

“WISDOM FOR HAVING GOOD CHARACTER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs 10:9; 11:3, 20; 20:11; 22:1; 28:6

Introduction.

We all know people who are characters. Some of them might be six, others sixty. We know people who stand out, light up a room, live bigger than life, and are the life of the party. They can be super fun and super annoying.

And we know people who have good character, those who are stable, trustworthy, have integrity, are a pillar in their family, church or community. People we look up to.

How about you? Are you more of a character or more of a person of character? If you were a character in a novel, what kind of character would you be in that novel? What would others say about you?

The truth is you are a character in a novel, in an autobiography. You are the character in your story that is being written every day. And your character is not static, you are changing, growing, maturing, being transformed, increasingly becoming a person of some kind of character. What does it look like?

Do you want to be a good character in your story? Living committed to doing what is right, being faithful, not just living for yourself, living wisely and well in your daily moments.

Personality vs. Character.

In order to talk about character let's reflect for a moment on the difference between personality and character. What traits define personality and what traits define character?

Your personality is outward, it is what we most readily see, your natural temperament, your communication style, your sense of humor, whether you are introverted, shy, quiet, or extroverted, talkative, outgoing. Personality is often what people notice and how they describe us. Personality is not inherently holy or sinful. There is no moral judgement on being shy or outgoing.

Character is deeper, it is the internal moral and spiritual core and orientation of the heart. Character is what governs a person's choices. Character is who we are when no one is looking, who we are in the dark. Character can be good or bad, sinful or Godly.

Personality could be described as the “mask we wear for the world to see.” A person’s character is what we are beneath our personality mask. Character is deeply ingrained, that shapes us. Not something we just put on or take off.

Your character is the person you are when you pull off the disguises.

Character is described by dozens of words, many found in Proverbs. In our texts we read integrity, uprightness, blamelessness. To that we can add honesty, kindness, faithfulness, humility, courage, self-control, and the fruit of the Spirit.

“As the excellence of gold is its purity and the excellence of art is its beauty, so the excellence of people is in their character” (A.W.Tozer).

Our culture has gone through a transition in the last 100 years. In the past our culture upheld the value of character, upholding and honoring men and women of virtue, integrity, faithfulness, people who were honest, courageous, pure of heart.

Think about the character qualities that defined the greatest generation, who came through the Great Depression and two World Wars and were shaped and molded by self-sacrifice, hard work, selflessness, humility, modesty, service, resilience.

Today the emphasis is on personality, wit, charisma, image is everything. We want image, marketing, style, what is attractive gets attention. The people we hold up to the spotlight are a mile wide and an inch deep. Where are the men and women of deep Godly, moral character?

How do we form Christian character?

We know from Proverbs 20:11 it begins very early, even little children show their character and present parents with the constant challenge of shaping and forming character.

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether what he does is pure and right.

So how is our character molded and shaped? Where do we go to get good character?
How can sinners actually become people of good character?

The book of Proverbs has more to say on the formation of character than any other book. Solomon’s wisdom for building character fills the book of Proverbs. It is universally relevant and immensely practical wisdom.

Let’s summarize the wisdom for forming character under three statements.

You become who you are.

You become what you love, what you desire, want.

You become what you do, the choices you make.

You become who you are.

Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

Character begins with the heart, and the heart of character is the fear of God. A person of good character centers their life around God rather than themselves. Character begins vertically before it becomes horizontal.

Character is the work of God transforming us by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts to conform us to the image and likeness of Jesus. The heart of Christian character is conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

We don’t become people of good character by our willpower, by trying harder.

II Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

You can’t change unless you are in Christ. You can’t become like Christ unless you are united to Christ. Christ has redeemed us to be like Him. It is by His grace that we are made like Him in character.

Titus 2:11–12 The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

You can’t think about changing who you are until you think about who you want to become like. You become who you are.

Saint Augustine was saved as a young man around 30 years old, from a life of immorality and sin. One day he met an old lover in the marketplace. She tried to get his attention, to attract him. But to no avail. She finally said, “But Augustine, it is I!” He replied, “Yes, but it is not I.”

You become what you love, what you desire, want.

