

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.

May 2002

Thoughts ⇨ Actions ⇨ Habits ⇨ Character ⇨ Destiny

Tolerance

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.

I WILL...

Not confuse what is right with what is popular

Have you ever heard the old cliché, "what is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right"? Often Christians must choose the direction that's right, even though the majority might disagree. Joshua had to make such a stand. He had trusted and obeyed God in leading the ancient Israelites into the Promised Land, and God had given victory over every one of the 31 kings encountered in the conquest. Now he had to stand before the Israelites: "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord ..." This was not popular, as inferred from Joshua suggesting it might even appear "evil" to those of that day. He continues, "...choose this day whom you will serve ..." Here he is referring to the choice between other gods and the one true God, the God Almighty. Joshua makes his stand for right rather than the popular: "...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua knew that in following God everything had come true as God had promised. (Joshua 24:15, 21:45.) Fortunately, the people likewise made the right decision to follow the one True and Almighty God. Peer pressure can be very powerful, but we are reminded that "... the word of our God shall stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8b) because He and it are true and right, and of His prom-

ise: "keep my commandments, and live" (Proverbs 4:4). Right decisions lead to right directions which lead to right destinations. Who will you choose this day to serve?

Expect the same of myself as I expect of others

"And above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Our first thought may be to apply this "I will" to the work ethic, which is appropriate and important. But as Christians it is helpful to continue on and relate this principle to our assessment of our brothers or sisters in Christ. The goal and "measuring stick" for all of us is to be like Jesus Christ and God's Word. In assessing others our purpose should be to consider how we can love them, bare their weaknesses and irritations, and help them grow in Christlikeness. Holding firmly the "measuring stick" will help us assess another realistically and fairly. It can be easy to hold the standard and goal high as we assess our brother, but sometimes not as high for ourselves. The standard and goal for everyone is the same. When we assess another or expect something of another, it is wise to first ask ourselves the question, "where am I on the scale of God's measurement in this area?" Showing kindness? Gentleness? *continued on next page*

"Realizing that everyone is at varying levels of character development"



"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful."

1 Corinthians 13:4

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Character Council
of Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky

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Punctuality? Generosity? Not gossiping? Having private devotions daily? Knowledge of the Bible? Obedience to the Lord? We must recognize and make allowances for the fact we are all at varying stages of maturity in Christlikeness. This assessment of others can become a major blessing to them in enabling us to love them and encourage them more effectively. But it can also become a major blessing in our own life by prompting us to take personal inventory and then motivating us to recommit to doing our best in practicing and growing in the same areas. This application to ourselves will help us to not unfairly or unlovingly expect more of them than of ourselves. The benefits of assessing others can be very significant - both for them and for us - both for this life and the life to come! Will you choose to be such a benefit? Purpose to abandon tendencies to criticize and judge, and instead, to assess for the purpose of blessing others and yourself.

Look for ways to help others mature

The goal for everyone is Christlikeness in our beliefs, decisions, behavior and values; for Christlikeness is humanity at its best (Genesis 1:27, Colossians 1:15). And for the Christian, training in Christlikeness is very valuable not only in this life but also in the life to come (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Helping others mature is therefore a very significant way to love them. Begin by purposing to be a good model for others, exhibiting and growing in His beliefs, behavior, and character qualities. Purpose to love them and forgive them and accept them and encourage them as persons, even while desiring change in their beliefs and behavior. Purpose to teach and correct kindly (not contending and fighting) in the hope God will cause them to change and come to knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Purpose to pray for their growth and for your wisdom in knowing how best to help them. And in light of the extreme importance of growing in Christlikeness, may your vision be to say with the Apostle Paul, "*For this [presenting everyone mature in Christ] I toil, striving with all the energy which He mightily inspires within me*" (Colossians 1:29)."

