and customers. Everyone will benefit by those who are considerate and concerned for their associates - By individuals who show good manners.

Who reject violence and harshness as means of problem-solving. Who look for ways to ease the pain of others. Who do not annoy and irritate others. Who strive to make and maintain peace. Who realize that exhibiting gentleness does not demean one's authority or personhood, but rather enhances it, as it does for Jesus Christ the Creator, Sustainer and Savior who said of Himself he was gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29). Who through the practice of good character, bless their associates tangibly, demonstrate the power of God in their midst, give others vision of what they can experience and become, and encourage them by demonstrating they too can change and grow. Will you choose to practice gentleness and be a blessing at work? Ask the Lord to help you now to commit and to help you to practice and grow in gentleness.

At Church

This story takes place in a big church on a Sunday night. The attendance was high and the pastor had just stepped behind the podium to deliver the message. He was about ten minutes into the sermon when from the back of the church slowly walked a young man dressed in

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an old tattered shirt, pants that hadn't been washed for no telling how long, and a jacket that was useless in the freezing wet weather. It was clear to the observers that this man had never been in church before. The pastor tried to continue while ignoring this distraction, but it was plain to him that the eyes of his members were on the newcomer. Everyone watched as the man walked down the middle aisle and stopped at the very front. Then to everyone's surprise he slowly lowered himself and sat in the aisle. The tension was thick and no one knew what to do. Was this man crazy? Didn't he know what a distraction he was? Then suddenly the attention was drawn to the church's elderly deacon. He was slowly making his way down the aisle. Everyone felt a sense of relief knowing that the deacon would probably explain to this young man that he was being a distraction and that there were more seats in the back. So as the old man reached the young man, all eyes were glued on him to see what his response would be. To everyone's surprise the old man with great difficulty lowered himself beside the young man. The silence in the church was deafening. Then the pastor spoke.

"Brethren, you will forget what has been said here tonight, but you will never forget what you have seen."

In the Community

Gentleness in the community is showing consideration and concern for neighbors. It is welcoming new comers to the neighborhood and offering to help them get oriented. It is noticing that a neighbor hasn't been out to get his paper in two or three days, and checking in to see if they are in need of assistance. It is taking the initiative to ask neighbors about their family and other concerns. It is returning their garbage can back to its rightful place after pickup. It is not annoying them with early morning, late at night, or Sunday irritating noises. It is striving to be a peacemaker, especially to encouraging them into a close, personal relationship with the Lord of peace Himself. Everyone is busy. So ask the Lord to help you slow down and be attentive to the needs of others, and to help you respond in gentleness. Commit today to growing in the practice and habit of gentleness with your neighbors, and thereby to be a blessing.

Gentleness in the Heart

Gentleness is showing consideration and personal concern for others. It is keeping an eye out for, listening for, and recognizing the needs, weaknesses and limitations of others - regardless of their station in life. And it is responding softly with consideration and concern - with comfort, encouragement, assistance, uplifting, intercessory prayer and/or other loving means.

Gentleness, as pointed out in The Power for True Success*, is best evaluated not by the one giving it, but by the one receiving it: "*A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel*" (Proverbs 12:10)

Gentleness is a character quality of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3, Galatians 5:22-23).

Growing in Gentleness

Out of His love for us, the Lord desires and directs each of us Christians to grow in Christlike character. Growing in character qual-

ities is, for the Christian, a matter of the heart - the center of our thoughts, feelings and affections, and our will.** Growth for the Christian is a joint process with the Holy Spirit. As Christians we are commanded to grow and to take responsibility for our part in the process. At the same time, we are to ask the Holy Spirit for His power and assistance, and submit control of our life to Him, Who brings about the growth. (1 Timothy 4:7-8, 1 Peter 1:16, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 4:13.)

To grow in gentleness, the top and on-going priority for the Christian is to make sure in your relationship with the Lord, that there is nothing in your heart displeasing Him, and that you are totally submitted to the Holy Spirit's control of your life. This entails confession, asking the Holy Spirit to fill you, and on an on-going basis, maintaining this intimacy through "Spiritual Breathing".**

Then, focusing on gentleness, ask the Lord to
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Gentleness

help you:

- Reflect on, learn from, and be grateful to Him and others for the gentleness and comfort you have received.
- Be attentive to others, and discerning of their needs, limitations and weaknesses.
- Be patient and sacrificial in the giving of your time and resources to help.
- Be sensitive and wise with attitudes, words and helping deeds.
- Be faithful in prayer.

and ask the Lord to:

- Break down and remove from you old habits of insensitivity and harshness.
- Strengthen you with His great power and help you grow in gentleness.
- Remind you to thank Him when you experience victory and to breathe spiritually

"...ask someone to join you in the journey of practicing and growing in gentleness, encouraging one another and sharing the triumphs and challenges"

when you blow it.

