



# The Virtues and Character Development Project

*The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.*

I Thessalonians 5:24

## Position/perspective paper

A significant portion of the thinking presented here arises from *The Virtues*, by Jennifer Herdt

[Global Faculty Initiative ([https://www.facultyinitiative.net/content\\_item/389](https://www.facultyinitiative.net/content_item/389))]

The goal of *The Virtues and Character Development Project* is to produce resources that will enable parents to guide their students in the development of habits that lead to Christ-like character. These will be shared through churches, Christians schools, and homeschool groups. Since character is formed through one's lifetime, these resources will be created for use with K-12 students, college and university students, and professional school students.

Character is defined as the nature within an individual that enables that person to live out the actions needed for the common good, i.e., in society. This results when the virtues, i.e., life habits, are performed repeatedly over time until they become second nature. At this point, the virtue has become part of one's character. The development of good character enables one to flourish in the community and society. Since these virtues arise from one's relationship with God, they are gifts of grace and merely not the product of human effort.

While it is common to focus on legalism, i.e., following rules that form a code of conduct, character formation rightly understood goes far beyond this to enable a person to act well in each situation for the common good, i.e., the good of the community. The person with good character thinks, feels, desires, judges, and responds in ways that are appropriate to each life situation.

It is increasingly evident that the conversation about virtues needs to have a biblical foundation to be effective. Thus, the goal is Christ-like character. Furthermore, each virtue addresses a particular problem, either to be resolved or to be avoided. For example, humility is necessary to counter the problem of pride in the lives of individual and in the culture. This insight leads to the need for the project to explore each virtue and answer the question, *what problem does this virtue resolve or avoid?* In essence, virtues are a means through which God is able to work in the lives of individuals, and the community, to build relationships that bring about flourishing.

It is important to note that, while everyone is developing character through one's lifetime as a result of each life experience, thus both good and bad character are possible, the purpose of this project is to develop good (i.e., godly) character. It is for this reason, i.e., that character formation continues throughout lifetime, that the resources will be developed for all levels (K-12, college and university, and professional school). Since most students complete their formal education at roughly the stage in life when they begin to become parents, it is anticipated that the many years spent developing virtues will be transferred to their own students as part of their parenting. Thus, the project transcends generations.

Since character formation occurs in community, three specific types of community will be the focus of the dissemination of the resources: family, church, and school. In these settings, parents will be able to learn what resources are available, as well as gaining insight into how to

explain the reasons why the virtues matter. This is intended to demonstrate that parents will need to work consistently with their students in these activities. This will help them recognize that character development involves peaks and valleys, i.e., progress and regression, throughout one's lifetime. This also will provide an opportunity to understand that the virtues are interconnected, i.e., one does not reach maturity without growth in all the virtues. Therefore, the tendency to focus on only a few virtues in one's life will be reduced.

It is important to emphasize that godly character arises from transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit, just as occurs in the fruit of the Spirit. It is not the result of merely human effort. While the role of parents is considered as essential, the involvement of the various communities will be vital to the overall success. The guidance given by parents and other authorities in the life of an individual contributes to the inward transformation in which the person has moved past merely a code of conduct into a life of actions that are motivated by a heart that is centered on others. Therefore, this venture is a life-long journey.