

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.

September 2001

Thoughts ⇨ Actions ⇨ Habits ⇨ Character ⇨ Destiny

Responsibility

"Knowing and doing what God and others are expecting of me"

I WILL...

Keep my promises

We take a risk when we make a promise. The Bible teaches we are to let our yes be yes, and our no, no. If we do make a promise we need to be prepared to fulfill it. Keeping promises will protect both our reputation and the Lord's. If a promise to a person is broken, relationships will be damaged - both with the person and the Lord. We need to ask forgiveness, and to do so promptly before bad feelings deepen and side effects spread. When promises are broken trust is broken. In some instances it will not be possible to restore trust. In others, trust can be regained but many promises may need to be kept for the one promise broken. "Let love and faithfulness never leave you...Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man." (Proverbs 3:3-4) Purpose to keep the promises you make.

Not make excuses

Personal responsibility will cause us not to make excuses for our faults. Making excuses is blaming others or circumstances for our failure to fulfill our responsibility. Courage and humility are required to accept the responsibility for our actions and failures. Failures brought to our attention can lead to growth, strength and success. Ask God to help you grow in His character quality of responsibility, and to give you courage, humility and wisdom to deal with and

grow from failures. He loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. (Jeremiah 29:11). God uses all things for our instruction. He is faithful to instruct and train us through the circumstances of our daily lives. Do not be discouraged when it seems everything is going wrong. Handling the discouragements in a Godly way allows God to make successes from the things the world would call failures.

Do my work to the best of my ability

"For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and our lives laid bare - before Him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body." (2 Corinthians 5:10) Everything done will be judged by God. Also, the things we do not do, or do half-heartedly, will be made evident as well. Realizing we have this significant, personal appointment with Christ in the future that will impact our eternity, let us bring great accountability to our work now. Have we done our best? Are there things you would do differently if given the second chance? Opportunities come continually. Let's do our best for the Lord and enable He and others to benefit from our faithfulness.

Make things right when I do wrong

"Love your neighbor as yourself", commands the Lord (Mark 12:31) - actively
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"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."
Romans 14:12

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desire and delight in the well-being of your neighbor, without personal reward as your motive. When through my actions and inactions I detract from another person's well-being, I do wrong - whether physically, economically, emotionally, socially, intellectually or spiritually. When I do wrong, the Lord tells me I'm to go make restitution to the person, and ask the person's forgiveness for my wrong.* (Matthew 5:24) After that, the Lord tells me to confess my wrong to Him and ask His forgiveness, and He will then forgive me, restoring the intimate love relationship between He and I. (1 John 1:9) This is the way, in His infinite wisdom and love for us, the Lord has designed our relationships with others and Himself to function for maximal blessing. Failing to make restitution and asking forgiveness is sin, with its many consequences. Following His steps helps me grow personally in humility, courage, responsibility and other character qualities of the Lord; it also blesses the others, and blesses God. In our day, we need to be careful to not be de-sensitized or compromised in following His steps. In today's society nothing is wrong and no one is wrong. Society can justify all ills away, including sin. Saying, "I am sorry" may be polite, show consideration, and elicit some respect. But it is ambiguous and falls short in taking clear ownership for the wrong, as the Lord directs us. Let's be on guard, use God's plan to make right when we are wrong, and be a blessing to the wronged, God, others and ourselves.

[Just as we are to confess and seek forgiveness of those we wrong, we are commanded to forgive* those who wrong us -"seventy times seventy" times or as many times as wrongs occur - with the

caution that if we don't forgive them the Lord will not forgive us. (Matthew 6:14-15; 18: 21-2,35) Confession and forgiveness are important components of Christlike responsibility. Let's strive to practice and develop them as normal interpersonal habits.]

* See "In the Heart", [Character Helps - Benevolence](#) for discussion of the nature and process of forgiveness.

Know my duty and do my duty

When we think of duty we must think first of our duty toward God. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandment: for this is the whole duty of man."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13) We may say, "I do not know what God wants me to do!" As it has been so well put: "It is not what I do not know about what God wants me to do, but that which I do know He wants me to do, that concerns me." How true. He wants very much for us to know our duties because He loves us, and as we keep His commandments He is able to direct us in the abundant life He wants us to enjoy with Him. (John 14:21, 10:10) He has given us these directives in His Holy Word, and it is our responsibility to learn about them. The same is true of life in general. We can search out our responsibilities as an employee, a citizen, and family member. It is our responsibility to know what they are. In some instances it will be another's responsibility to inform us, but we should not wait to be told. Initiative must complement responsibility. Our responsibilities are our responsibility. Let us accomplish them with diligence and bring blessing to the Lord, others and ourselves.

