

Availability

Character... It starts with me!

MONTHLY FAITH BUILDER BULLETIN

JANUARY 2012

Vs. Self-Centeredness

I WILL:

- put others ahead of myself
- find a way to help, not a way to hide
- be ready when I'm called
- be glad for the chance to serve
- check with the right person before I make commitments

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Simplifying our daily needs so we are ready and able to serve those whom God brings to us

The definition of Availability refers to “those I serve”. To understand Availability, you must first understand who you serve. We obviously serve those in authority over us but don't we also serve our peers? Good leaders serve those they lead. So being available means being ready to help others wherever we are and to do so cheerfully.

If you look at the opposite quality of self-centeredness you can better understand Availability by thinking of it as “other-centeredness”.

When a faith community works together to maintain the building and grounds and to fulfill all of the ministry roles they accomplish something that they could not do alone. The active members are available to the active ministry of the faith community.

This month, look for ways to be available to the “others” in your family, faith or community.

"Pray as if everything depended on God
Act as if everything depended on you."
Ferdinand Isserman



“For the person of faith, practicing good character is a matter of loving God, self, and others.”

John Pierce, founding member of the Character Council

Availability in the Bible

The boat was empty and available, so when the Master came, it was used to teach multitudes how to find life.

Matthew 13:2

Put them in a mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.

Titus 3:3

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 16:24

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.

Matthew 6:24

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'

Isaiah 6:8

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 15:12

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'

Luke 10:27

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 4:29

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 4:19-21

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Philippians 2:3

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

James 3:16

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 18:14



Samuel, Model of Availability

Samuel was just a young lad when God called to him. Samuel had been sleeping in the temple when he heard someone call his name. He got up and went to his mentor, Eli, whom he thought had called to him. Eli responded that he hadn't called him and sent him back to bed. Once again he heard his name being called so he went to Eli again. This time, Eli realized that it was God calling Samuel so he told him that if he heard it again to answer the Lord. So Samuel went back to sleep. When he was called a third time, he replied as Eli suggested by

saying "Speak, for your servant is listening." God then told Samuel what he was going to do to those who had blasphemed.

By answering God's call, Samuel made himself available to be God's servant. He was available to do God's work during his whole life. One of the key's to answering God's call is listening. Samuel constantly put himself in "listening mode" so that he could hear what God wanted him to do.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all revere Samuel as a prophet/judge or wise

leader of Israel.

For more information on Samuel visit:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel>

<http://www.searchgodsword.org/enc/cbc/view.cgi?number=T46>

Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

1 Samuel 3:10

Teaching About Samuel

Begin by reading the story in the Bible where Hannah chooses for her son to be raised by priests of the temple so that he can rise to greatness. After the story, give each member of the group a ball of clay or modeling compound. Explain that your choice of friends helps to mold you into the kind of person you will become much like we can mold this clay. What happens if you hang around rough and mean people? Demonstrate the answer by being rough with the clay and flattening it. Ask the group to do the same. Ask what kind of person you become. Then mold the clay back into a ball. What happens if you hang around people who don't really care about anything. Do nothing to the ball. Ask the group how easy it is to become a better person around those types of people. Now Samuel hung around intelligent, spiritual people - people who prayed to God and talked to God but most importantly listened to God. While you are describing these people, begin to shape your clay into a bowl. These people lived their lives being open to the Word of God. Now instruct them to shape their clay into a bowl. If you used clay that will harden if left out in the air, let them take home their bowl as a reminder to make room in their lives for God.



Movie Credits



Pick a recent movie that would be popular for the ages within your group. Ask them who made the movie. You will most likely get back names of actors. For younger participants, you may want to start with the next question. Besides the actors, ask them who else works on a movie. You get answers like director, producer, music, costumes, etc. Ask them to recall how long it takes for the credits to roll at the end of the movie. If you have the ability to show a video/DVD then show just the credits to reinforce just how many people it takes to make the movie. You may want to freeze frame on some of the more unusual roles. Point out that everyone needed to be available to do their job for the movie to be a success. Not all of them can be the stars. Compare making a movie to running your church or school. Have them create a list of credits for the organization, identifying all of the people and groups it takes to run successfully.

