

# Character Helps - Orientation

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## Becoming A "Church of Character"

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In making a commitment to become a "Church of Character", a church joins a community-wide initiative, which includes the media, business, education, government, the faith community and others that encourage good character. This article introduces the community-wide initiative; describes the general nature of character, its development and benefits; highlights significant benefits of practicing good character which stem from the tenets of faith; and summarizes some ways in which its practice will be encouraged in and through the church.

## A Community-Wide Initiative

The community-wide initiative to encourage good character had its public beginning on September 27, 2000 when the Cincinnati City Council unanimously voted Cincinnati a City of Character - a city committing to encourage good character. Participating in the media announcement were leaders representing the entire community - the mayor, city council representatives of both political parties, chiefs of the police and fire departments, the superintendent of schools, and leaders of the business and faith communities. It also included the spokesperson for the initiative, NFL Hall of Famer, Anthony Muñoz. These leaders represented scores of community leaders and organizations who beforehand had signified their endorsement of the character initiative.

This community-wide initiative is the initiative of the Character Council of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. This Council is a non-profit organization. It joins organizations in more than 200 cities, in association with Character First, which have pledged to encourage good character. The community of the Character Council of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky includes some 2 million citizens in 7 counties.

The Character Council is founded on the following premises:

- Mission:** To foster character development in children and adults as a foundation for success.
- Vision:** Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky to become a community of good character where:
- Individuals and families are strong
  - Homes and streets are safe

- Education is effective
- Business is productive
- Faith is enriched, and
- Citizens care for one another.

**The Process:** The Character Council is committed to encouraging good character qualities in each of the 2 million citizens of our community:

- Each month one character quality is highlighted throughout the entire community through public service announcements, billboards, media coverage and other means directly to each citizen.
- Concurrently, the Council encourages the business, education, government and faith community segments of our community to support this same character quality among its members.
- At the same time, the Council offers to encourage other organizations focusing on good character development.
- The Council offers its assistance through ideas, materials, training and other resources to those participating in the community-wide initiative.

**Other Premises of the Character Council:**

- It believes every citizen can develop and practice good character - regardless of race, religion, background, age, social or economic circumstances.
- It does not imply our community is worse than others and needs attention. Rather, it believes every individual benefits by practicing good character, as do others touched by this individual's life.
- It does not tell anyone what values to accept. The 49 character qualities are offered by Character First as ones recommended down through history. But each individual can choose to practice or not practice each month's character quality.

The 49 character qualities are as follows:

<b>Alertness</b>	<b>Determination</b>	<b>Honor</b>	<b>Punctuality</b>
<b>Attentiveness</b>	<b>Diligence</b>	<b>Hospitality</b>	<b>Resourcefulness</b>
<b>Availability</b>	<b>Discernment</b>	<b>Humility</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Benevolence</b>	<b>Discretion</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Security</b>
<b>Boldness</b>	<b>Endurance</b>	<b>Joyfulness</b>	<b>Self-Control</b>
<b>Cautiousness</b>	<b>Enthusiasm</b>	<b>Justice</b>	<b>Sensitivity</b>
<b>Compassion</b>	<b>Faith</b>	<b>Loyalty</b>	<b>Sincerity</b>
<b>Contentment</b>	<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Meekness</b>	<b>Thoroughness</b>
<b>Creativity</b>	<b>Forgiveness</b>	<b>Obedience</b>	<b>Thriftiness</b>
<b>Decisiveness</b>	<b>Generosity</b>	<b>Orderliness</b>	<b>Tolerance</b>
<b>Deference</b>	<b>Gentleness</b>	<b>Patience</b>	<b>Truthfulness</b>
<b>Dependability</b>	<b>Gratefulness</b>	<b>Persuasiveness</b>	<b>Virtue</b>
			<b>Wisdom</b>

By focusing during the month on the same, single character quality throughout the entire community, a supportive, enabling and reinforcing atmosphere can be created for everyone in which to encourage and be encouraged in the practice of the monthly quality - the children get encouraged at school, the parents get encouraged at work, the family gets encouraged at its place of worship, citizens get encouraged in the community by the police and other representatives of government, and everyone gets encouraged by the media. And in addition to growing in the practice of good character ourselves, our community may also be an encouragement to others. By following the national monthly schedule of character qualities published by Character First, we are synchronized with all of the other cities in the nation and world following this schedule. In sharing our experiences, ideas and enthusiasm, we may possibly be an encouragement to others (as well as be encouraged by them).