Accept my own unchangeables and the unchangeables of others

Each of us has things we cannot change: parents, siblings, sex, nationality, skin color, mental capacity, time we live in history, and many other things. Learning to accept our unchangeables is vital to our Christian health, walk and maturity. When we don't accept the things we cannot change we foster a spirit of discontent and ungratefulness. And this spirit causes our life to shrivel up and projects

onto others. It is in effect saying to God, our Creator, "You made a mistake." But this is His world. He created it and everything in it just as he wanted (Genesis 1, Ephesians 1:11). And He does not make mistakes; He is perfect. Very gratefully, He is also loving, all-knowing and all-powerful (1 John 4:8, Proverbs 15:3, Matthew 19:26). He created each of us with our unchangeables, and knowing all, He says He has a plan for each of us that is wonderful (Jeremiah 29:11). To be upset with God is to not understand, and it is to grieve Him and inhibit the flow of His love in our life (Ephesians 4:30, Isaiah 59:1-3). The remedy to His grief and our suboptimal state is to ask His forgiveness for our ungratefulness and mistrust, thank Him for knowing best, and then turn attention to praising and thanking Him for the many things we have to be grateful for. With this viewpoint, forgiveness, and gratitude, purpose to practice tolerance with unchangeables of others: bear the irritations, and when appropriate, gently share the truths that have brought you a new spirit of contentment, gratefulness, and tolerance. You will be a blessing to many.

Listen before I form an opinion

"*He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame.*" (Proverbs 18:13) Realizing the goals are Christlikeness in beliefs and behavior, and love for one another, listening should play a critical role in my life. First, listening is an essential part of accurate communication. The word "opinion" means evaluation, estimation or judgment. How can I possibly form a valid opinion of another person's ideas or beliefs without listening carefully to them? Careful listening will help me form opinions that are valid regarding the ideas and beliefs of another. Valid understanding of ideas and beliefs is important; if Christlike, they may be truths the Lord wants me to hear, and if not Christlike, they may be things the Lord wishes me to gently address with the other person for their growth. Second, my listening is an important aspect of loving and encouraging the other person(s). My listening demonstrates love to them: they are a person of worth and what they have to say is important, even if it differs from my view. My listening may also lovingly help the other person clarify their own thoughts by the very process of verbalizing them - clarification important to both of us. So purpose to listen carefully to others - both as an act of loving them and also as the means of forming valid opinions of their ideas and beliefs in the event the Lord desires me to change mine or gently encourage them to change. God knows all the facts about us and yet is so patient to love and to listen. Let us do the same for one another.

Tolerance

Tolerance in Nature

The Eastern Box Turtle illustrates tolerance in a most vivid way. Because of its soft meat, the box turtle is the perfect prey for a curious raccoon. Unable to fight, the turtle must retreat to the security of its protective shell. As it is tossed and turned by the raccoon while holding its covering shut, the turtle must remain patiently tolerant. It must patiently accept its own "unchangeables" and accept the irritations of another.

How about us? Are we as accepting of our unchangeables and the environment we face in life? What if the box turtle refused to yield to its "unchangeables" and inadequacies and tried to face its predator? The outcome would be disastrous. Just as the turtle gains security and peace and life by remembering its inadequacies, we need to remember with a humble spirit that we are inadequate without Christ. God in His infinite knowledge, wisdom and love has created us with our unchangeables, has plans to bless us

(Jeremiah 29:11), and has designed us to find our security, peace, and an abundant life in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. (John 3:16, 10:10; Hebrews 13:5). When faced with unchangeables and irritations let us too be tolerant. Let us remember with thanksgiving we are who we are only by the grace of a mighty and saving God, and let us turn in personal relationship to Jesus Christ for security, peace and abundance of life.



Tolerance in History

In approximately 1320 B.C. Moses was called by God to lead the oppressed Jewish people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. They had been captive there for 400 years. God promised them a land of their own, the Promised Land. Because of their disbelief and disobedience against God, the 3 million people spent not just a few days but 40 years in the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land.

The complaining against Moses about the hardships of the journey was endless: he had led them out of Egypt only to die; there was no water to drink; the water was bitter; there was no food; his leadership was questionable; and on and on.

For 40 years Moses tolerated their immaturity, their fears and lack of trust, yet encouraged them to press on. With his trust in God, Moses continually encouraged them to trust and obey God. Thanks to his leadership and tolerance, the nation of Israel eventually reached the Promised Land with all its blessings.

[Reproduced from [The Tolerant Moses](#) by Marilyn Hepp. See website www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html under icon "49 Character Quality Resources", then "Tolerance", then "1-Minute Testimonials."]

