

CHARACTER COUNTS



A GOOD NAME IS BETTER THAN PRECIOUS OINTMENT - ECCLESIASTES 7:1

Scripture:

Psalms 111

The LORD remembers the covenant forever

1. Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.
2. Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.
3. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.
4. He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.
5. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.
6. He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.
7. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.
8. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.
9. He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever—holy and awesome is his name.
10. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Ephesians 5

Be careful how you live

15. Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,
16. making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.
17. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.
18. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.
19. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,
20. always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



CHARACTER COUNTS

ACTS 6

1. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebrew Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.
2. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, (in essence) "We need help."

3. "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are of good character. We will turn this responsibility over to them." (paraphrased)

Choose people who are trustworthy, who respect others, who accept responsibility, who are fair, who are caring, and who are good citizens. Why? Because character counts; because reputation is important.

IS REPUTATION REALLY IMPORTANT?

Our call to worship makes a reference to a restaurant. Would you go to a restaurant that has a poor reputation? Would you go to a restaurant where they weren't fair, where they didn't respect their clients, and the food preparation was not trustworthy? You'd have to go quickly, because restaurants with that reputation don't stay open for long.

Is there anyone here who would do some field work for us? Will you visit a restaurant with a bad reputation this week, taste a variety of items from the menu, and let me know if you think they really deserve it? You see, I'm not even sure I can get you in the door of a restaurant that flunked the health department inspection, let alone get you to taste anything there.

THE QUALITY MOVEMENT

Character counts, quality matters. Edward Deming used quality to help the Japanese overtake America in many aspects of automobiles and electrics, because of companies who said quality is the most important thing we do. Reputation is our most important product in business, in society, in our church.

SO WHY ARE WE SO FASCINATED BY LOW-LIFES?

So why is it that we are so fascinated with people who lack quality, who lack integrity, who are eccentric and odd?

August is normally a slow news month. This year the news has been on steroids (if not about steroids). In two weeks, the lead stories on CNN have shifted from the war in the Middle East to a plot to destroy 10 commercial airliners. These are overwhelming international events. And then one day there was no news about them at all. Why? Because of a slimy guy who reminds us of the character portrayed by Anthony Perkins in "Psycho." A man who wasn't a teacher in Petaluma, but a substitute teacher who was fired by a wise school principle. A man who was fascinated by child abuse and the deaths of young girls, and who confessed to the murder of JonBennet Ramsay 10 years ago in Colorado.

Are we are so overwhelmed by war and terrorism that we are looking for something simpler toward which we can direct our anger? As I look at his image and hear his words about the little girl – whether they are true or not – I ask how did we get something like this that is so shallow, empty and void of moral character of any kind? And what was he doing teaching children?

But frankly, I really don't want to know. And you don't want to know either. It is not worth our time to know much more about him if we weren't so morbidly fascinated by this distraction from the real issues of our time.

**As a church, we are not about the
destruction of moral character, but the
building of moral character.**

THE BIBLE TEACHES THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD CHARACTER

There is no shortage of advice in the Bible about selecting leadership from people of good character, and about promoting good character among people of faith.

- We read about the governors who sought to find charges against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Daniel 6:4 New King James version
- Luke says that Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. Acts 16:2-3 New King James version
- We are also sending another brother with Titus. He is highly praised in all the churches as a preacher of the Good News. 2 Corinthians 8:18 New Living Translation
- A good name is better than precious ointment. Ecclesiastes 7 New Revised Standard version
- Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and 6 is about building character and a good reputation.

CHARACTER COUNTS IN SCHOOL

There is a program in the public schools called **CHARACTER COUNTS**. A version of it is being used in Petaluma, but I am not aware that it is being used in Santa Rosa. It is a program teaching something like morality to children in school, and I applaud the creators and teachers in this program.

There is nothing particularly American or Christian about these six qualities of character. They seem to transcend institutions, but go to the heart of the people we want to live with in a just and moral society. I wish more of the people we read about in the news would have these qualities.

Here is the short list of the six pillars of good character. The bulletin cover is in color to help you remember.

