THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CHARACTER

INTRODUCTION

Welcome again to today's devotional. I trust you are ready to be challenged and hopefully inspired again to pray toward character and Christlikeness. Today I'm eager to talk to you about **the Transformative Power of Character.** I'm so glad you're here.

COMMENTARY: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CHARACTER

How does a person become more like Jesus Christ? Somehow many Christians have gotten the idea that most of the work, if not 100% of the work, is up to God. It's the Holy Spirit who transforms a person. After all, it's all about the fruit of the Spirit as spelled out in Galatians 5:22-23, right?

> **The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

Not so fast. Look at all the traits in the passage: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. But let me ask you a question. Where is courage? Where is diligence? Where is honesty? Or humility? Or integrity?

You get the idea. There are a lot of traits that are also certainly like Jesus Christ, but which are missing? Did God mess up? Forget? Is this just a partial list?

Here's the deal. There is a category of traits absolutely crucial for Christlikeness and living the Christian life but which are not provided by God—directly. For example, generosity is a Christlike trait. Nowhere in the Bible are we told God makes us generous. You definitely need diligence and vigor to live the Christian life. But you won't find anywhere we are told God makes us diligent or vigorous. And think about this, you can't even become a Christian in the first place, much less live a Christlike life, without honesty. But go ahead. Look anywhere in the Bible for some place it says God makes us honest. You won't find it. We need to be grateful, but the Lord doesn't do that for us either. Or resourceful. Or industrious. Or respectful.

These traits, which are so crucial to living the Christian life, are in a category we call "moral traits," because they are developed and strengthened in the conscience and will of a person. It's how God created us as moral beings. He designed us to perceive and pursue certain qualities that are instrumental in carrying out the heartbeat of His spiritual qualities like love, joy, peace, patience and so on.

By placing the pursuit and perfecting of these traits in our hands God calls us into partnership with Him, which is exactly where He has wanted human beings to be from the beginning. You can hear and read evidence of this partnership when the apostle Peter wrote this:

> **"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness"**

and in the next verse concludes this optimistic statement of holy potential by claiming that we will be **"partakers of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:3-4)**

If you were to stop there you'd only get half the story. Because Peter immediately jumps in the very next verse to the partnership element in this amazing promise when he states: **"For this reason, make every effort"** — meaning work hard, give your best effort, be very intentional — "**to add"** various qualities in a compounding process that you are responsible for.

> **...add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (Galatians 5:22-23)**

Then he says something quite sobering:

> **"For if you possess these qualities (i.e. qualities that you work on by your own effort) in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8).**

Clearly this suggests that without this kind of intentional effort you will be ineffective and unproductive as a Christian.

But is this "effort" all on us? No. Fortunately the Lord also created us to have our character shaped by helpful influences. From the time we are little children, our parents and extended family and then schools, churches, neighborhoods and social institutions play collective roles helping moral virtues to develop. Unfortunately, there have been multiple breakdowns in each of these venues and systems for character development. Remedial efforts must be taken to supply the missing ingredients of character development.

That's why you are being invited into a character formation process to learn about these traits, how they develop, and how you can practice the skills involved in these traits. But right now these days of prayer are designed to prepare you spiritually for this character development journey.

My task is to help you say yes to making this effort. For many reasons. But here's the most important reason. The greatest gift you can give to the Lord—your highest act of worship—is to reflect His nature. To become like Him. This gift has a price tag though. It's important and necessary to "make every effort."

REFLECTION:

With this is mind let's take time to reflect on **the Transformative Power of Character**, and I've got good news. According to scripture the Lord always rewards sincere effort. Think of Jesus' parable of the talents. It went this way:

> **A man going on a journey, called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. (Mt 25:14-15)**

As the story goes the guy who got five and the guy who got two put the money to work and doubled the master's money. The guy who got one hid it. You see, each talent was worth a huge sum of money and understandably he didn't want to lose any of it.

But notice this. When the master settled accounts his reaction offers a priceless insight. The master was frustrated with the servant who did nothing, but he rewarded the two servants who increased what they were given with more of the same. The principle applies broadly to all of us: ***Do something with what you already have been given, and the Lord will give you more.***

With that in mind look at the following list of character traits. Pick out two or three that you would like to improve or strengthen in your life.

Courage, Diligence, Generosity,
Gratitude, Honesty, Humility,
Industry, Integrity, Perseverance,
Resourcefulness, Respect, Vigor

Now fill in both blanks in the following statement with one of those traits you chose and read the sentence to reflect on what "making every effort" might mean for you.

- ***Do you want more*** ____*name of a trait*____***? Put your best effort toward the amount of*** ____*name of a trait*____ ***you can muster, and the Lord will give you more.***

Here's an example of what I mean. Suppose you want more **diligence**. Put it in the blanks and read the sentence with that word inserted. It shows you to: *Make every effort to be as diligent as you can be, and the Lord will help you become more diligent.*

This is why intentional character development is so important. It's transformative, because your efforts set you up for more of God's transformative provision.

Finally, pause the video here and reflect on these two questions:

- ***Am I willing to offer the Lord the highest form of worship which is to "make every effort" to become more and more like Him?***
- ***Am I willing to use as much diligence as I can muster, or as much honesty as I can muster, or as much humility as I can muster, with my own strength, etc?***

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, thank You for inviting me into this process of personal transformation by partnering with You. I'm not sure I ever fully appreciated how big a part I play in transformation. I understand that I am not the one who changes me. That's what You do and only You. But now I see that You often do that in relation to my best efforts to use the moral strength and traits that You have already given me. So help me in the days and weeks ahead to do my part toward becoming Christlike. I consecrate myself toward that end. In the name of and to the glory of Jesus. Amen.