Tolerance

Tolerance in Daily Life

At Home

Since children are at varying stages of maturing in Christlikeness, a parent needs tolerance. Children are not as adult as much as we'd like to think. They have to learn. While growing, children need tolerance that will give them space to make mistakes without harsh judgments. Giving young people space to make decisions in small things will help equip them for more difficult decisions. As much as we hope and pray for the success of our children, they will still make mistakes along with their successes. What happens when they do make mistakes? Home is a place that children stretch their "wings". Even the eagle protects its young from falling as it flies beneath the young eaglet until it is able to maintain its flight. Tolerance - looking for ways to help them mature - will encourage each of us to come alongside the young to encourage them "when" they fail and lift them up "when" they fall. But just as children need tolerance and need to mature in Christlikeness, so do all family members. So purpose to practice and grow in tolerance: keep demonstrating love to each family member, even if disagreeing or irritated by their ideas or behavior; model Christlikeness; encourage the others when they exhibit it; listen carefully; gently point out truths of Christlikeness; and most importantly, pray - pray that you will have love, wisdom and patience with each family member, and pray that you and all will grow in Christlikeness.

At Work

The workplace needs people of tolerance. Managers, owners, employees, customers, suppliers, family members will all benefit greatly by people: Who respect the right of others to their beliefs and practices! Who bear and put up with beliefs, practices and persons not liked! Who delight and desire to see others come to see, adopt and adhere to Truth (the beliefs, character and conduct of Jesus Christ)! Who cling to what's right and true regardless of social pressure? Who accept the unchangeables of others and the frustrations they create! Who listen carefully and lovingly to others before forming opinions! Who willingly help others grow in their workplace skills, knowledge and network! Who take the time and initiative to lovingly encourage others - even "opponents"! Who demonstrate the power of God

working in a life in the midst of the rough and tumble of the workplace! Who give vision and hope to others as to what their life can be like! Christians exhibiting tolerance in the workplace can benefit many! Will you choose to expand your practice of tolerance at work?

At Church

Tolerance is central to the Church's mission of helping members grow in personal intimacy with Jesus Christ, grow in love and good deeds, and grow in Christlike character and conduct (John 17:3, Ephesians 4:11-13; Hebrews 10:24). Often a church has a large array of believers at varying levels of maturity. Consequently there will be many manifestations of beliefs, words and actions that are not yet Christlike - providing members many opportunities to practice tolerance. Practicing tolerance is significant because the church is a living organism whose every member is a part who effects the other parts and because the church is intended to be a loving, unified exhibit (for which tolerance is an absolute essential!) before a needy and watching world from which they are entitled to conclude whether or not Jesus Christ and Christianity are true! (Ephesian 4:1-16, John 17:21.) Tolerance is a composite of self-control and love. With self-control we are to control our emotional reactions to irritations, insults and errors; think through foreign ideas to discern whether the Lord is trying to correct us or prompt us to gently correct them; remain resolute regarding Christ's truths; and bear up under the impact and burden of differing ideas and practices. With love we are to treat each person as highly valued in God's sight; keep in mind the goal is to correct the ideas, values and behavior into Christlikeness and not to condemn the person, i.e. love the sinner while hating the sin; forgive them for hurts and ask their forgiveness when appropriate; and model Christlikeness for them. (See section on Tolerance in the Heart). Let us commit to growing in tolerance, and thereby to being a blessing to the Lord, others, and ourselves - it can have far-reaching consequences.

In the Community

Tolerance in the community is respecting the right of everyone to their beliefs and (lawful) behavior, without necessarily agreeing with or sharing

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Tolerance

them, and bearing and putting up with beliefs, practices and people not liked. And for us Christians, it also implies loving them in wanting God's best for them - His beliefs, truths and practices. Practicing tolerance today can be very demanding! For example, it can take great self-control to control our emotional reactions to people living together outside of marriage, committing adultery, practicing homosexuality, getting abortions, denying the existence of God, rejecting absolutes, lying, cheating, and on and on - because we know these are offensive to the Lord and destroying the practitioners (Proverbs 1:20-33)! It can be very demanding to listen keenly to grasp the deceiving arguments and tactics of homosexuals, abortionists, and those misleadingly using the term "tolerance" to mean accepting everyone's

beliefs as equally valid (i.e. there are no absolutes)! And then it can be very demanding to respond to them in love: exhibiting God's acceptance of them as people for whom He deeply desires their best, without in any way compromising God's standards; loving the sinner while hating the sin; not returning insult or evil but truly pitying and praying for them; and modeling Christlikeness and showing them kindness in the hope they will come to knowledge of the truth. The outcomes of your practicing tolerance can be very significant - for them, for those whose lives they are impacting, for the community at large, for the Lord, and for you! Commit to expanding your practice of tolerance in the community today; your impact can be significant.