R e s p o n s i b i l i t y i n N a t u r e

Bald eagles are remarkable birds. With wingspans approaching 85 inches, and bodies weighing less than 14 pounds because of their hollow bones, these powerful birds can ascend to altitudes of 10,000 feet in minutes. And with eyesight seeing sharply for a mile or more, they can dive for fish and prey at speeds of 100 miles per hour. Bald eagles are also remarkable for their responsibility, as demonstrated especially in the care for their family and commitment to their mate. To test each other's responsibility before committing, a male and female will ascend high into the sky, where the male will let a stick fall from its mouth. If the female swoops down and catches the stick before it hits the ground, she passes the test of responsibility. She then conducts the same test of the male. If he proves successful, they then commit to each

other for life. In selecting a place to build their nest, they responsibly choose a site in between two branches of a tall pine tree. This provides an energy-saving launch pad for future flights. They then set out to build their nest. The male diligently gathers several thousand sticks and brings them to the nest where the female carries out the construction. Each year they add new grass and sticks to cover the old, eventually creating a nest up to twenty feet deep and up to nine and one-half feet in diameter. This huge array of sticks and other materials often provide shelter for other smaller birds, as well. During incubation and care for the young, the parents carefully divide the responsibilities, the female protecting the eggs and the young, and the male diligently providing a constant supply of fish. When the appetites of the

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young exceeds the males ability to keep them all fed, the female shifts responsibilities to help fetch fish. When it comes time for the young to learn to fly, the parent very responsibly teaches by flying a short distance ahead. Air currents rushing over the parent's wings help to "carry" the young as they develop their own flying skills. Responsibility benefits both those who are responsible and those whom their influence touches. Because the eagle take responsibility to keep its surroundings clean and operative, the nest becomes more effective and also provides protection and provision for those under their wings. As the young eaglets observe their parent's serious attentiveness to their

responsibilities, they are instructed in how in the future to care for their nest, their young, and their mate. In the same way, let us choose to be models of responsibility for others to follow.



R e s p o n s i b i l i t y i n H i s t o r y

Horace B. Claflin was a New York businessman spanning the Civil War era*. All the schooling he ever received was only that of the common school and academy of his native town. But he was very observant, and learned more by observation than he did from books. As a result he was constantly advancing higher in his responsibilities. His unblemished character added charm and power to his executive abilities.

With his executive abilities, charm and character he eventually established a business that amounted to seventy-two million dollars in a single year, and for twenty years before his death averaged a magnitude of traffic greater than that of any other warehouse in the world! By his own indomitable perseverance and application he developed ability enough to readily manage this enormous business.

But most noteworthy, he was a man of character and responsibility. He never broke a promise! From boyhood to manhood he redeemed every pledge! The embarrassments of the late war

(Civil War) forced him to ask his creditors for an extension; and long before the extension terminated he paid every dollar with interest. Again, the panic of 1873 embarrassed him, but he came out of it with every promise fulfilled. And he stood by his convictions with character, too! Before the Civil War, when his Southern patrons withdrew their large patronage because of his avowed hostility to slavery, he met the test grandly with character: "My goods, and not my principles, are for sale."



Something as simple as a promise!! "A promise is a solemn pledge, in which personal character is involved, whether relating to important or unimportant matters. Of course it should be kept. Integrity of character demands it. A successful career is impossible without it. True manhood and womanhood require it."*

(* Excerpt and quote [pg 290] taken from, *Gaining Favor with God and Man*)

R e s p o n s i b i l i t y i n D a i l y L i f e

At Home

Responsibility - keeping promises, not making excuses, doing our best, knowing and doing our duties. Responsibility is very important in the home. When everyone understands their responsibilities and is accepting their personal role of responsibility, there can be trust, harmony and peace among family members, and order, efficiency and effectiveness in family affairs. Without responsibility there can be chaos, heartache and

dysfunction. In developing responsibility in the home, there is no magic potion or words you can say, no easy steps to success in the area of responsibility. Each person, from the oldest to the youngest, must personally decide to be responsible, and to get started. The older with the greater authority have the greater responsibilities, and must realize the importance of their role and influence in the family. Dads, moms, big sister or brother, recognize who you are in this order of the

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home and your influence. Recognize you have eyes that watch everything you do. Are you modeling a good example of responsibility? Are you exhibiting this character quality of Jesus Christ, setting forth His power in the home and encouraging trust in Him and thirst for Him? Begin today. Be the pattern others can follow to achieve order, harmony, peace and effectiveness in their life and homes, and to place their trust in the Lord.