## **Good Character**

### **What is character?**

Character is the composite of one's character qualities. A character quality is a habit, a usual pattern of thinking, speaking or acting. Good character qualities, like any habit, can be developed by making decisions and taking actions that reinforce those habits. For example, a person's character today may be a composite of honesty, generosity, tardiness, disorderliness and other qualities. The good news is that the habit of tardiness can be replaced by punctuality, and that of disorderliness by orderliness - creating the added benefits of these new qualities.

### **What are the benefits of good character?**

There are many benefits of practicing good character. For example:

- Helps individuals reach their full potential
- Enhances self-acceptance, self-confidence and self-satisfaction
- Increases productivity and accomplishments
- Improves relationships
- Benefits and encourages others
- Contributes to success

Practicing good character creates many benefits for the individual. But in addition, these benefits extend out to the family, friends, organizations of which a member, and the community.

Encouraging just one person to practice good character can have significant, far-reaching effects!

### **What are the steps to developing good character qualities?**

1. Understand the quality.  
(For example, understand Enthusiasm as expressing joy in each task as you give it your best effort.)
2. Grasp its actions.  
(Enthusiasm expresses itself in smiling and putting your whole heart into what you do.)

3. **Realize its benefits.**  
(Know that being enthusiastic can improve your outlook, effectiveness and benefit to others.)
4. **Practice its actions.**  
(Practice smiling and putting your whole heart into what you do.)
5. **Encourage it in others.**  
(Model Enthusiasm, and motivate and support others in practicing the quality.)
6. **Be encouraged.**  
(Be strengthened in practicing the character quality by the example and support of others.)

Each month there will be provided along with the character quality a definition and other explanatory information about the quality, activities to practice in developing the quality, and benefits associated with the quality.

## **Good Character and The Christian Faith**

All of the benefits and other aspects of character discussed up to this point apply to every human being, regardless of their religious orientation. For the individual committed to the tenets of the Christian faith, however, there are significant additional benefits and considerations.

### **Character qualities of Jesus Christ**

The 49 character qualities, as mentioned earlier, are ones which have been recommended down through history. While found both in religious and non-religious settings, it is specifically noted here that these character qualities are character qualities of Jesus Christ. Since the Creator's design for perfect humanity was man made in His own image (Genesis 1:27), and since Jesus was His image and hence perfect humanity (Colossians 1:15), these character qualities of Jesus help describe us humans at our best. Recognizing these character qualities as qualities of Jesus Christ and of humanity at its best, provides the Christian with two general motivations for growing in Christ-like character and practicing these 49 qualities. One motivation is to bring joy to the Father who desires His children to grow up and mature into His likeness (1 Peter 1:16). The second motivation is to develop them so as to be closer to His perfect design for humanity and thereby experience more closely all He intends us to be and do.

Moreover, recognizing these character qualities as pertaining to humanity at its best, and that each individual will benefit by practicing and growing in them, Christians are motivated to encourage every person to practice the character qualities - 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). 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, however, but from faith

in Jesus Christ; good character can not earn or attain a relationship with Him, but it can enhance the relationship with Him (Romans 3:23, 6:23; Revelation 3:20; John 1:12; Ephesians 2: 8-9).

In short, for the Christian, practicing good character is a matter of loving God, self, and others.

### Illustrations of added motivations and benefits from the tenets of the Christian faith

As has been suggested, for the individual committed to the tenets of the Christian faith, there are significant additional benefits beyond the general benefits which result from practicing good character qualities. As examples, four of these benefits stemming directly from the tenants are presented below.

Practicing good character qualities:

**1. Brings pleasure to God.**

This follows by noting that (a) the great 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" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Mark 12:29-30), that (b) the key way by which the Christian demonstrates his love to Him is through obedience to Him (e.g. "he who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me", John 14:21), and that (c) He commands us to "be holy as I am holy", i.e. have character like Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:16) Thus the Christian in practicing good character is endeavoring to be holy, in obedience to God's word; this obedience, in turn, demonstrates love to the Lord, which brings him pleasure.