Are your desires crooked or straight, high or low, selfish or selfless? What is in your heart?

Proverbs 27:19 As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart.

We are what we want, what we desire.

Union with Christ, is our new identity. Devotion to Christ, love for Christ is our new desire. We become not only who we are in Christ, we become what we love.

Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Your character reflects what's in your heart.

Proverbs 22:1 A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

Proverbs 28:6 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways.

Character is more valuable than wealth. Character is worth more than appearance/status. Wean your heart from the earth and turn your love and attention to God and His glory, this is wisdom.

If you desire to change, then you've got to change at that level, the heart level. Make it your ambition to love God first and foremost and more than anything else.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Romans 13:14 Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

You become what you do, the choices you make.

The choices we make, the habits we form have a huge impact on our character. What we do with our bodies affect and shape our minds and our hearts and our spiritual lives.

Proverbs 10:9 Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.

Proverbs 11:3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

Daniel "resolved not to defile himself" while living in captivity in Babylon and that Godly choice set the direction for the rest of his life, enabling him to keep his integrity intact.

What you choose shapes you. What you do over and over forms your character. Chose your rut carefully you will be in it along time. Is how you are walking now how you want to end up, how you want to be known?

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether what he does is pure and right.

Character begins very early and always eventually shows itself in our actions and habits. Proverbs repeatedly connects the kind of person we become with the paths we choose.

Proverbs 4:14–15 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.

One decision rarely determines your character. But repeated decisions become **habits**. Habits become **patterns**. Patterns become **character**. Character eventually produces **destiny**.

Biblical wisdom is not merely knowing what is right or doing what is right; it is becoming the kind of person whose heart, desires, words, choices, and conduct increasingly reflect the fear of the Lord.

The Bible consistently upholds men and women of character, reinforcing the critical importance of believers having genuine, steadfast, biblical character.

Does being a person of good character mean we are perfect, we never sin?

Of course not. Proverbs acknowledges that.

Proverbs 24:16 The righteous falls seven times and rises again.

King David was a man of good character and he sinned greatly, and when he did, what did he do? Cover up, blame, excuse, lie? No, he humbled himself and acknowledged his sin and repented.

It is evidence of good, godly character to get up, confess and repent and set your feet back on the path of righteousness. It means to stay in the good fight, run the race, and keep the faith.

We keep doing battle with that selfish little brat in our hearts who want his own way and keeps trying to drag us back into sin again and again.

Implications and application.

Two weeks ago I said to single women, don't date a man who doesn't work and work hard, who can't keep a job, or doesn't want to work and provide for someone besides himself.

This week I say to single women don't be hasty in deciding who to date, personality is fun and attractive, but character takes longer to discern.

It is absolutely impossible to have a healthy, lasting relationship with someone of poor character. Never make an assessment of someone based on your first experiences or impressions with them, that isn't an accurate representation of who they really are.

Proverbs 31:30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

What does character look like? Its not in dramatic displays, it shows up in all the ordinary places in life. Who are you imitating, who are you becoming:

With your words, how you respond when angry, what are you like at work, do you lie, have integrity, how do you treat your parents, your siblings, the poor, how do you handle money, how do you handle temptations, what do you do when nobody is watching.

Character is built one day at a time in the ordinary places of life, in the mundane daily activities. In the little things, a little lie, a small cheat, a broken promise or word.

How is your story developing, what kind of character are you in your story? Who is the Author of your story, you or Christ? Is He your identity? Are you committed to doing what is right, being faithful, not just living for yourself, to live well in your daily moments.

Are you willing to take ownership of your choices and take responsibility, to change from being a passive observer and make active choices?

Are you tired of trying on your own and ready to take hold of God's means of grace that cultivate godly character, Scripture and prayer, worship and a humble dependence on the Holy Spirit?

Anyone can build a house that looks good on the outside, but the test is whether it is built on the sand of personality or whether it is built on the solid rock of true Christian character. When the storms come and they will, personality won't be enough, it is character that endures.

Good character is Christ like. I will never become like Jesus until I'm united to him, devoted to him, and seeking to imitate him in day-to-day life. Who are you becoming? What you are loving and desiring, and by what you are choosing to do, whose example are you following?