At Work

Imagine your work environment as one in which everyone is responsible - keeps their word, doesn't make excuses for their failures, performs their work to the best of their ability, makes things right when they do wrong, knows their duties and does them. What a vision! What a blessed place it would be! And just one person can instigate this "social revolution": modeling responsibility through their personal conduct, heightening its awareness through table folders on their desk and more "public" attention-getters like posters if permitted, personal invitations to co-workers to join together in practicing and encouraging each other, and other means. Will you be this person? Imagine the impact that even a beginning can make - admitting a failure, not making an excuse, asking forgiveness of the persons negatively impacted by your failure, making things right! What a direct blessing this would be to each party affected! What a thought-provoking [and hopefully thirst-creating] witness this would be to everyone of this inhuman-like behavior in our day! What a do-able example to follow! And what pleasure you bring to the Lord by committing to humble yourself, and to practice and encourage His personal character quality of responsibility! And what blessing you will receive from the Lord as He encourages and builds you in the process! The benefits are beyond measure! Will you be the catalyst to start the "revolution"? Will you take a first step now!

In the Church

When we think of responsibilities in the church we tend to think first of tasks and roles. In Matthew 12:36 the Lord reminds us of a more foundational responsibility: *"But I tell you, on the day of judgment men will have to give account for every idle word [empty words of no meaning] they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and*

by your words you will be condemned." How does this apply to us today? As we enter into our private devotions or come to join our congregation in worship, for example, what is our attitude? As we sing songs of worship such as those containing words as "I surrender all," or "I have decided to follow Jesus," or "I will serve thee," what is the attitude of our heart behind the words? Do we mean what we sing or are they merely, "idle words?" Maybe we say, "Oh, those are just songs." God said we will give account for every word. He does not differentiate between how we express them. God will hold us accountable for all of our words, thoughts, motives, attitudes and actions. What are our motives when we enter our private devotions? To please and love God? What are our motives when we enter the doors of our place of worship? To glorify God and minister to others? This is our responsibility before God. Do we want to see God move in our churches today? Let us do our part. Let us be responsible for the attitude of our heart every day - in our private devotions, in our congregational worship, and in our every moment. The Lord will bless our attitude of responsibility.

In the Community

It is true as citizens we have our "rights." With every "right" comes responsibility. The quality of life and fruitfulness of our community is directly related to the personal responsibility of our citizens. Let us each take steps today to begin reviewing and practicing personal responsibility in each casual relationship and each formal role in our community. Let me start taking steps to be careful to keep each promise, do my best in each thing I do, make things right when I've wronged somebody, and stop making excuses. Let me begin taking personal responsibility for my every thought, word, action, attitude, and motive. And when we have opportunity, let us encourage others to do these same things. In this generation of, "it's another's fault", this practice and encouragement of personal responsibility can bring blessings and hope inexperienced by many before. This practice can, in fact, result in blessings both in this life and the life to come. Be responsible. The dividends can be out of this world

Responsibility

R e s p o n s i b i l i t y i n t h e H e a r t

Responsibility is fulfilling the promises or commitments for which we are accountable. Besides the concept of reliability, responsibility includes the matter of knowing the commitments for which we are accountable, and matters relating to our making of the promises or commitments in the first place. Our being responsible is important because of the significant effects it can have on God, others, and ourselves. For the Christian, it is also important because at its core, responsibility is a matter of the heart.*

