

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with Christ through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

In addition, we would love for you to help us by going to our web site at www.aldenson.com. Here you can write to us, order additional material like this booklet, check out all my music, have a daily bible study, and stay up to date on the ministry. You can also send us a prayer request and questions for the TV show. But more importantly, please continue to be in prayer with us as we work together to help those that are in need.

Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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Most artists create for only a brief moment in time. That phenomenon was once known as “15 minutes of fame”. Yet even in a fickle world, there still emerge a talented few that transcends time and trends. With nearly 15 years as a major label recording artist and seven hit

albums to his credit, Al Denson is that kind of artist.

But the attention and acclaim his artistry has brought him over the years are anything but the routine rewards of worldly success. Rather, they are the fruits of a life of purpose and passion, and a mission that has always reached far beyond merely making music.

The millions of young people Al has performed for, befriended, counseled, consoled and clowned around with in his career already know that. And thousands more are finding out every day.

This past year has seen Al expand his efforts to a global audience through the reach of his daily syndicated television production, “The Al Denson Show.” “You’ve got to reach out to people where they are with the most powerful means and this form of media allows you to build trust and a rapport,” says Al. “This has all been so amazing. I can’t imagine what lies in store when the Lord finally calls me home, but I don’t have to wait for heaven to receive rewards. I get them every time a kid comes up to me and says, ‘I heard what you said, and I accepted Christ.’ You can’t ask for anything more or better than that.”

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CHRISTIAN Character

The time of the new millennium in America was marked by several “buzz” words, one of which was “character.” On January 20, 2001 in his inaugural address, George W. Bush, the forty-third President of the United

States even made character the theme of his speech and challenged Americans everywhere to become a nation of character. It sounds wonderful, but what exactly is character anyway? Webster’s dictionary defines character as “moral excellence and firmness—the total qualities that make up an individual.” Being a person of character is really about being a person of “excellence.” This may sound very lofty and unattainable, but we shouldn’t let the word “excellence” discourage us. Excellence isn’t about being perfect and never making a mistake. It is about

- having a commitment to a higher, more noble way of living.
- having an unwillingness to accept what is unacceptable.
- not being content just to get along or settle for second best.
- wanting to make a difference in our world.
- wanting to know that after we’re gone it will have mattered that we lived.

Webster was wise enough to realize that excellence is only part of character. Excellence

must also be accompanied by firmness. The true measure of character is the ability to achieve excellence and then to maintain it over time—that is firmness. Firmness is standing strong and being consistent in the face of fear,

pain, discouragement, fatigue, rejection or ridicule.

Excellence says, “I have the courage to care.” Firmness says, “I will keep on caring.” President George Washington once said, “I hope I shall possess FIRMNESS and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the CHARACTER of an honest man.”

Anyone who is willing to pay the price can become a person of character. To the extent character is respected and developed in a life, a person’s family, relationships, community, school, and world will be made better. Being a person of character will also welcome us to a community of moral people. The vast majority of Americans still have a respect for the virtues of character, and having character makes us a part of this most elite group which share ideals. This nation was founded on principles of goodness, and becoming a person of character will identify us with all the great people of character who have come before us and all those who will carry on after we are gone. Character gives us roots in the past and a presence in the future.

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Having character will always make anyone a better person. If living a life of character will do this for an unbeliever, shouldn't Christians have an even higher standard for character? Character has also been defined as “the inward motivation to do what is right regardless of the cost.” Who should have more inward motivation to do what is right than a Christian? The very fact we are children of the Kings of Kings and His ambassadors and representatives on this earth ought to give us a higher calling. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

Christians are not the source of light—Jesus is. But we are called to brighten this dark

world and we do that by “reflecting” His light. Just as a mirror reflects, disburse, and displays light, so our lives are to be a mirror which reflects the light of Jesus to our world. Many Christians living today have allowed their “mirrors to be smudged” by worldliness and compromise. As a result, Jesus isn't able to shine through their lives, and it is hard to tell these “smudged” Christians from the unbelievers who don't know our Savior at all.

There has never been a time in all of history when the world was more desperate to see who Jesus is and what He is really like than now. Jesus still is the only answer for individuals, for families, for our nation, and for our world. If Christians don't start taking who they are and the job God has left them here to do seriously, then all hope for this world is gone. Character is important today for everyone, but CHRISTIAN character is even more important.