**2. Promotes relational and experiential intimacy with Jesus Christ.**

This follows by noting that (a) knowing God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ experientially and relationally is eternal life - the highest quality of life we can experience (John 17:3), and that (b) making every effort to keep adding goodness (practicing Christ-like character) to our faith will promote this knowledge (2 Peter 1:3-9).

**3. Is valuable in every way in this life.**

This is a direct promise from Scripture: "... Train yourself in godliness (Christ-like character and conduct) ... [which] is of value in every way in this life..." (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Often we cannot see or measure either the immediate, long-term or expanse of the effects of a single act or a habit of practicing good character - on ourselves, others or the Lord. But here we

are assured by the One Who knows all, that practicing good character has great value.

**4. Is valuable in the life to come.**

This is a direct promise from the same Scripture: "... Train yourself in godliness (Christ-like character and conduct) ... [which] is of value in every way in ... the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:7-8). The One Who knows tells us that there is a life to come, and that practicing good character now will be valuable in that life. Realizing that this life will last for ever and ever (Matthew 25:46), investing now in good character will be an investment that will bring dividends for ever.

Encouraging just one person to practice good character can have significant, far-reaching effects - both in this life and the life to come!

**Added strength for developing good character qualities**

A character quality is a habit, which like other habits can be developed by making decisions and taking actions that reinforce the habit. This development requires desire, determination, attentiveness and endurance. In one's own strength one can indeed make progress. However, the Christian operating under the Lordship of Jesus Christ has the invaluable added benefit of God's grace (power) to help. For as spoken through the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13.) Such power is valuable in developing all character qualities. For some character qualities, however, this power may be indispensable. For example, dependability can be defined as "fulfilling what I consented to do, even if it means unexpected sacrifice". Being willing to habitually sacrifice one's selfish interests, resources and other matters to fulfill an expectation or promise made to another, may be more than a person is able or willing to do - without the power of the Lord.

## **Character Encouragement in A "Church of Character"**

A "church of character" is a church which has made significant commitments to intentionally encourage the practice of the monthly character qualities in its congregation and in the community. In so doing, the church joins a select group of other churches, synagogues and members in the faith community of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky which have made the same significant commitments. Recognized by the Character Council and community as a Church of Character (or synagogue, temple, or other), these exemplary congregations hold immeasurable opportunity, both individually and collectively, to significantly impact their congregations, other congregations, and the entire community - both in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky - and beyond!

The commitments for all congregations in this select group are the same. These commitments fall into three sets. The first focuses on commitments prior to commencement

**of the monthly encouragements. These begin with the commitment of the senior spiritual leader to personally try to practice, model and encourage others to practice, the monthly character qualities, and to intentionally encourage the other leaders to do likewise. This set also includes orienting members to this initiative through a seminar, newsletter, and providing means for members to avail themselves of some helpful materials.**

**The second set focuses on monthly commitments to encourage members to practice the character quality of the month. These initiatives are all supplemental to the normal preaching or homily series, the religious education curriculum, and other normal practices. But they have the merit of encouraging practice recurrently throughout the month and in small doses. These commitments include, for examples, a newsletter orienting members to the new character quality, a 4-minute sermon at the beginning of the month motivating the monthly character quality from the tenets of the faith, weekly bulletin inserts and announcements personally encouraging the monthly quality and illustrating it through testimony from history or contemporaries, and short bible studies for classes and small groups.**

**The third set focuses on monthly commitments of the church to encourage the community. These include initiatives such as displaying the monthly character quality on the church's marquees, encouraging each member to model the character quality in the community when opportunities arise, carrying out a monthly project to intentionally encourage the neighborhood, and passing on to the Character Council experiences and other informational items that can serve to encourage the community.**

**Most importantly, it is to be remembered that the ultimate goal of all of these initiatives is simply to encourage each individual to practice good character - so that they and all whose lives they touch can experience its benefits!**

**Encouraging just one person to practice good character can have significant, far-reaching effects! Imagine the potential in an entire congregation! And then, imagine the potential in an entire community! As a "Church of Character", the church and its members have immeasurable opportunity to significantly impact many people - beginning with the individuals in the congregation, and emanating out to other congregations and the entire community - both in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky - and beyond!**