

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.

November 2001

Thoughts ⇨ Actions ⇨ Habits ⇨ Character ⇨ Destiny

Initiative

"Recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it."

I WILL...

Do what is right before being told

Initiative involves recognizing a need, responding to that need and seeing it through to its completion. Rather than wait to be told to do something, be alert to opportunities to demonstrate initiative and create its benefits. Many are blessed when you voluntarily step in to meet needs. Trainers and those in authority are greatly encouraged when those under their care assume a task without being told to do it. When reminders need to be continually rehearsed, energy is taken from the one reminding. Serving without being reminded or prompted gives energy to all involved.

Not put off until tomorrow the things I can do today

Each minute and resource I have is a gift from the Lord which He expects me to manage well for Him, and for which He will hold me accountable in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:10). Proper planning compliments the initiative I take in beginning a task, formulating the necessary steps, and implementing them according to plan. It helps me with priorities, not putting minor things first (Luke 9:59-62) which "puts off" the completion and benefits of more

valuable things. In addition, taking the initiative to do things today, rather than being lazy or idle (which the Lord classifies with those who destroy, by failing to do good), leaves me more free to accept new opportunities tomorrow.

Contribute to the success of the whole team

Being part of a team effort brings special rewards and personal satisfaction, if each team member takes initiative in areas for which he or she is responsible. Doing our part both contributes to the success of others and benefits us personally. In Old Testament times, King David demonstrated initiative as he engaged Goliath in battle (1 Samuel 17:45-51). As a young shepherd, David saw the need (kill this giant of the enemy Philistine army which no one else dares to try, so that Israel will not become their captive), took appropriate steps to accomplish his objective (selected the right stones for his sling) and saw it through to completion (hurled the lethal stone at the giant). Had he lacked initiative the outcome would have been decisively different. Because he showed initiative before and during the battle the entire nation of Israel benefited. Every generation since the time of David has benefited

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"Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully, and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as wise, making the very most of the time..."

Ephesians 5:15-16

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from his success. Our initiative may never be recorded in history, but doing our part to take initiative will bring benefits to the Lord, those we impact, and ourselves.

Be a part of the solution rather than the problem

Problems are a part of everyday life. We can often easily become a part of the problem, making it worse by our complaining, criticizing and not cooperating. On the other hand, we can be part of the solution, focusing on possible answers and not criticizing. As a military leader once said; "don't just bring your problems to me, but bring with them possible solutions." Sometimes life's challenges can tend to discourage us, but God is a very present help in time of trouble (Psalm46:1). Being a part of the solution might include joining another in prayer in taking the problem to the Lord for His help. Take initiative: be a part of the solution.

Look for ways to help others

Love is at the core of the Christian life: "love God and love your neighbor as yourself" are God's two great commandments and priorities for our life (Mark 12:29-31). Initiative prompts us to watch for opportunities to love and help others. As has been observed:" There are 'energy givers' and 'energy takers'. There are those who encourage and those who discourage. There are those who serve and those who want to be served. A person who takes initiative often gives, encourages and serves before others even realize there is a need, problem or opportunity."* Take initiative. In just seconds you can significantly encourage others through a smile or affirming word or kind deed. Initiative is being attentive to opportunities to show Christ's love through acts of kindness and love. And in the Lord's design, one reaps what one sows.

*Adapted from Character First!, Education Series 2, Booklet 3, published by the Character Training Institute.

I n i t i a t i v e i n N a t u r e

The whistling swan migrates in the spring to the northern Polar Regions. As they migrate these swans fly at 6,000 feet and 100 miles per hour, often for more than 8 hours without resting. This would not be possible without the initiative of the older swans. As they begin the journey the whistling swans are usually the first of all the migrating birds to take off. However, as they all take to the sky it appears they do not know which way to fly. As they circle they soon sense the direction "north" in their heads, and individually and without order fly to the north. Soon the oldest bird takes the initiative to fly to the front of the other birds. This pres-

ence blocks the wind and creates lift which eases the effort and assists the flight of the others. They all fall in behind the lead swan and form a "V" for lift and minimum air resistance. Because of the initiative of the older, more experienced whistling swan they are able to fly for hours without fatigue. In time the energy giver in the front becomes fatigued. As the lead swan becomes fatigued, another from behind takes initiative to come forward and takes its place as lead swan. In this way they are able to accomplish the migration in record time. The initiative of one benefits many.