What are the attributes in a Christian's life that make their character a “cut above” the rest? Here is an easy way to remember what some of these qualities should be.

Contentment
Humility
Righteousness
Initiative
Self-control
Thankfulness
Integrity
Availability
Nature

These are a few of the Christian character traits that, when present in our lives, will help give the world a clear picture of who Jesus really is. Let's examine each one individually.

Contentment

Christians should be the most contented of all people but too many times we fall into the same trap the rest of the world does. We want “things” because we think they bring us satisfaction and comfort. But after the new wears off, instead of being content with what we have, we find ourselves even more discontented and empty. Material things will entertain us and help us forget our real problems—but only for a short time because we were never created by God to be fulfilled by anything but Him. If we choose not to accept this truth and deal with the real issues in our lives, we will probably decide the solution to our discontent is to spend more and that happiness is only one purchase away. Once we do this, we set a very vicious and destructive cycle in place in our lives that is hard to break.

In Philippians 4:12 the apostle Paul writes, “I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” It sounds like he knows something we need to know about being content. If we skip down to verse 19 we will discover his secret. It says, “My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Notice Paul doesn't say God “can” meet our needs or “may” meet our needs, but God WILL meet our needs.

In Psalm 9:10 it says, “Those who know your name will trust in you, for you Lord have never forsaken those who seek You.” The secret to Paul's contentment was he had learned that God could be trusted to keep His promises. Paul found God to be trustworthy because He knew three things about his Heavenly Father we must know as well.

- (1) He knew God in His love always wills what is best for us.
- (2) In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and
- (3) in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about.

We can trust a God like this to meet our needs and do what is best for us. The peace that comes in our lives when we choose to trust Him will give us contentment, regardless of our circumstances and regardless of what we have or don't have.



Being content doesn't mean we are passive, lazy, or don't care. It simply means we do our part and then we trust the sovereignty, the wisdom, and the love of God to provide what He knows we need, when we need it. We must always remember that contentment is a choice. If we choose not to trust God and be contented, then the alternative is to believe the lie which says "things" bring happiness and meaning to life. If we believe this, we will waste our lives away struggling and wishing for what we don't have and miss what is really important and worthwhile in life. Contentment is not the fulfillment of what we want, but the realization of what we already have.

Humility

One of the definitions the dictionary assigns to humility is "meekness." This is a word that conjures up all sorts of undesirable images for most people. Perhaps when we hear the word "meek" we think of the 98-pound weakling who gets sand kicked in his face at the beach. Or maybe what comes to mind are "human doormats"—people who allow others to walk all over them. It is sad that so many of us have this view of meekness because it is entirely incorrect. Meekness really means "strength under control."

The word picture for meek is a powerful, wild stallion who has been broken and now wears a bridle. The horse is no less strong

Humility is the realization that none of us is where we are solely of our own doing.

because it has been broken, but now that strength is no longer wild and untamed; it is strength under control. Instead of a 98-pound weakling, it is a 200-pound, muscular body-builder who gets sand kicked in his face at the beach. Unlike the weakling, the body-builder could easily strike back, but he chooses to keep his strength under control. This is why the Bible uses the word meek to describe the Lord Jesus. If we are to be truly Christ-like, then we must have lives which display the character quality of meekness or humility.

To have humility is also to have a right or correct estimation of our self. To think no more or to think no less of whom and what we really are. Humility is the realization that none of us is where we are solely of our own doing. The abilities we have are a gift, and any achievements we have made have only come with the help of many other people. Dr. James Moore tells the story of a distinguished professor who taught at the University of Chicago. Quite often, his preschool granddaughter would come to visit him at his office. She loved to reach up and hold his hand and walk around the campus with her grandfather. One day, the man was carrying his granddaughter around on his shoulders. They met a friend who had seen the little girl just the week before. The friend looked up at the little girl riding on her grandfather's shoulders and said with a smile, "My goodness! Look at you! Look at how much you've grown since

I saw you last week! The little girl replied, "Not all of this is me." Dr. Moore goes on to say that all of us should be able to relate to this story, because the truth is that we all are riding on the shoulders of others. All of us are bigger and better people because of our families, our teachers, our friends, our mentors, our ministers, our coaches, our teammates—anyone who has made a contribution to our lives.

