Why Your Character Still Matters

In 1996, when I was an editor at LifeWay, I spent a handful of days in the hospital. It was a difficult. I'd never spent a night in the hospital and we had four young boys. Needless to say, my wife was up to her ears in kid's stuff and I hated that I was stuck in a place I didn't want to be. Breaking out of a downtown facility in a hospital gown was out of the question. I'm an overly bashful sort. At about 9 PM, after I had read every bit a literature available in my room, I heard a familiar voice. It was George Clark (picture below), a pastor, fellow editor, and mentor at LifeWay. Besides the Mrs., He was my only visitor that week. Nobody from my church came to the hospital, but George was there. It was during that time that I really appreciated the power of servanthood and character. George went to be with the Lord a few years ago. I don't remember a whole lot about that experience, but I can still see George walking through the door, and I can still hear his deep voice and his unmistakable Tennessee accent as he prayed for me. Those are the things I will remember until the day I see him again in Heaven. He showed me what the character of a man looks like.



The following characteristics were personified in George's life and work. I think he'd agree with this list.

Be a man of honesty.
A man should personify honesty in all his relationships. We ought to strive to be honest which is harder than it sounds. Sometimes it's hard to speak the truth while fudging with the truth seems easier. Truth-telling is the bedrock of character. It would have been so much easier for Stephen, one of the first seven deacons, to slowly back away from the truth when he saw the religious leaders holding rocks and daring him to continue to speak. He was the first of many believers to lose his life for the truth of the Gospel.

"If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters." Alan K. Simpson

Be a man of sexual integrity.
Recently, we've witnessed how fast and how far men can fall when they lose their way sexually. No man sets out to wreck his life over a fleeting pleasure but it happens gradually, sometimes innocently and later the damage is visible. That's why guardrails are so important. The culture has changed dramatically in realm of sexual conduct in our culture but the Christian standard remains. We have to be diligent and guard our hearts. We see the story over and over again. It starts out with a conversation. Then a sharing of feeling and emotions that should not be shared with a woman who is not your spouse. Then the gravitational pull of sin continues to slowly wear down the boundaries until the only thing left is a mess that two or more families will have to survive and a church that has to ask what to do next.

Be a man of generosity. If you want to see the true character of a man, look at his bank account. Materialism is at an all-time high and generosity is at an all time low. Most economists say that todays families give less of a percentage of their income to the church and other charitable

organizations than the families in the Great Depression. I really don't understand it; but I don't think I've ever met a person that has "giver's remorse" after they gave generously to the Lord. Why? Giving makes us happy. In 2017, HealthDay News reported after research that "generosity really is its own reward, with the brain seemingly hardwired for happiness in response to giving."[1]

Be a man of optimism. Optimism seems like a personality trait than an aspect of character, but I would argue that optimism is primary to the health and viability of a church. It speaks louder than the eloquence of your preacher, the aesthetics of your facility, or the talent of your musicians. If the leadership is optimistic, the church culture will change. You certainly remember the twelve spies that went to get a preview of the Promised Land. What were their names? Think hard! I'll bet you remember only two- Joshua and Caleb. They're the ones people name their kids after! No one names their son, Shamua or Palti or any of the other names on the spy roster. Why? All spies, except Joshua and Caleb, were frightened, pessimistic and forgettable in the long run. We must be optimistic. We've all read the back of the book. We all know how the whole thing ends. Jesus is on the throne. Satan is defeated. We win! And if we're optimistic about the big picture, we can be optimistic that God can work with our faith.

Be a man of humility. Harry Truman said it best, "It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit." I've known lots of men who seek power and prestige at church because they didn't get it at work. This is contrary to everything the church is about. Being a man isn't about grasping for power. In fact, a committed follower of Christ is about the exact opposite. We go about our business with a spiritual basin and towel, just like Jesus. Once you are a man of humility, there's no telling what you will accomplish.

This is what I know about being a man of character. If George

was around, I’d call him to improve this list. His short list would be better. He lived it every day.

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[1] https://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20170815/givers-really-are-happier-than-takers#1