Trustworthiness (blue – think “true blue”)

Be honest • Don't deceive, cheat or steal • Be reliable — do what you say you'll do • Have the courage to do the right thing • Build a good reputation • Be loyal — stand by your family, friends and country

Respect (gold – think “the golden rule”)

Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule • Be tolerant of differences • Use good manners, not bad language • Be considerate of the feelings of others • Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone • Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

Responsibility (green – think “responsibility for a green garden”)

Do what you are supposed to do • Persevere: keep on trying! • Always do your best • Use self-control • Be self-disciplined • Think before you act — consider the consequences • Be accountable for your choices

Fairness (orange – think “dividing an orange into equal shares”)

Play by the rules • Take turns and share • Be open-minded; listen to others • Don't take advantage of others • Don't blame others carelessly

Caring (red – think “heart”)

Be kind • Be compassionate and show you care • Express gratitude • Forgive others • Help people in need

Citizenship (purple – think “regal”)

Do your share to make your church and community better • Cooperate • Get involved in community affairs • Stay informed; vote • Be a good neighbor • Obey laws and rules • Respect authority • Protect the environment

CITIZENSHIP IN SANTA ROSA

I am enrolled in a citizenship program next year called Leadership Santa Rosa. You'll be hearing about some of my adventures in the coming year which begins with agriculture day at a dairy, at a cheese factory and a day labor camp. Each of us will be required to do a ride-along with a Santa Rosa policeman, we will visit the judicial system, medical system, school system, and we learned that each of us will be given the high school proficiency test to see if we would be able to graduate from high school in Santa Rosa. So this is the first of several lessons about citizenship, caring, and character that will be part of the year ahead. I am in the process of finding myself a tutor for the high school proficiency exam.

CHARACTER IN THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Character counts.

Citizenship counts.

Reputation counts.

A good reputation can't be bought. It can only be earned over time. To earn a good reputation, we know that we must follow Jesus' example. Jesus was honest and straightforward with people. When you speak the truth in love, you earn respect. Deception or even polite half-truths eat away at a good reputation.

Follow through on what you say you're going to do. If you make a commitment, stick to it. People will learn that your word is good, that you keep your promises. Consistency speaks volumes to people who are so used to the unpredictability of a world built on the *if-it-doesn't-work-try-something-else* philosophy.

Know when to hold your tongue. Look for the good in a given situation. Speak well of others whenever you can do so honestly. If you can't, heed this time-honored advice: "If you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all." Hurtful words have a way of finding their target when you express them among friends or even strangers. Be sure not to name names when you're talking. Keep in mind that your reputation is on the line with every word you speak.

55 YEARS OF MISSION IN SANTA ROSA

That is why the reputation of our church is so important. Next year we will celebrate 55 years of mission in Santa Rosa. We want to do a number of good things next year to celebrate that.

But think about the last 55 years this way: In 55 years we have given millions of dollars to mission, we have made thousands of visits to the sick, and served as a beacon of hope for our community. We have done a world of good for the individuals and the community we serve.

And remember what the kids told us last week: **“Our Family Sticks Together.”** Don’t you dare tear down the reputation of this church in public, even if you are annoyed. Don’t pick on those institutions that build character, because the church is still the best hope for humanity, even when churches make mistakes. Don’t let others get away with that either.

HONORING DICK AND IRENE ROBBINS

We have a man and a woman in our church who have a good reputation. After worship we have a thank you party for Dick and Irene Robbins. But first, I want to repeat the most famous sermon illustration we have ever heard in our church which is an illustration about character. Character transcends anything the world can do to us, anything time, health, and change can throw our way. Dick always carries a large bill with him, just in case of emergency. Dick, do you have your \$50 bill on you today for an encore?

Monika Rhodes, will you give me some help with this? (Monika went to Dick, got the \$50 bill and took it up to John in the chancel area. They both proceeded to punch holes in, staple and tear the bill to shreds. Of course, Monika had switched the real \$50 for a fake bill. At the end of all the abuse, the real bill was still intact, and Dick said he would donate it to the Rosebud Preschool Endowment Fund.)



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