Righteousness

The word "righteous" means "morally right, just, virtuous, blameless." We know there is only one who is completely righteous and that is God. However, the Bible says in I Corinthians 1:30, "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness..." The salvation experience puts us "in Christ" and we become righteous because He is righteous. Therefore, we are to live righteous, Christ-like lives. But, there is a big problem standing in the way of righteous living for many Christians today. The problem is that there are "conflicting values" lying side-by-side in their lives.

These are people who say they are Christians and have an interest in spiritual things. But there are areas in their lives where there are actions, attitudes, words, and values that conflict with those of Christ. Jesus said in John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." In other words, we can't say we love Jesus and live in a way that contradicts His Word.

True righteousness is not a line to cross, ...

Somehow many Christians today have decided to pick and choose which parts of the Word of God they want to obey, and that it is OK for them to disregard the rest. These Christians believe as long as they are keeping more commandments than they are breaking that God will ignore all the times they are striking out—like God is not interested in the specifics of their obedience, only in their “spiritual batting averages.”

How many teenagers who say they are Christians, make it a habit to go to church and wouldn't miss their Christian Club meeting on campus are the very same kids who will cheat on tests, lie to teachers, use bad language on the team, party on the weekend, gossip or be unkind to someone at school, or be unforgiving when someone angers them? What about the Christian couple who say they will never have intercourse before marriage but are doing everything else sexually but that? Or what about the unmarried couple who attend church together, then returns back home to the same address?

Consider for a moment the Christian teenager who is disrespectful to his parents and has a bad attitude at home. And what about the Christian who is lazy at work, cheats on his income tax, is abusive to his family, ungodly to

his neighbor, or unloving to anyone who is different? Is it any wonder the world is so confused and turned off by most Christians? Too many of us are advertising to an unbelieving world something with our lives that isn't very pretty. Christians all too often want to know how much they can get away with. What they are really asking is, “How close can I get to the line between right and wrong, between pure and impure, without going out-of-bounds?” Well, if we have to ask that question, we have already gone too far. A righteous lifestyle cannot be defined by an activity. True righteousness is not a line to cross, it is an attitude. A righteous lifestyle includes our minds and our spirits, not just our bodies. Instead of asking, “How much can we get away with as Christians?” Ask, “How much like Jesus can we be?”

II Corinthians 5:14 says, “The love of Christ compels (motivates, propels) us...” The great unconditional love of Christ and what He has already done for us should be enough to motivate us to live a righteous, godly life. Christian character should consistently include attitudes, actions, and words which are righteous, line up with the Word of God, and is motivated by a heart full of love for the Savior.

Initiative

Again, Christ is our model for Christian character, and Jesus always took the initiative, whether it was in relationships or in leadership. Leadership in a word is influence. There have been many leaders throughout history that have exerted a tremendous amount of influence on multitudes of people, but the influence was for evil and not for good—leaders like Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Jim Jones. The question is



not “will you influence someone,” but “what kind of influence will you be?”

J. R. Miller said, “There have been meetings of only a moment which have left impressions for life, for eternity. No one can understand that mysterious thing we call influence...yet...every one of us continually exerts influence, either to heal, to bless, to leave marks of beauty; or to wound, to hurt, to poison, to stain other lives.” What is needed today are leaders who have the standards, ethics, morals and values of Christ—leaders who can influence their world for good. The quality of a Christian's life will be measured by the extent to which he has positively impacted the lives of others.

Many Christians may have the mistaken impression that great leaders are born that way. Leonard Ravenhill tells about a group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque village. As they walked by an old man sitting beside a fence, one tourist asked in a patronizing way, “Were any great men born in this village?” The old man replied, “Nope, only babies.” You see, leaders are not born; they're made and developed over time.

...it is an attitude.

Taking the initiative in life means you set the pace for others with your energy, spirit, and enthusiasm. A leader is one who sets the speed for others by picking up the pace as the competition gets tougher. In major championships you see great runners kick in on the last lap. A great basketball team plays its most aggressive defense in the last quarter. Christians shouldn't be the ones who slack off; instead they take it up a notch—we should increase the pace.

Bruce Larson in his book *Wind and Fire*, gives some interesting facts about Sandhill cranes: "These large birds, who fly great distances across continents, have three remarkable qualities. They rotate leadership, they choose leaders who can handle turbulence, and all during the time one bird is leading, the rest are honking their affirmation." Christians with initiative can lead and set the pace from the middle or the rear as well as from the front. They understand that leadership involves energy, encouragement and enthusiasm.