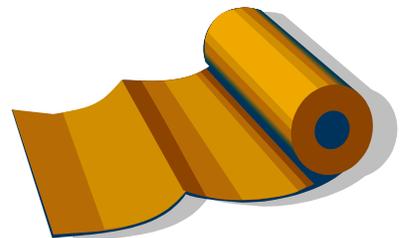
Tubing

This exercise requires cardboard tubing such as empty wrapping paper or paper towel rolls. If there isn't time to get enough for one for each participant, then they can each make one out of a sheet of construction paper or cardstock. The paper can just be rolled and held on both ends or taped into place. Divide the participants into two teams and line them up, shoulder to shoulder, into 2 lines. Based on the number of participants and size of your space you may need to adjust the number of teams. You will need a marble or small ball for each team that are identical. The object of the game is let the marble roll through the tubes from one end of the line to the other. The first team to get their marble to the end, without dropping it, wins. A dropped marble needs to be started over at the beginning. To make it more complicated, when each team member finishes passing the marble to the next person, they have to run to the end of the line and be ready to catch it again. You may need a long hallway or gym. This takes more skill with smaller teams and short tubes as you have to slow down the marble so that each one has time to get to the end of the line. When the game is over, discuss the teamwork and cooperation required to accomplish the goal. If the next person wasn't available to catch the ball, it gets dropped. We each need to be available to help each other whenever they need it.



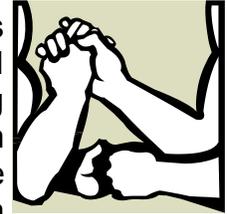
Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Philippians 2:3



Arm Wrestling

Pair up your participants and set them up to do arm wrestling. The game is scored as follows: each person gets a point when their partner's hand touches the desk. Each pair will combine their scores for competing against the other teams. Give the instructions quickly and do not give them too much time to think about the scoring. Give them 2 minutes to wrestle and start the clock. In most cases, the students will think of this game in terms of the standard competitive arm wrestling and will resist their partner. If they think about the scoring, it makes more sense to not resist and let your arms go back and forth and allow both partners to score as many points as possible. Each group varies and sometimes they will catch on quickly and some groups will have to be told about it. When it is over, discuss the mindset of competition that set them up to resist their partner. A competitive attitude is a self-centered attitude.



For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

James 3:16



Walk a Mile in My Shoes

Start this exercise with a discussion of what it means to Walk A Mile in My Shoes. After there has been some discussion on the topic introduce the concept of empathy - the ability to recognize and share in the feelings of someone else. In order to “cure” self-centeredness and practice availability we have to be able to first recognize the feelings and needs of another person. Create some “feelings” cards. (There are some websites below with free flashcards.) You can make cards with pictures of people expressing feelings or cards with the words on them and the students have to demonstrate them for each other to guess what they are portraying. For older students you could also play it like Pictionary where the students have to draw pictures that express emotions for the others to guess. One of the links below is a bingo game using emotions.

<http://www.mes-english.com/flashcards/feelings.php>

<http://www.toolsforeducators.com/feelings.php>

<http://www.bingocardcreator.com/bingo-cards/human-behavior/feelings>

For Grades 9 - 12: The Nemours Foundation has created a resource for Teaching Empathy. See

www.kidshealth.org/classroom/9to12/personal/growing/empathy.pdf



A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Proverbs 15:18

“When We Stand Together”

“When We Stand Together” is a song by Canadian rock band, Nickelback. (If you saw the half-time show at the Detroit Lions game on Thanksgiving, you heard them perform this song.) This song is about helping each other and working together. The song’s lyrics point out issues that are easy to overlook. Being available means we open our eyes and see the problems we need to fix.

Use the song as a background for a PowerPoint presentation that the participants contribute pictures to illustrate the lyrics. They can be pictures they cut out of a magazine or newspaper and scan into the computer, pictures they find on the internet or photos they take. You can do this as a group project or let a small group do it and show it to the whole group. If you have an older group, you may want to divide into groups and let each group do a PowerPoint, a music video or any other way they want to illustrate the song.



