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What's in a name?

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A good name is more desirable than great riches;
To be esteemed is better than silver or gold. (NIV)
Proverbs 22:1

Introduction

What do people think of when they hear your name? Do they associate you with greatness, honesty, kindness? Do they think of you with affection? Do people want to be close to you, work alongside you? When friends have a special event planned, do they call you to join them? Do they long for your company? Do you attract people to yourself?

Or, in contrast, when people hear your name, do they think of you with fear, resentment, bitterness? Do they associate you with impatience, laziness, rudeness? Do they talk about your faults? Do they condemn your actions and judge your behavior?

The concept of names

The concept of a name is much

more than the name we are given at birth. When the Bible says "a good name is more desirable than great riches," it is not talking about the name that our parents, grandparents, or priests chose for us at birth, or our family name, which we have inherited from our ancestors. This would not be fair, since we could not have chosen our given name or even the family name that we were born into. So, what is the Bible talking about?

"Name," as suggested in Proverbs 22:1, means so much more than our given name or family name. It's meaning is actually rooted in our character, in our reputation and in who we are as a person.

The power of names

When people hear your name, they automatically start associating you

with difference characteristics; they automatically start thinking of you in either a positive or negative way. It is hard for us to think about this when it comes to our own name, but it is easy to understand this when we think of other people's names. For example, when you hear the name Hitler, what do you think about? What do you associate his name with? How is he remembered? On the other hand, when you think of Mother Teresa, what do you think about? How does her name make you feel? What words would you use to describe her?

Just like the names Hitler or Mother Teresa have the power to trigger an emotion or impression in our hearts and minds, so do our names trigger emotions and impressions on others. Actually, others' impressions of who we are say much more about our true selves than the impression that we have of ourselves. We are pretty biased! We often like ourselves too much. We tend to see more faults in others than we do in ourselves. We tend to justify our poor performance, by saying things like: "Oh, I was tired." Or "Oh, I wasn't feeling well that day, so that is why I acted that way...", but when people make mistakes (even when the mistakes are the same as the ones we are guilty of ourselves), we often become judgmental and get upset. We do not try to justify their ac-

tions like we did ours: seeing the faults as One-time-mistakes. Instead, we assume that their behavior is simply a reflection of the way they are. We easily say things like: "They are lazy.", "They are always late.", "They never reply to e-mails.", "They do not have good manners!", "They are insecure.", etc.

Is it not interesting that we often use different standards to measure ourselves compared to the standards we use to measure others? The truth is that the impression people have of ourselves is clearly seen when they hear our name.

Building a good reputation

Think about the different brands of products you often buy, such as brands of tennis shoes, food items, electronics, clothes, etc. Think about the brands that you really like. When you hear the name of the brand, you might have such great thoughts about the company and its products. At the same time, there are those brands that we are always trying to avoid! Brands that we do not associate with quality and reliability, brands that we do not trust. When you see such brands, don't you want to stay away from them? Don't you avoid buying their products? Why is it so? It is simply because you do not trust their

name. The brand's name is its character, its reputation. With time, every brand can make a name for itself, and that name is either seen positively or negatively.

However, a good name takes a long time to build. A good brand also takes much time and effort to show itself as reliable. It might take years! But even after building such great reputation, it only takes a simple one-time mistake to see everything come tumbling down. One fault can cause the collapse of a hugely successful brand. For example, famous and reliable car makers have taken years to build their name and gain customers' trust. But in recent years, we have seen how some car makers have caused controversy when it was found that faults in their cars caused fatal crashes, or faked test results demonstrated a higher safety rate or eco-friendliness than the product could actually provide. Customers were shocked and started questioning if they could trust the company again. When such things happen, what action is often taken by companies? Yes, recall. Companies often lose millions or billions of dollars by recalling faulty products. It costs them a lot of money, but it also hurts their pride. But still, in order to compensate for the damage to their name, they must invest in regaining customers' trust. If not, the future of the com-

pany becomes very uncertain, and most likely, quite risky. Continued trust in the company is crucial for its future business.