Christians with initiative are willing to be examples. This means we are willing to open our lives to the inspection of others. We have nothing to hide and have no fear of exposure. We are not perfect, but we are, to the best of our ability, living a life worth imitating. A Christian should have a willingness to be accountable to others. There are those who will tell you that character is not a leadership issue.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is impossible to separate **WHO** a man is from **WHAT** he does. The "Who," in our lives is Christ and He should influence everything we do and how we do it.

Self-control

In the Galatians 5:22, the Bible gives us a list of characteristics which will be present in the life of a Christian who is living a Christ-like or Spirit-controlled life. The last, but certainly not the least, one on the list is "self-control." There are two things about self-control we cannot afford to miss: one, that self-control is only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit's power in our lives, and two, that it is impossible for a Christian to live a Christ-like life without self-control.

God gives us the very same power which raised Jesus from the dead to help us discipline ourselves, choose the right action, and follow through with the right behavior. But His power is not given as a "shortcut to perfection." God will do His part but we have to do ours, too. He won't do our work for us, but He will provide what we need. The Bible says in Phillipians 2:13, "For God is at work within you, helping you **WANT** to obey Him, and then helping you **DO** what He wants." In this verse God promises not only to give us the power to do the right thing, but also, the desire to do the right thing if we will ask.

The Bible tells us not to let the world squeeze us into its own mold. In other words, we are not to be like the world in the way we think and live our lives, but rather we are to be transformed into the image of Christ by having our minds renewed or changed. To live a life of self-control, we must guard what we feed our minds and begin to think God's thoughts. The Bible says in Isaiah 26:3, "You will keep in perfect peace, him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you." If we are struggling with self-control, we need to commit our minds and our thoughts to God every day. We must determine, with an act of our wills, to let Him have total control of our thoughts and to

keep our minds fixed on Him. Remember, whatever we feed is going to grow, and whatever we starve is going to die.

We must realize we can choose what we think about. We can't always keep thoughts from coming into our minds, but we can choose what we will do with the thought once it is there. What we think about is going to determine how we feel, and how we feel is going to determine what we do. The Bible says very clearly in Phillipians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praise worthy—think about such things."

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If we are really committed to living lives that are characterized by self-control, we will be serious about our thought life. Remember, the desires we focus on and feed in our lives will only become stronger, while the desires we ignore and starve will weaken and die.

Most Christians mistakenly believe that self-control means resisting what is wrong—that self-control is all about willpower. But that definition puts the emphasis on the wrong thing. Self-control is about wanting what is right so badly that resisting what is wrong is natural. It is loving what God loves and hating what He hates. When we spend all our time focusing on what we shouldn't be doing, it will make us want to do it even more. But when we make our focus what is good and right, then our desires will follow. Self-control should include every area of our lives; what we think about, what we say, and what we do.

Thankfulness

Christians should be the people who are the most thankful and have an “attitude of gratitude” for all that has been done for them. The happiest and most fulfilled people in this world are the most thankful people. Having an attitude of thankfulness is not something that we are born with, it is acquired. We come into this world, demanding, selfish, and ungrateful,

and it takes work to learn to be thankful.

What does it mean to have an “attitude of gratitude” or to be grateful? The word gratefulness comes from the Latin word *gratus*, meaning, “free, ready, quick, willing, prompt.” It simply means we have a healthy sense of indebtedness to those who have blessed our lives. Grateful people are free, ready, quick, willing, and prompt to let others know with their words and actions that they are thankful for the contributions that have been made to their lives. When we chose to do this on a daily basis, it will change our entire outlook on life.

Remember

- Appreciation is the thought
- Gratitude is the feeling
- Thanks is the action

Gratefulness is never an attempt to “make up” or “even the score” for what others have done. It is simply a way to outwardly demonstrate how much we appreciate what other people have done for us. We shouldn't wait for a convenient time or opportunity to show our gratitude to others. One thing that keeps us from having an attitude of gratitude is looking at what we don't have instead of what we do have. It seems most of us want to compare ourselves to those who have more of what we want and not less of what we want. For instance,

we might have an old car and be unhappy and discontented because we are comparing our old car to the new cars some of our friends are driving. Instead, we could compare ourselves to other friends who have no cars at all, and must either walk or ride the bus everywhere they go. Choosing to compare ourselves to those with more will not change our financial situation or our car, it will only make us, and everyone around us, miserable. Choosing to compare ourselves to those with less will change our outlook and our attitude, and help us to enjoy life. Being content with what we have is the key to having an “attitude of gratitude.”