Everybody, Somebody, Nobody and Anybody

Once upon a time, there were four friends; Their names were Everybody, Somebody, Nobody and Anybody.

Whenever there was an important job to be done, Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.

When Nobody did it, Everybody got angry because it was Everybody's job.

Everybody thought that Somebody would do it, but Nobody realized that Nobody would do it.

So consequently Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done in the first place.



The Breath of God

For this exercise you will need a balloon. (If anyone is allergic to latex you will need to use a mylar balloon.) Begin by asking the group about the creation story. Have them tell you all they know about either account of creation in Genesis. If someone mentions that God blew into the nostrils of man, then blow up part of the balloon. If no one mentions it then read the following scripture quote and then blow up the balloon partially:

“The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” Genesis 2:7

Explain that we are each like a balloon that holds God’s breath and that we are each called upon to serve each other. Being available means being ready to serve. Give an example of keeping your needs simple such as not playing every sport at school or not being on every committee. Blow into the balloon for each example you give. Explain that the balloon is only partially filled and that we need to do those things that make us ready and able to serve. Ask the group for ideas of how to prepare to serve others. For each suggestion, blow into the balloon. Be sure to solicit suggestions of prayer, worship services, and Bible reading. When the balloon is full, then have the group give some suggestions of ways to serve others. For each suggestion, let a little air out but then blow some back in right away. If anyone questions why you do this, it’s because service to others gives joy to the giver. If no one questions what you are doing then at the end of the list, ask the group why they think you took air out and put some back in. Leave the group with the thought that whenever they see a full balloon that they should remember that they contain the breath of God within themselves.



Team~Building Activity

Building a culture of good character requires keeping the community spirit alive. Here is this month’s teambuilding activity:

Personalized License “PL8TS” (Plates)

Provide each participant with drawing paper and crayons or markers. Have them create a license plate that describes them. You will find a city or county name at the top of the plate. Encourage them to make up a name that adds to the description of themselves. The bottom of the plate can contain a motto. This can be something they make up or a famous saying that applies to them. They can also use a short Bible quote. The main part of the plate is the number itself. They can use the texting abbreviations and/or common plate abbreviations. (You can find some common abbreviations at www.baac.net/michael/plates.) Give them a max number of letters that can be on their plate. (The number varies by state but 8 characters/spaces is a good target.) When they are finished, allow them to share their license plate design with the others. A license plate is a form of identity. As Christians, we believe that our identity is rooted in God, “he has called us each by name”. (Is 43: 1)





For the Family

We are studying the character quality of **Availability**: Simplifying our daily needs so we are ready and able to serve those whom God brings to us. The opposite of Availability is Self-Centeredness.

To practice Availability I will:

- put others ahead of myself
- find a way to help, not a way to hide
- be ready when I'm called
- be glad for the chance to serve
- check with the right person before I make commitments

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Family Activity:

This activity will demonstrate the family members need to work together and look out for the family. You will need a yard stick or something similar. Have all of the family members sit in a circle with the yard stick in the middle. You will also need string cut for each family member. The length of the string is determined by how much is needed to tie around the yardstick and reach each family member. Instruct each family member to tie their string around the stick just above the mid-point. Once all of the strings are tied, lay the stick in the middle of the circle. Everyone's string should be in front of them. Ask the oldest child if he can raise the stick to a standing position by pulling on his string. Obviously, it can't be done. Now ask another member to help. This works better but it will still be wobbly. Now have the remaining family members pull on their strings. By all pulling together (even a family of three) you can raise the stick. What happens if one person isn't pulling enough or too hard? When someone doesn't pull their weight or acts selfishly, it impacts the rest of family. In a family, being available means being ready to help each other whether it is a household task or a personal one. Ask each family member to identify something they can do to benefit the family. Take the discussion to the next level and describe what it means to be available to the community for service. As Christians, we need to be available to serve our neighbors and spread the message of the Kingdom through our good works and good will. The family setting is where we first learn and become comfortable with being available for service.