Aspects of Responsibility

- 1) **COMMITMENT.** Our everyday word, says Jesus, is to be trusted as a commitment. Furthermore, to our everyday word, He says, do not add any oath to back up the truth of your word, such as "I swear by God" or "This is the honest truth, so help me God". This is a scheme of Satan. Because in adding an oath to one statement we are implying there are other everyday statements that are not reliable and cannot be trusted. This is not to be so. *"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No'; anything beyond this [as an oath] comes from the evil one"* (Matthew 5:37). All of our speech is to be trustworthy; we are to be people of our word. *"...let your yes [in word] be yes [in deed], and your no [in word] be no [in deed]..."* (James 5:12). In the Lord's eyes, our "Yes" or "No" constitutes a promise that we have a responsibility to fulfill.
- 2) **HUMILITY.** As we consider and enter into commitments regarding the future, the Lord cautions us not to be boastful, which is evil, for we do not know about or control the future. We are to always keep in mind our life and times are totally in His hands. Rather He says, *"... you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.'"* (James 4:13-16). We are to keep in mind our total dependence on Him, and in humility before Him, to proceed to carry out our commitments - the Lord willing.
- 3) **TRUTHFULNESS.** Our words and actions are to communicate truth; we are not to mislead or deceive in any way. Our "Yes" is in truth to mean we are committed to it being "Yes", and not to mean "No", or "Maybe". God tells us clearly that in His eyes a lying tongue hates its victims, and He Himself hates lying! (Proverbs 6:17, 12:22, 26:28)
- 4) **FAITHFULNESS.** It is important to the Lord that, like Himself, we be worthy of trust - of His trust and the trust of people. To be trustworthy we must be people of our word who faithfully and selflessly carry out our word. *"Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man"* (Proverbs 3:3-4).
- 5) **RESPONSE-ABILITY.** Do we believe we have the ability to carry out this promise - the time, authority, skills, and other resources? Responsibility requires that, before committing, we make this assessment wisely, perhaps with assistance from the Lord and others. Our trustworthiness is not to be compromised by our failing to fulfill our commitments due to our inadequate or poor planning.
- 6) **AWARENESS.** Each of these aspects of responsibility apply to each commitment of a Christian. Clearly our commitments include every promise we make explicitly. But they also include those we make implicitly. Implicit commitments include, for example, those we make by not countering the suggestions of others (e.g. if a friend tells you he will meet you at noon at the car, and you do not refute him, you have implicitly promised to meet him at noon at the car). Implicit promises also include those embodied as a part of a more overarching commitment. For example, when we commit to being an employee, we implicitly and concurrently commit to all commitments of an honorable employee - arriving at work on time, giving a full-days work for a full-days pay, being a good steward of the employers name and resources, etc. Similarly, when we marry, birth a child, become a citizen of a community, and make other overarching commitments, we become responsible for carrying out the implied obligations that accompany each overarching commitment. Most significant for Christians, when we commit to Jesus Christ as our Lord, we are promising implicitly to try to comply with His directives, as Lord. This means we must try to become knowledgeable of His directives for us - the things we ought and ought not do - so that in fact we will be responsible in carrying them out. Being a person of our word imposes on us

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the challenge of being aware of each obligation we are committed to, and fulfilling it.

- 7) **IMPORTANCE.** Our being responsible is important because of the significant effects it can have on God, others and ourselves - both in this life and the life to come. For example:

Our being responsible brings pleasure to God in a variety of ways: as individuals honoring Him through our obedience and promoting intimacy in our fellowship; as His human representatives exhibiting to others His trustworthiness and responsibility, and demonstrating His power which they can have in their life; as obedient and trustworthy servants and ministers who He can lead and through whom He can bless people, build His Kingdom and accomplish His purposes.

Our being responsible benefits people in a variety of ways: it affirms and encourages them through the ways we deal with them lovingly; it enables them to peaceably and effectively carry out their affairs which depend on our promises; it encourages them, by our example, to be responsible; and it demonstrates to them and others the power of God in human lives which they can have in their life.

And our being responsible blesses us abundantly: we experience the joy in pleasing Him; we experience the joy in seeing Him accomplish His purposes in and through us; we experience the joy in being a blessing to those with whom we make and keep promises; and we grow in responsibility and trustworthiness. Like all character qualities, as we practice keeping our promises, we grow in the habit of responsibility, and as we do so, our responsibility and trustworthiness become more habitual and predictable. As the Lord and others see our habit of responsibility in lesser things they will entrust us with larger things, which gives us the opportunity to further serve and contribute to the building of the Lord's eternal Kingdom.

The effects of our being responsible (or irresponsible!) can be very significant!

Responsibility and The Heart

Responsibility is, at its core, a matter of the heart. At the center is the fact that Jesus says I am to be a person my word; in my everyday life my word is to be trusted as a promise. Therefore, my word is to come from a truthful heart, a heart that is pure and loving with no intention to deceive or mislead anyone. It is to come from a selfless heart, a heart faithfully and lovingly committed to fulfilling my promise - above inconvenient changes in circumstances or selfish desires to do otherwise - the Lord willing. It is to come from a humble and wise heart, a heart that sincerely tries to not make unloving commitments it does not have the ability to fulfill. It is to come from a heart that tries to address each of its commitments.

Responsibility is, at its core, a matter of the heart - of a heart whose top desire is to please Jesus Christ, to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him, and to experience the abundant life He longs to share - of a heart of trustworthiness in keeping its word, truthfulness, purity, love for Him and neighbor, selflessness, humility and wisdom. Will you join me:

[Protestant] Ask the Lord to search me for anything displeasing to Him; confess and forsake everything displeasing He reveals; and ask Him to help me faithfully practice the habit of responsibility, beginning in my heart.

[Roman Catholic] Ask the Lord to help me in making a thorough and daily examination of conscience; reveal anything displeasing to Him; take these burdens to Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, seeking His presence and His grace to help me faithfully practice the habit of responsibility. His grace will be especially helpful to my heart in being responsible for Him and His will.

* The heart is the innermost center of our life: the center of our thoughts, feelings, affections, will, moral life, and conscience. The Lord looks upon the heart. The heart is therefore very important for the Christian. (For further discussion, see "In the heart" in [Character Helps - Enthusiasm](#) (March 2001).

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