The Bible doesn't command us to “feel” thankful in every situation. Instead it commands us to give thanks. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) To give thanks when we don't feel like it is not hypocrisy; it's obedience. This doesn't mean we should deny our negative thoughts and feelings. The Psalmists were always honest about their feelings and told God about them, but they always combined the pouring out of their feelings with sincere praise. Psalm 69 is a good example

of this principle. In verse 29 David says, “I am in pain and distress...” But in verse 30 he goes on to say, “I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving.”

Ephesians 5:23 says, “Giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Hebrew 13:15 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that praise His name.” God wants us to live a life of thanksgiving because He knows that having a grateful spirit can do some very important things for us. Here are just three:

1. Being thankful causes us to acknowledge our dependence on God.
2. A heart full of thanksgiving has no room for pride, rebellion, or bitterness.
3. A thankful heart is a tender heart that doesn't get hard toward God.

Without an “attitude of gratitude” it will be impossible to have a life which reflects the life of Jesus. Christian character will always be recognized by a spirit of thankfulness to God and to others.

Integrity

We all face temptations every day to be like someone else, to follow the lead of others, or to sacrifice our values on the altar of personal pleasure or public opinion. All too often, we see high profile individuals claiming one set of values with their lips and living out another set of values when they think no one is looking. Unfortunately, the character trait that seems to be in such short supply today, even among Christians, is integrity. The word integrity is defined as “the state of being complete, unified.” The word implies that there is a consistency of one’s actions with one’s values. To put it another way, our words and our actions are to match up, regardless of the circumstances, where we are, or who we are with.

Choosing to have integrity means we have chosen to be completely truthful in all situations of life. When we make a habit of always telling the truth, we are building credibility with people and earning future trust. Trust is the reward for having integrity and being truthful. The more a person proves to be truthful; the more trust others will have in his or her character. We get our word for “truthfulness” from the Old English word *treowth* which means “to be firm, solid, or steadfast.” Remember, character is

defined as “moral excellence and firmness.” It is then easy to see that it would be impossible to be a person of character and not have integrity or be truthful in every part of our lives.

Many times in an effort to preserve our reputations or justify our actions, even Christians will try to rationalize something that is wrong by giving it another name so it doesn’t sound as bad. There are many ways we do this:

- Bending the rules
- Telling a “white” lie
- Telling a partial truth.
- Not reporting something that is wrong.
- Lying to cover up for someone else.
- Exaggerating the facts
- Making excuses.

These may sound more “socially acceptable” but they are just a dressed up way of saying “I lied.” A solid commitment to always being truthful is the only foundation for a stable life and the only way to be a Christian of character. The truth must be the basis for all our decisions, actions, words, relationship, and beliefs. Being truthful is a character quality we must work on all throughout our lives.

A Christian with integrity of character will not only be truthful personally, but will also

be a defender of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This kind of person will always make sure they not only have all the facts, but give all the facts, as well. Anything we do that leads our listeners to make inaccurate assumptions is being untruthful, and showing a lack of integrity. Sometimes it can be silence, a particular tone of voice, an expression, or gesture that gives another person the wrong idea. Billy Graham once said, “Integrity is the glue that holds our way of life together. We must constantly strive to keep our integrity intact. When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.”

Availability

The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:20, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors...” The dictionary defines an ambassador as “An agent of the highest rank. A personal representative or messenger.” This is the honor God has bestowed upon us—we are His representatives in this world. This means we are to be ready to be God’s voice, His hands, and His feet when He has a message to deliver through us. In order to do this we must think His thoughts, see with His eyes, hear with His ears, and feel with His heart. We must be available to minister in His name at all times.

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Jesus taught that true fulfillment and happiness in life would only come through making ourselves available to God and then to be used in the lives of others. Jesus said in Mark 10:43-45, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant...for the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

This “attitude of availability” characterized the life of Christ while He was on this earth. Bible makes it clear in Philippians 2:5-9 that we are to follow His example. It says, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appear-

ance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every name...”

