

## **Character Trait for July, 2013 is DISCRETION**

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The character trait of the month is “Discretion.” It is defined as “a well-researched decision regarding what is appropriate and what is inappropriate in a given situation, and then acting on that conclusion to choose only the acceptable words and/or actions”. It’s important to note that words or actions deemed acceptable in one set of circumstances might be completely inappropriate in another. Learning the difference between those differing environments takes more than just knowledge – it takes wisdom (in other words, making practical applications of truth in daily decisions). Successfully exercising discretion includes employing many other positive character traits one has developed – like self-control, respect, good judgment, and civility – to avoid saying or acting on first impulse. The good thing, though, is that when you learn “prudence” in the everyday situations discretion becomes a mighty tool at your disposal in developing strong, nurturing social settings and in relationship building with others.

A person who utilizes discretion often recognizes that taking something at “face value” is not always a good idea. Sometimes it is better to think things through and apply both knowledge and sound judgment to situations before acting on them.

Using discretion is not always easy or “the popular action to take” – especially when dealing with certain “in crowd” groups and cliques which form in just about every social setting there is. Sometimes it takes great courage to act on what we know is the right thing to say or do, rather than go along with the crowd, or join in with the “political correctness” which seems to be so prevalent these days. Many people are coerced into going along with a certain way of thinking because most folks don’t want to be considered “different” than others around them. They want to “fit in” and be considered a part of “the group”. It takes great courage (another positive character trait!) to walk away from invitations to “join in” with others – even when your brain is screaming at you to do so!

In the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes (Chapter 2), the author wrote “Wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness.” Shakespeare obviously understood this as well; for in his work *Henry IV*, Part 1, Falstaff declares, “The better part of valor is discretion.”

So how does one begin to utilize this important trait called discretion? According to an article which appeared in the online “Metro Family” Magazine in 2011, the beginning of successful use of discretion includes starting with “I will” statements:

- I will choose my words carefully
- I will practice good manners
- I will listen to what others have to say
- I will not make fun of others

- I will turn down any invitation to do wrong

(Parents can easily “grow” this list and add their own “I will” statements for their children according to their own ideas and beliefs on character traits they are interested in their children learning.)

When we use discretion and think before we speak and choose our words carefully, we are less likely to hurt someone’s feelings. When we use discretion and think before we act, we are less likely to get ourselves into difficult situations with others, or create angry confrontations. Discretion does not require us to change our own beliefs or standards for living when talking or taking actions around others; it does require us to have respect for thoughts and beliefs of others in everyday life and allows us the luxury of offering – and receiving – respect in the communication processes of life.

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