I n i t i a t i v e

Initiative in History

We know George Washington Carver (1861-1943) as the parent-less slave boy freed during the Civil War who went on to invent over 300 products from the peanut. His life is a story of initiative. Challenged as a young boy to "learn all you can and then go out into the world and give your learning back to our people", George took the initiative to learn wherever he could - from the one room schoolhouse he attended as a pre-teen, from his nanny who he daily bombarded with questions as soon as he could complete his chores, from the customers in the barbershop where he later worked parttime, from one of his college teachers who invested her life to see that he had what he needed to learn, and from his patient, personal study and exploration of soils, plants, soil management, crop production and product development. To subsist and

pay for his learning, George worked at whatever work came to hand - general household worker, janitor, hotel cook, laundryman, barber, farm laborer and homesteader. Later, when he arrived at Tuskegee Institute, where for 47 years he would teach, do research and give back to his people and his country so outstandingly, George was ushered to his laboratory only to find it four empty walls. No equipment. Employing his initiative, he led his incoming students in searching the school's trash heap for old jars, bottles, pans, lamps, containers and other items from which they fashioned their microscopes, mini-burners, and other equipment. The life of George Washington Carver was one of initiative, and one whose initiative benefited his people, his country and the world.

Initiative in Daily Life

At Home

The quality of initiative can richly bless the home. Bless the others by seeing and meeting their needs before being asked; contribute to the success of the whole family; and be part of solutions rather than problems. Choose to use your "free" time (even seconds) fruitfully, rather than being lazy or idle. For example, clean up unfinished projects or clutter, get a start on future commitments or good works, or do good for someone. As the Psalmist declares, there is life in the power of the tongue (Psalm 18:21), so take the initiative often to speak words of affirmation and encouragement to family members; the few seconds can have significant impact. Be an initiator! Be an example and a blessing to every one in the home. And in the process you will benefit your family members, others through them, the Lord, and yourself.

At Work

Initiative is purposeful activity initiated freely by choice without the directive of others. The workplace will be greatly enriched by people of

initiative. By people - Who recognize what needs to be done in their job and do it before being told or exhorted! Who plan their time and do the most important things first! Who do not idle away time unproductively but use such moments to do good for someone or clean up old tasks or do something to benefit the team or organization! Who take initiative to build up others through affirmation, encouragement, helping to bear their burdens, and energizing them in other ways! Who purpose to be part of the solution to problems! People of initiative can benefit many in the workplace. Will you be such a person?

At Church

Initiative is purposeful activity initiated freely by choice. It is most valued when it is coupled with responsibility and produces good fruit. This typically involves four phases. First, we must recognize the need to be addressed. Second, we must take responsibility for addressing the need unless it obviously belongs to another. Third, we must determine a solution for how to meet the need. Finally, we must

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carry the project to completion. If each of us will decide to take initiative to move or to act upon a situation as the Lord prompts us, our churches will be much more productive for the Kingdom of God. Will you decide to take more initiative? It can create benefits both in this life and the life to come.

In the Community

How many times have we driven through the countryside and, seeing something laying in the road, have said "someone needs to stop and pick that up before it causes a wreck!" Today we tend to leave it for county and city workers

having responsibility for our roads. But in times past a person would stop to pick up something that could be a hazard to fellow citizens - a time when people looked after the concerns of each other whether they knew one another or not - a time when people had initiative. Let us commit to being people of initiative - people who recognize and do what needs to be done, and who look for ways to help others. And let us help bring back the times of such blessings to our community, the Lord and ourselves. The next time you are prompted with an idea about what another person "could" do, take initiative to consider what you can do.

Initiative in the Heart

Initiative is purposeful activity initiated freely by choice without the command or directive of others. It is self-initiated activity. This activity may take the form of thinking, such as imagining, creating, formulating, or planning. Or, it may take the form of acting, such as communicating or doing. Or, it may entail both. Initiative is most valued when it produces good fruit: it is directed toward meeting one or more needs; it is committed to thinking and/or doing to help meet need(s); it determines steps planned to attain the need(s); and it carries out those steps. Edison, for example, saw the need for the electric light bulb, and personally carried out each of these aspects to ultimately create a working product. In other valued cases, the initiative of the individual may entail only a part of the overall initiative. For example, one person might imagine and create a solution for meeting the need, and then responsibly enlist other people more qualified for carrying out the plan, e.g. an architect developing the plans for an orphanage and turning it over to a contractor to build. And in some cases, despite the deep commitment, careful planning and strenuous actions, the initiative falls short of meeting the need. Edison experienced many failures in his individual initiatives to develop a reliable light bulb. (He learned important things from these failures which were themselves valuable, but this doesn't alter for our discussion the fact the particular initiative did not result in meeting the need.) So initiative may envision and carry out all aspects of meeting a need, or only a part; and it may result in meeting the desired goal

or it may not. But in any case it is initiative if it is purposeful activity initiated freely by choice without the command or directive of others.