Jesus made Himself available to His Father first and as a result was able to show the world what God was really like. Our job, until He comes again, is to take over where He left off. If we are to be Christians who have the character of Christ, we must be totally available to our Heavenly Father. He must be our all in all, and being available to Him must be the consuming fire of our lives. God must be our reason for living, and serving Him must be our highest joy. Someone has said that Christians must have a “magnificent obsession” for Christ. Nothing can be more important in our lives than knowing God and making

ourselves whole-heartedly available to Him.

The chorus that says, “I give You my heart, I give You my soul, I live for You alone. Every breath that I take, every moment I’m awake, Lord have Your way in me” describes this kind of availability. We will only discover the essence of the Christian life when we come to grips with the fact that “You are not your own, you have been bought with a price.” (I Corinthians 6:19-20) The moment we gave our hearts to Christ, we gave Him the control of our lives as well.

Nature

The last Christian character trait we examine is the golden thread that must be woven through all the other traits, for it is the nature of Christ Himself. There are many words that could describe our beautiful Savior: compassionate, loving, tender, kind, gentle, understanding, forgiving, giving, caring—all of these must be a part of our nature, as well. Our world is full of people who know nothing of these characteristics. They are hardhearted, going places and getting things done in the fast lane. As Bill Hybels puts it, “They have goals to achieve, quotas

to meet, and deals to cut. They view people only in relation to themselves and their own projects and aspirations; tools to be used or trouble to be avoided.” People like this are rude, mean-spirited, impatient, selfish and insensitive. They consider themselves to be the “movers and shakers” of this world, winners, if you will, with no time for those they consider to be “ordinary” or losers.

But Christians should be different. If ever there are people in this world living lives of excellence, it should be God’s people. We should hold to a higher, godlier standard of living than the rest of the world. Christians should know that real fulfillment in life comes from giving, not taking, and investing their lives in something larger than themselves. We should be the ones who realize that the most important things in this life are people and relationships, and that without them life is empty, success means nothing, and money is worthless. When we have the nature of Christ, we understand that how we respond to and treat other people are what should set us apart from the rest of the world.

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Character will cause us to stand by others in challenging times but having Christian character will cause us to stand with others during those difficult moments. Christians who exhibit the nature of Christ in their lives will have a reverence and appreciation for life that gives them a sense of identification with humanity—especially those who are hurting or those who are less fortunate than they. Christian character implies solidarity which means that we accept the struggles of others as part of our struggles. Without this, it is easy to turn away from the pain of others and not worry about things that don't directly affect us. It is one thing to care about our friends and families who are needy and hurting, or even to care about people we

may not know as well, but who are like us. It is only when we have the nature of Christ that we can care about the problems of strangers or those who are different than we are.

Dr. Gary Smalley says that at the heart of making others feel valuable, loved, and accepted is a decision to honor them. Honor simply means deciding to place high value, worth, and importance on another person by viewing him or her as priceless and valuable. Honor is a gift we give to others. It isn't purchased by their actions and isn't dependent on how we feel at the moment. How we treat others is an indication of how valuable and important we believe them to be. The less value we attach to people the easier we can "justify" dishonoring them with our words or actions. We dishonor others when we treat them

as if they have little worth or value. When we are angry, critical, show favoritism, discriminate, or ignore people we are devaluing them.

Each person in this world is a special and unique individual that is worthy of respect. Giving respect means that we value the likes, dislikes, feelings, opinions, and the rights of others. Respect also means we recognize the boundary lines each person has drawn in their own life and that we never try to cross those lines. Christian character understands that our rights only extend to where another person's rights begin.

The nature of Christian character gives us the ability to see beyond today and keep hope alive in times of trouble. There is an epidemic of hopelessness raging today, unparalleled by any other time in history. People the world over are desperate for hope. They are looking for those who will not only help them find it, but show them how to hold on to it.

Compassion, love, tenderness, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, understanding, giving, and caring are the qualities which make up the nature of Christ and will give hope to the hopeless. Each of us is a creator. We are responsible for the kind of world we create around us and others every day. We can either choose to create beauty and hope or ugliness and despair in this world.

Matthew 12:21 says, "The mere sound of His name will signal hope..." (The Message) We are those who bear that name. We are His representatives, His ambassadors in a lost, dark, and dying world. People in our world need to see what Jesus is really like. They need a clear, clean reflection of who He is, so they can know there is hope for them. The only way this will happen is when Christians purpose in their hearts is to be Christ-like in their character.

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