

BUILDING THE CHARACTER OF GOD

The Bible reveals the astonishing purpose God had in mind, when He decided to create human beings.

In the book of Genesis, we find a marvelous passage that actually impacts our lives in the most positive way. It is easily overlooked, but we must be careful that we do not.

Here is what God has planned out for humanity from the very beginning.

“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . .’” (Genesis 1:26).

The Hebrew word for LIKENESS refers to the outward, the physical form and shape of man.

The word IMAGE, however, refers to mind and character.

And so, from the beginning, God purposed to reproduce Himself — HIS mind, HIS character — in us.

What do we mean by character?

Character requires a commitment to do the right thing even when it's difficult.

Even when it's inconvenient.

Even when it's uncomfortable.

Especially when there's intense pressure to do what's not right.

Character is very important to God.

Character is the one attribute, the one quality He cannot create in us by divine decree or directive!

It's a choice WE have to make.

It's a choice only WE can make.

Godly character cannot be instantly created.

It takes TIME!

Layer upon layer of perfect character is developed and acquired only through adversity, tests and trials.

It cannot be learned or acquired otherwise.

It is built through a lifetime process of OVERCOMING!

In his letter to the 12 tribes of Israel scattered throughout the Roman Empire, the chief apostle Peter lists eight layers of character we need to build so we do not fall away and lose out on eternal life (2 Peter 1:5-11).

The first layer is FAITH.

Faith is a strong conviction or belief in God and His Son Jesus Christ. True and living faith requires not only that we believe IN God, but we must also believe God.

That means we do what He says.

Without such an active, living and dynamic faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith then is not optional. If we want to please God, we must have faith.

The next layer is VIRTUE.

Virtue involves moral excellence. We keep ourselves pure and unspotted from the ways of the world.

Our language is kind and gentle.

Our conduct and behavior are honest, noble and upright. Without even the appearance of impropriety.

And because God's way is very different from the way of the world, a true Christian will experience opposition, intimidation and pressure to conform.

Our resolve will be tested; but, God promises to help us stay strong, firm and unshakeable.

Layer number three is KNOWLEDGE.

Knowledge requires understanding the right thing to do, based on what God says. Not what man says. And with that understanding, we do not grow weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13); but we patiently continue in doing the right thing (Romans 2:7).

Fourth layer is TEMPERANCE or SELF-CONTROL.

Temperance or self-control means balance and moderation in everything. Moderation is not a dull and boring life. Moderation doesn't mean no-fun!

Rather, moderation means mastering our desires and passions so we behave in a manner that adds to our own enjoyment while enriching the lives of those around us (Proverbs 16:32; 1 Corinthians 6:12).

Layer number five is PATIENCE.

Patience involves steadfastness, endurance and perseverance in every aspect of our daily lives.

Trials aren't easy. They really stretch our spiritual resolve to the limit.

By exercising patience, we tell God, "I'm in YOUR hands. YOU know best. YOU are going to get me through this. And I am going to get through this a better person with an extra layer of YOUR character" (James 1:2-4).

Layer number six is GODLINESS.

Godliness is an attitude of respect for and honor towards God by doing those things that are pleasing to Him.

Obedying God, growing in His knowledge and understanding, absorbed and engrossed in His way of life, dedicated and concentrated on doing the right thing are what truly please God (Hebrews 13:16).

Layer number seven is BROTHERLY KINDNESS.

The Greek word is a familiar one: *philadelphia*, which expresses the love for one another as brethren.

It means brotherly love which we express for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are ready and willing to help each other out where we can and when we can. But we don't meddle. We don't get nosy.

Over-familiarity can gradually erode the honor and respect that keep a relationship strong (Proverbs 25:17).

But, mutual respect, caring for, being considerate of one another, that's brotherly kindness (Romans 12:10).

The eighth and final layer is LOVE.

This isn't the mushy, syrupy kind of love.

The Greek word here translated love is *agape*, which is the genuine, deep, sincere, outgoing concern for one another.

The apostle John wrote this to express the very nature of God Himself.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

God wants us to develop and cultivate HIS holy, righteous, godly character.

He's not going to force us to do it.

We must yield to Him and freely choose to go HIS way, adding layer after layer of HIS character.

And God will then fashion us in HIS own image and likeness so we can become immortal, spirit-born members of His divine Family.