Then take responsibility for your part. Make every effort to put off the old patterns of insensitivity and harshness, and put on new patterns of gentleness. Specifically, make every effort to practice daily the "I Wills" for gentleness. Use the simple "Opportunities- Success" (OS) process of self-accountability to help yourself to effectively practice and grow in these "I Wills". Ask someone to encourage you. Even better, ask someone to join you in the journey of practicing and growing in gentleness (and other character qualities), encouraging one another

and sharing the triumphs and challenges! ***

And finally, after appealing to the Lord for His help and doing everything you can do humanly, wait patiently on the Lord - keep steadfastly entrusted to Him to strengthen you (Isaiah 40:31) and deliver you (Psalm 34:19).

The Lord, Who knows all, counsels us that developing and practicing good character is important in every way both in this life and the life to come! (1 Timothy 4:7-8) And He offers to help us develop it! Let us give thanks to Him, and go forth gratefully, enthusiastically and expectantly with Him to intentionally practice and develop it!

*The Power for True Success: How to Build Character in Your Life, Institute in Basic Life Principles, Oak Brook, IL, 2001. Page 99.

**For further discussion of the heart and its importance, confession, being filled with the Holy Spirit and "spiritual breathing", See "in the heart" in Character Helps-Enthusiasm (March 2001). Free on website www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html under icon "49 Character Quality Resources", then "Enthusiasm".

*** For description of the OS process and discussion of various ideas for accountability, see "Encouraging The Practice of Monthly Character Qualities" and "A Field Study of The 'Opportunities-Success' Process", John F. Pierce, October 2001. Both available free on website www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html under icon "Faith Community Strategy", then "Encouraging Monthly Character Quality Practice".

What Benefits Does a Christian Create When Practicing the Monthly Character Quality?

Benefits To God:

Brings God **honor** by demonstrating to Him our love, trust, and obedience in trying to develop the character qualities of Jesus Christ as He directed us to do.

Brings God **pleasure** as Father in seeing us grow up into the likeness of His Son Jesus (Who was perfect humanity and His design for us) so that we can become and do all He created us to be and do, both in this life and the life to come.

Brings God **love** as we come into a more intimate, personal relationship with Jesus.

Benefits To Others:

Brings **benefits** to others as they personally experience directly the effects of the Christian's practice of good character, e.g. the energy of a smile, wholeheartedness in helping, keeping of promises, respect, truthfulness, etc.

Informs others by demonstrating what the character qualities and benefits look like in real life.

Encourages others by seeing a real person who believes in the importance of practicing good character, and by seeing that a real person can in fact develop and practice good character

Benefits To the Christian:

Brings **joy** in pleasing God, the highest priority of the Christian's life.

Promotes **intimacy** in the Christian's personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Contributes to the Christian's receiving love, strength, wisdom, other blessings from the Lord.

Helps the Christian **grow** in character qualities of Jesus Christ .

Develops **value** for the Christian both for this life and the life to come.

Enhances the Christian's self-acceptance, self-confidence and self-satisfaction.

Increases the Christian's productivity and accomplishments.

Improves the **relationships** of the Christian with other people.

Helps the Christian reach his or her full potential.

Brings **joy** to the Christian in pleasing and receiving affirmation of other people who are important to him or her, e.g. spouse, family, pastor, friends, co-wonders, group members, etc.

Brings **joy** to the Christian in helping to benefit spouse, family, and others.

Brings **joy** to the Christian in helping to build a better community, workplace, and world.

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Published monthly by the
Faith Committee of the
Character Council of
Greater Cincinnati and
Northern Kentucky

The Faith Committee gratefully
acknowledges the contributions
of editing and text by John
Pierce, text by Bob and Trisha
Hicks, design by Emily Steffens
and nature graphics by The
Character Training Institute



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