

Forgetting Not

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Messiah Yeshua. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. (2 Peter 1:8-9, NASB)

What are those qualities Peter said that if we lack we are blind and shortsighted and have forgotten our purification? J. G. Holland wrote: “*Reputation and character are widely different things. Character lives in a man, reputation lives outside of him.*” We can safely say that reputation is “what others think I am,” whereas character is “who I am.” Character is the inner reality of who we really are. It is a matter of virtue to be sure that our words, actions, and attitudes reflect good character. It is also a matter of virtue to realize that, if I fail to be obedient, I not only need to correct my wrong attitude toward authority, but I also need to apologize to those who *witnessed* my disobedience. My poor choices demonstrate poor character and this may/could have had a bad influence on others – an action for which I am responsible. Virtue is the moral excellence a person exhibits by consistently making the right choices, the beauty of the soul. Virtue is the missing link in our society between character and reputation. In short, *virtue* is the total moral excellence evident in my life as I consistently do what is right. According to 2 Peter 1:5, we need to give all diligence to: “*add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge.*”

Is there anything about modern culture that really concerns you? Are there social trends in your community that trouble you? Are there problems in the world you wish you could do something about but know you never could fix by yourself? While we may not be able to solve the world’s problems, we do have a moral responsibility for our personal conduct. The influence of our good character is an important contribution we can make to our home, family, job, and community. Virtue is the measure of that influence.

Sometimes we think that virtue is a feminine quality. Wrong! The Latin root of *virtue* is the word *vir*, the term for an adult male. From it we get the English word *virile*, meaning manly. The related word, *virtus*, means “strength.” Thus, the etymology of the word *virtue* points to the idea of being full-grown, mature moral strength. It came to English through a French variant that meant “moral strength; manliness; valor; excellent worth.” We find the word *virtuoso* appearing in the early 1600s, meaning one who is highly skilled in some area of the fine arts. As a violin *virtuoso* is skilled in music so that excellent music becomes part of her, so a *virtuous* person is someone whose moral excellence is evident because it has become part of who they are. The dictionary definition of *virtue* is: virtue **n 1**: moral excellence; right action and thinking; morality **2**: a particular moral quality regarded as good or meritorious **3**: effective power or force **4**: chastity.

The Hebrew word translated *virtue* is *chayil*. It is found in Ruth 3:11 “*And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou required: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.*” Thus, Ruth was even in the direst of circumstances a virtuous woman. It is also found in Proverbs 12:4 “*A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that makes ashamed is as rottenness in his bones*” and in “*Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.*” An *eshet chayil*, a woman of valor or a virtuous woman is the king’s crown, far above any other measure of value.

Lead others the right way—Set the precedent

Virtue is measured by personal character and especially by the moral force one’s character brings upon others. Virtue goes beyond just doing the right thing to setting a precedent for others to follow. When you are about to make a decision, do you ever consider how that decision will set a precedent for others? Do you ever consider how your choice will impact the ethical sensitivity of those around you? Abraham Lincoln is commonly credited with the statement, “*You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.*” Our true character will eventually become evident. We should model moral leadership on the job and in our community by setting the proper precedent in our daily decisions.

Calling a nation, a community or an institution to address failures is a serious action. Society needs courageous moral reformers – those who will set the precedent and lead the way – but often there are too many willing to reform others and too few willing to be reformed themselves. Virtue that seeks to reform must be balanced by the character quality of humility. Humility is: *acknowledging that everything good I have to offer is*

the result of others who have invested in my life; and recognizing that there are still many areas in my life that need to be corrected or strengthened. Before calling others to reform, we seek first to “set the precedent” by strengthening our own character.

Virtue stands above popular permissiveness

Doing what “everyone” knows is right is good. The distinctive mark of virtue, however, is doing right even when popular opinion condones what is wrong. It is standing above popular opinion to uphold what is right even when wrong is commonly permitted. Virtue upholds moral excellence by doing what is right. People will often test your moral standards in order to see if they are genuine convictions or merely a show. When pressured by people to abandon what is morally right, respond with self-control. Self-control is “*rejecting wrongs desires and doing what is right.*” One must be steadfast in virtue; we must do the right thing. Self-control under moral pressure also involves resisting the urge to become angry with those trying to influence you wrongly or to react un-virtuously to their needling.

Your Associations Shape Your Life

People influence people. Not only in childhood, but also in adult years, we influence and are influenced by the people we meet, the people we live and work with, and the personalities we follow through the media. Even the lives we read of in books can impact our own hopes, dreams, and character. A virtuous person seeks to be an agent for moral excellence in society. To that end, such an individual chooses his or her associations wisely.

Author and motivational speaker Charles “Tremendous” Jones underscored the necessity of choosing associations wisely with these words: “*You will be no different tomorrow than you are today except for two things: the people you meet and the books you read.*” The virtue evident in your life is a direct result of the choices you make. Use discernment in the associations, television programs, books, and other influences that you allow to affect you. Give deliberate effort to identify and spend time with those who will positively influence you, whose character you admire and respect. Additionally, exercise gentleness toward all, interacting amiably with the people whose paths intersect yours.

Life is not lived Alone

Human beings are social entities. We constantly influence and are influenced by one another. Sometimes the influence is intentional, but most influence is unconsciously exerted and unconsciously received. Virtue has to do with the moral influence that your life exerts upon others. Open a piano and shout into it, and some of the strings will begin to vibrate. Strike a tuning fork and hold it next to another fork of the same frequency, and the second fork will start to vibrate. Hang two pendulum clocks beside each other and eventually both pendulums will swing in sync. This is the law of sympathetic vibration: objects of the same frequency tend to vibrate in sympathy with one another when placed in close proximity.

Objects of different frequencies will sometimes affect one another as well. This is called forced vibration. Just as the vibration of one object can affect other nearby objects, so the character of one person can influence the character of those nearby. An individual’s words, actions, and attitudes can exert a real influence on others. That is why children tend to become like their parents. Even those who try desperately to be different often grow up to make similar mistakes or develop character traits similar to those of their parents.

Moral or ethical standards establish a “higher line” for measuring business performance. Yet the pressure of the bottom line is frequently felt more keenly than that higher line. Ignore neither. A good business decision takes into consideration both ethical and financial soundness. Helping others to see the importance of both in a decision requires the balancing character quality of persuasiveness. Persuasiveness is “guiding vital truths around another’s mental roadblocks.” Use tact and creativity when urging others to do right. Rather than lecturing, inspire virtue with proper persuasiveness. “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* (Phil. 4:8 KJV)