

Joyfulness – Opelika’s Character Trait of the Month for December, 2013

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The Character Trait for the month of December in Opelika is *Joyfulness*. The definition of joyfulness is this: a good attitude, even when faced with unpleasant conditions; a state of well-being and contentment that comes from faith, inner strength and getting ones priorities in order. The state of joyfulness does not equate with the absence of sorrow – but rather it includes peace of heart even in the darkest times of one’s life.

Joyfulness should not be equated with the sentimentality of emotions, but should be more likened to a determination of one’s spirit. That’s because our daily emotions are most often “manufactured” by circumstances or settings. Things such as music, movies, and tear-jerking stories, which fill us with an overwhelming sense of passion and emotions of sentiment, can give us this type of “temporary feeling”. (A great example of this would be the Hallmark Movies we watch throughout the year. We *know* things are going to “work out” by the end of the movie; and yet we watch until the end of the story, and are left with the feeling of complete happiness by the end!) The trouble with these “simulated” emotions, though, is that they disappear when the next situation creates a new emotional set of circumstances. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this kind of sentiment, as long as we “get” that it’s only temporary! But, as author Marianne Williamson says of joyfulness. “Joy is what happens to us when we allow ourselves to recognize how good things really are.”

Like with many of the “intangible” Character Traits, joyfulness grows inside each of us the more we choose to live and operate our lives with joy in us. In fact, as author Angel Chernoff states in her online Blog on “Practical Tips for Productive Living” points out, “*Who we are makes a difference. The way we treat others matters. The decency or indecency that fills our hearts and minds matters....but not all character traits are created equal, at least not insofar as happiness is concerned.*” The traits which, she states, works solidly with the character trait of Joyfulness, to help all of us build the strongest impact for living a happy, joyful life include:

1. Courage – which is the resistance and mastery of fear, not the absence of it;
2. Patience – which is waiting; but not passively. Real patience is more like when one keeps on going when the going is hard and slow.
3. Gratitude – which changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy (D. bonhoeffer)
4. Love –the kind that drives out hate
5. Forgiveness – to willingly make the choice to set aside the wounds caused by others and finding peace in your heart.

Some of the greatest ideas we can teach our children about joyfulness are the following:

1. Joy develops from understanding that *we* are not the “center of the world” but a part of a greater, beautiful creation; and it’s just as important to give back to our surroundings as much as it is to take from them. And when we do that, we add to the “good days” of those around us and that gives us a real sense of accomplishment.
2. Joy grows from the confidence we acquire when we learn that “who we are” is actually perfect! As the Bible says in the Old Testament Book of Psalms, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (139:14) Teaching our children that while we might not look like each other, speak like each other, or have the same abilities and gifts as each other, it doesn’t mean someone else is better than us! It just means we all have our own “uniqueness” and that in itself should be appreciated and even celebrated!
3. Joy grows not from all that we receive in life but in what we are able to give to others to put a smile on their faces and in their hearts.
4. Joy grows from knowing that even when bad days come, they will also go away; and we, having lived through them, still have things we can be grateful for, always!

We know that we have developed the strong foundation of joyfulness when things outside our ability to control no longer have the power to rob us of the joyfulness we’ve chosen and nurtured in our lives. A joyful heart rejoices at the possibilities of life even on bad days. It’s what keeps us going even when times grow “trying”. And once we have accomplished that delightful inner character trait, we are well on our way to having joyfulness in our lives always and finding happiness because of it.

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