



## **Reflections on keeping Character Values Strong**

*Putting Christian Principles into practice through programs that build spirit, mind and body for all.*

The Character Values of Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility are made strong when they are anchored in a biblical framework and Christian understanding. By detaching the four Character Values from the Christian Mission that brings them meaning opens them up to be interpreted in different ways.

This is particularly true when the new highest value of society is the “new tolerance” and when the philosophy of the “new” tolerance has become the highest value of an organization. The “new” tolerance can sometimes be rather intolerant and demand that all other values submit to it. This in turn has the effect of either formally or informally changing the meaning of the YMCA character development values. To keep the mission strong and the Character Values robust we must at least be aware of this potential. Consider these examples.

- Example – Biblical Respect means – to be kind or pleasant even if you disagree with the person or their choices. Respect redefined means – you must accept me, my lifestyle and my choices as equally as valid as yours.
- Example – Biblical Caring means - to show compassion on others and to care for them and confront them when needed. Caring redefined means – accept me, care for me, but don't tell me anything I do not want to hear. In other words keep it to yourself if you do not agree with my moral choices that may have gotten me into this mess.
- Example – Biblical Responsibility means – to live up to an objective standard or moral code like hard work, sacrifice, moral purity, honor, etc.. Responsibility redefined means- to live up to my own moral code on what I define as hard work, sacrifice, moral purity, honor, etc..
- Example – Biblical Honesty means – to be honest in our dealings, to have an honest assessment of ourselves, to speak the truth to others in love. Honesty redefined means – to be honest as best I can but if the cause is worthy the rules can be bent or broken, I will define what honesty means to me, and since there is no objective standard don't you pretend to have any truth for my life.

Frequently, people will say that each of these attributes are common among all the worlds religions and that is what will define them. Yes these themes are there in most world religions, but they are not necessarily defined with the same rigor in each case. So just be aware of this.

We hope that the four character values (the 5<sup>th</sup> being Faith in some associations) are inspiring and give people a standard to strive for and live up to. We maintain this possibility by constantly defining them and challenging people to live up to them. And we need to confidently know they are indeed rooted in Christian principles that when they are put into practice build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.