T o l e r a n c e i n t h e H e a r t

Tolerance derives from Latin, meaning to endure, put up with, bear. It means to recognize and respect the right of others to their beliefs and practices, without necessarily agreeing with or sharing them, and to bear or put up with beliefs, practices and persons not liked. For the Christian it implies, in addition, to desire and delight in others coming to see, adopt and adhere to God's intended beliefs and practices. Since persons with differing beliefs and practices are part of everyday life, we have plenty of opportunities to develop and demonstrate tolerance - friends, relatives and others holding different beliefs and practices about the existence of God, the authority of the Bible, absolute truth, cohabitation outside of marriage, homosexuality, abortion, use of profanity, lying and cheating, keeping one's word and carrying out one's responsibilities, respect for authority, greed, selfishness, harshness, courtesy - and on and on.

[It is very important to recognize that young people today are being taught a dramatically different definition of "tolerance". Rather than "to recognize and respect the right of others to their beliefs and practices, without necessarily agreeing with or sharing them", the new definition of tolerance is "to accept every individual's beliefs and practices as equal". All beliefs, all values, all lifestyles, all truth - are equal. All truth is relative to the individual. There are no absolutes - no right and wrong. To say something is right or wrong is not being tolerant. For this reason, those advancing this new definition are very intolerant of

Christians (and Orthodox Jews) because we proclaim a belief in absolute truth. This new definition of tolerance is becoming America's top virtue.

-- For original and further discussion see [Character Journal No. 21](http://www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html), January 2001. Free on website www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html under icon "49 Character Quality Resources", then "Tolerance" and "Children and Family Resources".]

The Importance of Tolerance

Before turning to tolerance, it is important to remind ourselves that the goal for the Christian is Christlikeness. That is, for the Christian, the greatest commandment and highest priority of life is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength", and the second is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29-31). The key way we demonstrate our love to Him is by obeying Him (John 14:21). And one directive He gives us is to "... Train yourself in godliness (Christlike character and conduct) ... [which] is of value in every way ... for the present life and also the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). As we grow in Christlikeness we bless Him: we honor Him with our obedience, and we bring Him joy in growing up into the likeness of Jesus which was His original design for perfect humanity (Genesis 1:27, Colossians 1:15). And as we grow closer to Christlikeness (humanity at its best!) we experience more closely all He intends for us to be and do; and we bless God, others and ourselves more extensively for eternity! The

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character qualities, conduct and beliefs of Jesus Christ are therefore the standards and the goals for the Christian!

Tolerance is, at its core, a composite of self-control and benevolence (agape love).

While "tolerance" itself does not appear in original English translations of the Bible, both self-control and love do. Both are character qualities of Jesus Christ (Galatians 5:22-23). For this reason, practicing and developing tolerance - self-control and love - is very important for the Christian!

Self-control should be central to the life of the Christian. Christlike self-control is keeping the self controlled in accord with the character, conduct and beliefs of Jesus Christ: the mind and its thoughts, the will and its decisions, the emotions and its feelings, the body and its behavior, and the conscience and its values.* Self-control can clearly be central when differing ideas, values, and behavior of others impact upon you:

- ♦ controlling your immediate reactions when anger is aroused, to count to 10 or 20 to restrain immediate words and actions to allow the surge of adrenaline to subside and the body to return to a state where rationality can prevail.
- ♦ controlling you to rationally search out the causes of your anger and decide if they are righteous indignation or simply a personal inconvenience or offense to personal pride.
- ♦ controlling you to evaluate ideas, values and behavior that differ in case the Lord is trying to correct or add to your present ones.
- ♦ controlling you to address blind spots and institute changes in your ideas, values and/or behavior based on your reflections and prayer, when appropriate.
- ♦ controlling you to remain resolute in your convictions and commitment to the character, conduct, beliefs and truths of Jesus Christ.
- ♦ controlling you to bear up under impact or burden of differing ideas, values and behavior, and to try to do so joyfully, keeping in mind that the Lord loves you

and is using this for your good (James 1:2, Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:28-29).

