BOOK REVIEW

Parent Differently: Raising Kids with Biblical Character That Changes Culture

Kathy Koch

In her book, ***Parent Differently: Raising Kids with Biblical Character That Changes Culture***, Kathy Koch provides insights for parents to help them teach their children to have Biblical character, including descriptions of what parents and children can do to enhance Biblical character development. She begins by discussing the meaning of character and why it matters. She quotes Os Guinness for a definition of character: *Character is the inner form that makes anyone or anything what it is – whether a person, a wine, or a historical period…Applied to a person, it is the essential "stuff" he or she is made of, the inner reality in which thoughts, speech, decision, behavior, and relations are rooted*. She points out that there are four connected qualities: patience, loyalty, dependability, and sincerity. It matters because character determines one's destiny. *Biblical character is motivated by God's ways and will*. Character is observable, forms our reputation, determines our priorities, is based on beliefs and values, and therefore, serves as our inner governance. Koch states that *children can (a) learn what to do, (b) want to do it, and (c) be willing to do it*, but require the leading of the Holy Spirit. *Biblical character is based on righteous qualities, virtuous standards, and irrefutable principles found in the Bible*. God cares about the lives of children now. So, transformation is possible when they yield to God's Spirit. Since beliefs determine behavior, it is important to teach the following. *They must believe in the triune God, and in what God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit has done for them, can do for them, and will do for them. Your children need to know God is on their side, has the power to protect them, and has equipped them to do great work*. Character is our foundation for all decisions, attitudes, and actions.

One goal in character development is *being*, so one positively impacts culture. Koch reminds the reader that change is a process that requires working at growth. Habits are easier to form when parents begin early in life. *Teaching from nothing is easier than teaching from a bad foundation*. It is more important that a child lives out the character, not merely has it. It also is important which kind of character (e.g., mature vs immature, healthy vs unhealthy, complete vs growing). This must be a priority in parenting. Three character traits are necessary: gratitude, joy, and self-efficacy. With the Bible as the standard, and Biblical character inside, children will be able to use their character now to change their culture.

Character leads to obedience, as pointed out by Koch. Children must understand expectations and learn rules, not only what they are, but why they exist and how to follow them. This helps explain the connection between character and obedience. *Modeling, teaching, and reteaching character will decrease disobedience and increase heart-centered obedience*. Some recommendations include: being God-centered, studying God's Word, and engaging with godly people. This leads to a transition from legalism (*I have to…*) to being (*I am a person who does…*). This will reinforce Biblical character development.

Koch uses a pyramid to provide suggestions for choosing particular qualities. The base foundation is security, with the next levels of identity, belonging, purpose, and competence at the apex. The elements will be important in who the children become and what they can accomplish. *You and your children will be healthiest and most mature when you personally know, prioritize, believe in, and trust God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit*. The role of technology becomes important, making somethings easier, but may lead to self-centeredness.

Becoming like Christ is essential to Biblical character. Koch guides parents to teach students to Christ, His teaching, and His interactions with others. She also recommends learning about Bible heroes as examples. The role of God's truth is present in Micah 6:8, II Peter 1:5-8, Matthew 5:3-12 (the Beatitudes), 13-16, 21-48, and Galatians 5:22-23 (fruit of the Spirit). These provide a Biblical worldview that will change you and your children.

The foundational beliefs that are essential are presented to provide a framework for working with your children. These include God's Word, faith in Christ, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and the empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Jesus believed children are worth blessing. So, He spent time with them. Other foundational beliefs include parents (and parenting), learning, change, and character. The concept that *we want children to **use** character and not just **have** character* is central.

Several strategies for teaching character are given by Koch. One is to make it a priority. In addition for the parents, personally learning to depend on God will model what you are desiring in your children. This will help *teach them how to recognize and respond to the Holy Spirit's leading*. They need to see you acting with Biblical character. For example, ***You're kind because it's who you are, not just what you do***. You need remind them that character development is a choice that is repeated over and over. You should compliment and correct as appropriate. Allow consequences to teach lessons as well. Remind them that character is a choice, and choices have consequences. Meaningful conversations are helpful, especially as a child ages. Look intentionally for teachable moments. Point out the relationships between the various character traits.

The appendix includes a list of 48 healthy qualities and their opposites. These provide a reference for understanding where your child has strengths and where growth is needed. They may help you know how to evaluate where your child is in the maturation of character.

Koch's *Parent Differently* provides many insights that will assist parents in having specific ways of thinking and working with their children to develop Biblical character. These thoughts also will help parents learn to model the same character.