Initiative is a matter which includes choosing to use my "free" or "discretionary" time (even seconds) fruitfully, as for example, cleaning up unfinished projects or clutter, getting a start on my future commitments or good works, doing good for someone. (Significant encouragement can be imparted to others in just seconds!) It is choosing to use free moments fruitfully rather than being lazy, slack or idle (unoccupied or unemployed). In the Lord's eyes, the idle is in the same category as one who destroys, failing to do good! (Proverbs 18:19) According to the Bible, each moment of my life is a gift from God (Colossians 1:15-16). He entrusts each of these moments to me to manage for Him for His purposes - to act as His steward. He expects me to manage them well (Matthew 25:15-29; Luke 12:41-48), and will hold me accountable. In heaven He will judge my earthly stewardship as a Christian (2 Corinthians 5:10); the reward or loss will contribute to a more or less enriched experience for me in heaven [although we are not told in what way].

Initiative is a matter which will on occasion entail freely initiating thoughts and actions "to do good to all people as I have opportunity" (Galatians 6:10), as for example loving and building up others through affirmation, encouragement, help in bearing their burdens and energizing them in other

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ways. On other occasions initiative may entail putting aside less important discretionary matters and zealously initiating action on good works the Lord has for me to do (Romans 12:11, Ephesians 2:8-9).

Initiative and The Heart

Initiative is, at its core, a composite of stewardship of time and resources, love for God and others, and zeal for good works. Although "initiative" itself does not appear in original English translations of the Bible, all of its components do. Indeed their composite, initiative, is an important character quality of Jesus Christ. For this reason developing and practicing initiative is important for Christians (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Initiative is, at its core, also a matter of the heart. It is therefore very important for the Christian. As discussed in [Character Helps-Enthusiasm](#), the heart is the innermost center of our life: the center of our thoughts, feelings, affections, motives, will, moral life and conscience. "Little wonder that the Lord looks beyond the outer appearances to our heart (1 Samuel 16:7): it is the center of our life! The question is what does He find? Thoughts, motivations, words, actions and aspirations pleasing to Him? A heart motivated by ardent affection for Him? A heart submitted to making Him #1 in life? A heart of love for Him that brings Him pleasure? Or a heart that is displeasing to Him? A sinful heart - the heart of a person who is thereby grieving God and quenching His Spirit (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thes-salonians 5:19), whose intimate relationship with God is blocked and is not experiencing His love and power (Isaiah 59:1-3), and whose efforts in life (e.g. building good character) may not have eternal value (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)? Clearly the proper Christian motivation for building good character is love for God with one's whole heart - a love to which God in turn responds with love and power. This loving relationship can be restored at any time through ... " confession and "spiritual breathing". (See [Character Helps-Enthusiasm](#) for further discussion.)

Recognizing that initiative concerns the matter of how we choose to spend or invest our "free" moments, we recognize that our thoughts and actions can please or displease God. They will please Him when they are in keeping with His

specific directives for us in His Word, eg. "do not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14), or when they are in keeping with His general truths, e.g. "love your neighbor" (Mark 12:31). They will displease Him when spent at variance with these, such as with wrong goals, motives, thoughts, actions, stewardship of resources - or in idleness and laziness. He loves us, has a wonderful plan for our life (Jeremiah 29:31), wants us to experience life abundantly (John 10:10), and wants us to experience the joys of being a blessing to Him, others and ourselves! The keys lie in maintaining an intimate relationship with Him and obeying His Word.

Therefore, let's commit our lives to pleasing Him and asking Him to help us. Let's:

1. Search our hearts for anything displeasing to Him; ask His forgiveness; re-commit our life to Him as Lord of our life; and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us and take control of our life. (See [Character Helps- Enthusiasm](#).)
2. Ask Him to help us hear His voice when He speaks to us to alert us to an opportunity for initiative.
3. Ask Him to help us overcome inertia and idleness in our life, and empower us to take initiative when appropriate.
4. Ask Him to help us hide His Word in our heart so we will grow in our understanding of both His general truths and specific guidelines in order to better live lives pleasing to Him.
5. Ask Him to help us put off old habits of idleness and poor stewardship, and grow in habits of Godly initiative - including exercising good stewardship of our time, doing good for people as we have opportunity, loving Him, and being zealous for good works.

"Look carefully then how you walk! Live purpose - fully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless do, but as wise (sensible, intelligent) people, making the very most of the time (buying up each opportunity)...." (Ephesians 5:15-16, Amplified Bible)

I n i t i a t i v e

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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Intimacy