With us, humans, it is the same. With the passing of time, as we live in this world and interact within this society, as we build relationships and make connections with other people and groups, we are building our character, showing people who we really are. We are revealing our reputation with the decisions that we make in life. Sooner or later, people will start having an impression of who we are. That impression will either lift us up, or tear us down.

So, I ask again. What do people think of when they hear your name? This is something we must think about often.

Riches

In today's society, money is so important. Everyone seems to be so concerned about accumulating riches, saving money, guaranteeing a stable job, investing in stocks, and so on, in order to see an expansion in one's financial assets. But in the search for riches and in the pursuit of material things, humans often lose character. Many times, they see themselves having to cheat or lie in order to benefit financially. But is it any good destroying your name, or reputation, in order to

accumulate riches? What good is in the silver or gold, if they make you a liar, a cheater, a proud and selfish person? Will you enjoy life when you look around you and notice that you are alone, or that those who know you look at you with bitterness and resentment?

We all know that riches come and go. The economy is not solid. It is very unstable. Even the biggest companies can suddenly announce bankruptcy and even the richest men can lose everything from night to day. On the other hand, our character follows us forever. If you have a good character, your reputation will call people and blessing towards you. You will naturally attract people's favor. And of course, you will attract God's favor, because God honors the righteous. God also measures us by what other people think of us. Why? Because it is impossible to please God and offend people at the same time. If you are pleasing God and following His teachings, then, you will naturally be pleasing others too.

God's greatest commandment is that we love God with all of our heart, mind and soul, and that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This means that we should show love and respect to people around us, and treat them just like we would like to be treated ourselves.

Summary

A good reputation is possible to create. But, of course, dirty, unrighteous people will not like it. Many people and situations will come our way in an attempt to make us fall. So, we must be strong in our desire to be good, to honor God, to build a good name for ourselves. We must make wise choices daily!

"A good name is more desirable than great riches;

To be esteemed is better than silver or gold." (NIV)

The Bible verse above has two phrases. In each phrase, there is a choice and a condition being made. It is our choice to build a good reputation and to have the approval of others. "To be esteemed" means to have people's favor. Both of these are choices we should make. Both are priorities. Both are measures of success.

What lesson can we learn from the Bible? It is that we should put much emphasis on building a good reputation and making meaningful relationships. While many people chase nothing but financial gain and professional success, we should choose to chase a good reputation because even if we lose all of our possessions, a good reputation would help us to gain it all

back. It would attract people's favor and God's favor towards us, and such favors can help restore and regain any materialistic form of success in this life.

Conclusion

So, what can you do to build a good name, have a good reputation, and gain the loving favor of others? Everything you do in life, no matter how big or small, is contributing to the development and formation of your character and reputation. Therefore, we must guard our steps, words, thoughts, and actions, very carefully. They are shaping our character and giving people a good or bad impression of who we really are. It is important for us to be gentle, kind, patient, loving, caring, honest, modest, careful, respectful . . . Have you been a blessing to others?

If you are young, you have an advantage. Your reputation is still being formed! Think about your attitudes, actions, friendships, values, time management, etc. In everything you do,

you can build a good reputation for yourself. Being young also allows you to be flexible and gives you a chance to make changes if you feel you can do better in certain areas. Choose, today, to make this Bible verse a goal in your life.

Your name and reputation are daily choices that should be your highest priority and your strongest goal in life. If more and more people in our society made the choice to build a good name and a good reputation for themselves, the world would be a much better place. Let us be the solution to the envy, jealousy, selfishness, greed, and pride of the world. Let us develop a good name and a good character that can give us wisdom and the favor of God in our lives. Let us be magnets that attract people towards us because of our good name and our positive aura.

What do people think of when they hear your name? I pray that they see the amazing person that God created you to be. God bless you!

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