

# Principles for Transformation: Connecting Personal and Public Life

## Four Tips for Cultivating Character

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Last month we looked at the importance of cultivating character to impacting culture. A revival of character can lead to a renewal of culture. But how do we cultivate such character? There is a saying:

*Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.*

Let's look at each of these in turn, and what they mean for us spiritually as we [seek to transform](#) our homes, offices, schools, and communities.

### **Sow a Thought, Reap an Act**

Deciding what goes into our minds is the beginning of dealing with character. The Bible has a lot to say about the importance of our thoughts. Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 to "be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

A first step in our transformation involves rejecting those thoughts from the cultural environment around us that are opposed to Christ. Rather than being conformed to these patterns of thinking, we ought to pursue the [renewing of our minds](#).

In Matthew 12:34, Jesus says,

*...the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*

The treasure of good thoughts filling the heart spills over into good words and good actions. Thus, we need to guard our hearts and minds because out of these come our words and actions.

## **Sow an Act, Reap a Habit**

When we do act rightly and continue that pattern, virtues are formed. We can look at certain people – co-workers or leaders, for example – and know they are reliable.

On the other hand, when we act wrongly and persist in that behavior, it becomes a vice. Bad habits can easily be stopped in their beginnings. However, the more they are practiced, the stronger they become.

In the beginning, bad habits are like cobwebs. They're sticky and unpleasant, but easily broken. If not resisted, though, these behaviors can become chains that bind us.

It's important to see how our thoughts lead to actions, which then turn into habits.

## **Sow a Habit, Reap a Character**

Hebrews 5:14 describes the process from thought to character in a nutshell. It reads,

*But solid food is for the mature, who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*

First, we must take in solid food, not milk – meaning in-depth teaching rather than just the basics. Second, these thoughts need to not just stay in the mind. They need to be [put into practice](#), so good habits are formed and wisdom is developed. Then our senses will be trained to “discern good and evil.”

We need solid biblical content and regular practice of it in order for character and wisdom to be produced.

## **Sow a Character, Reap a Destiny**

Character flaws often profoundly affect a person's future. A wrong word or phrase has destroyed the careers of media personalities, politicians, and businessmen and women. There is a saying that warns,

*A slip of the tongue leads to a slip of the mind, which leads to a slip of the soul.*

Something slips out of the tongue, and, because of pride, has to be rationalized and justified (the “slip of the mind”). That very denial of our original mistake leads to our “slip of the soul.”

The [C.S. Lewis Institute](#) used to have a summer program on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. I noticed two problems with the property that we struggle with in our own lives:

- Erosion: Around the edge of the property was built a sea wall consisting of large rocks. The owner of the property next door did not install a sea wall and lost about five acres or more of valuable land to the bay. When we neglect time in scripture and in prayer, we do not always see or feel the immediate consequences. It may take time before the erosion is evident. But sooner or later, the house will fall into the bay.

- Silt: Large boats used to be able to come right up the channel and dock in the harbor. However, because of silt accumulation, the channel needs to be dredged, a difficult and expensive proposition. There can be similar accumulation of silt in our lives, muddying the waters and making it hard for us to see clearly. Periodically, we need to dredge the channel so that clear water can flow again and we can restore clear communication with our Lord.

If we want to cultivate character in ourselves and our communities, we have to start with our thoughts and resolve to act in a different manner.

*Lord, help us face defects in our character and resolve to deal with them starting in our thoughts and acts.*