- ♦ controlling you in your analysis, prayers and decision concerning if to respond to the differing individual(s), and if so, how do to so lovingly.

Love (agape), the other component of tolerance, is also crucially important. Agape love is selflessly and actively desiring for and delighting in the well-being of the loved one, without personal reward as the motive.** Along with other ways of loving, Christians are motivated to encourage every person to grow in Christlike character, conduct and beliefs - regardless of the person's religious beliefs or state. It is a matter of "*loving our neighbor*" (Mark 12:31) and "*as we have opportunity, doing good to all men*" (Galatians 6:10), because in growing in Christlikeness every person will be blessed in becoming closer to humanity at its best. (Ideally, in the process, every individual will ultimately come into a vibrant, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This will result not from the attainment of good character, conduct or beliefs, however, but from faith in Jesus Christ; good character, conduct and beliefs can not earn or attain a relationship with Him, but they can enhance an existing relationship with Him (Romans 3:23, 6:23; Revelation 3:20; John 1:12; Ephesians 2: 8-9)).

Love is central in responding to people with differing ideas, values and behavior. For the Christian it is seeking ways to help people with varying levels of knowledge, wisdom and maturity to grow. It is:

- ♦ keeping in mind that each person is highly valued by God individually and you are to look upon and treat each person as valued (Galatians 6:10) - enemies; the immature; the unbeliever; those who have hurt you through disrespect, selfishness, anger, hypocrisy, laziness and various ways; and others.
- ♦ keeping in mind that the goal is to correct the ideas, value or behavior (in keeping with those of the Lord), not to condemn the person(s); it is to "hate the sin but love the sinner".
- ♦ never returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but truly pitying, loving and praying

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for them (1 Peter 3:9).

- ♦ not being quarrelsome - fighting and contending - but kindly correcting with courtesy and gentleness, in the hope God may grant that they change and come to knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:24-25).
- ♦ forgiving them for hurts and offenses.
- ♦ asking forgiveness if you have hurt or offended them.
- ♦ modeling Christian love for them to see and experience so they will conclude that you are a follower of Jesus Christ (John 13:15).
- ♦ modeling Christlikeness, so you can invite them to follow you as you follow the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Toerance and The Heart

Tolerance - self-control and love - is, at its core, a matter of the heart. It is a matter of acknowledging that my top priority is to love the Lord with my whole self: my mind, my emotions, my will, my behavior and my conscience. It is a matter of pleasing Him, obeying Him, praising Him, thanking Him, growing in His likeness, modeling Him, serving Him and loving others. It is a matter of acknowledging that when confronted with differing ideas, values and behaviors, I am to humbly and resolutely control my self in accord with the character, conduct and beliefs of Jesus Christ; and I am to love those differing with me as He would love them and to purpose to bring them into a personal, maturing relationship with Him. As we conclude, let us each:

- ♦ ask the Lord to search my heart for anything displeasing Him.
- ♦ confess and forsake everything displeasing He reveals.
- ♦ ask the Lord to fill me with His holy Spirit.***
- ♦ meditate on aspects of self-confidence and love itemized above, and ask the Lord to empower me to practice and grow in the character quality of tolerance.
- ♦ commit myself to implementing these aspects of tolerance.

 * For further discussion of self-control, see "in the heart" in Character Helps- Self-Control (December 2001). Free on website www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html under icon "49 Character Quality Resources", then "Self-Control".

** For further discussion of agape love, see "in the heart" in Character Helps- Benevolence (June 2001). Free on website www.charactercincinnati.org/faith.html under icon "49 Character Quality Resources", then "Benevolence".

*** 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".

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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3805 Edwards Road, Suite 200 Rookwood Tower Cincinnati, OH 45209
Phone: (513)751-6789 Fax: (513)379-2121 www.charactercincinnati.org

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