Other ways to teach character in the home:

- Display the poster in a prominent place such as on the refrigerator or let each child decorate the character quality and definition for their bedroom door.
- At the dinner table ask if anyone noticed anyone (not just family members) demonstrating the character quality (or not demonstrating it).
- Point out news stories where character was or was not involved.
- Review the "I wills" and see if there are specific actions you can add to this list.
- During car trips, challenge the kids by describing scenarios and having them identify if it describes being the quality or being the opposite.
- Praise with character by recognizing the character quality involved rather than the achievement.
- Use the prayer for the quality as a family or when tucking the children into bed.

Character
Education
Opportunities

In January



Here is a list of days in January that could present opportunities for faith building

- 1 Global Family Day, Greek Orthodox St. Basil's Day, Catholic Solemnity of Mary
- 2 National Motivation and Inspiration Day
- 5 10th of Tevet
- 6 Ehipany, Twelfth Night, Three Kings Day
- 8 Baptism of Jesus
- 16 Religious Freedom Day, Martin Luther King Day, World Religion Day
- 23 Chinese New Year
- 27 International Holocaust Remembrance Day



Weeks to Celebrate

- 1 Celebration of Life Week
- 9 National Vocation Awareness Week
- 18 Week of Christian Unity
- 23 No Name Calling Week
- 29 Catholic Schools Week



New Year's Resolution Activity

Think of New Year's as a clean slate. Start by writing a list of the good habits, accomplished goals and accomplishments and also include the bad habits, missed opportunities and mistakes you had during the previous year. In another color, write "Forgiven" next to the bad items and "Thanks" next to the good items. Next have them circle 1 or 2 of the bad items that they want to correct for next year. On a another sheet of paper have them draw a sketch of themselves achieving the goal of making that correction. This does not need to be a work of art. Stick figures are just fine. Encourage them to post this someplace they will see it through the year.

**May your New Year
be Full of Blessings!**

Availability

Simplifying our daily needs
so we are ready and able to serve
those whom God brings to us



“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15:12

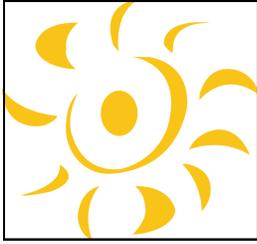
**Who has God asked you to
serve?**

Prayer for Availability

Dear Jesus,

We praise you for your goodness and mercy and thank you for the example of availability in your life. You were available to the disciples, the poor, the sick and dying, the sinners and the saints. Help us to put others ahead of ourselves as you did. Teach us to find ways to help others rather than ways to hide from service and to be ready when we are called upon to help. Remind us that service should be rendered joyfully and guide us as we make commitments so that we can follow through on what we promise.

Amen.



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Character...It Starts With Me!

Character in the Classroom *Continuously*

There are many ways that you can teach the Character Quality of Month. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Ask students to make posters to hang in the classroom or around the school.
- Challenge students to find quotes, news stories, current (or classic) songs or movies that portray the character quality of the month. Be sure to share these with the class and “archive” these to use in future years.
- Add the character trait of the month to the spelling word list. (Even if it is posted in the classroom to copy!)
- Offer for students to make a video or write a rap that demonstrates the Character Quality of the Month.
- If you teach younger students, see if you can “borrow” some older students to lead your students in an activity or switch the roles and have the younger students “teach” a rhyme to the older students.
- If you teach older students, you can be the initiator in the previous activities.
- Invite local business leaders or small business owners to talk about the importance of a character trait. If you teach older students, aim to get a representative from a business that typically hires teens so that they can relate the importance of good character when applying for and *keeping* a job.
- Men and women in uniform usually make impressive guest speakers. Police departments, fire departments and military recruiting offices are usually willing to come into a classroom. Do not be afraid to give them specific requests or guidelines for speaking so that it is pertinent to the lessons of the month.
- Always have a generic character activity planned and ready to go that you can use as filler when you have time to kill or that a substitute teacher can use in your absence.