

Note: The following is the introduction from *Doing Business with God: Building Character with Grace* by R. John Benoit with Ken Walker. Published as an e-book by the author in February of 2017.

The Alpha

My journey of “doing business with God” began one day during my quiet time. Although telling God the Father that I felt encouraged by all that I saw Him doing through me and around me, I had to confess some frustration was still nipping at my heels. Several challenges greeted me as I launched a new business venture. Not so much with strategy, but difficulty trying to resolve personality differences with various personnel.

Wondering if a lack of faith lay at the root of my failure, I repented to the Lord for this shortcoming. However, as I listened for His still small voice, I sensed Him saying, “You are not lacking in faith. You are lacking in *character*, in specific areas. These weaknesses cause your flesh to rise up instead of your faith. The weakness is not faith; it is the dominance of your flesh. Continue to build your character each day.”

The Lord has a way of getting me to recognize truths that might otherwise prompt protests or retaliation against the messenger. I thanked Him for loving me enough to tell me something I needed to hear. Indeed, it is much easier to hear and obey God in my prayer closet than to think about gaining status without character—inevitably leading to a fall and seeing my mistakes plastered all over the media.

This chastening didn’t surprise me. Three days earlier I had what I believed to be a divinely-inspired dream. Near the end of it, someone accused me, and maligned my character. In the dream I responded, “The Apostle Paul was the same way.”

It was a strange response so upon awakening, I immediately sought the Lord’s direction. The Holy Spirit led me to Acts: “Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Through that verse I felt the Lord calling me to go into my areas of influence in business, education, and government. I felt Him saying, “Your character is much like Paul’s, full of determination and resolve to accomplish the high calling I have for you. And likewise, he started as the least, but was steadfast, faithful, and obedient until the end. He was humble because he knew that it was My favor, grace, and revelation that allowed him to be anything. You are like that, too. You know your Source.”

While I didn't grasp all the details, I knew God would "set me up" to take my character to a higher level. He would prepare me for greater things to come, to walk in a greater measure of grace, and to advance His kingdom in ways that would demand a higher level of integrity. I believed the Lord would establish me on a firm footing if I sought to grow into a closer image of His likeness.

Around this time, I received a call from my good friend Gail at the La Red Business Network, (<http://www.lared.org/principles/>) inviting me to take the GEI ([http://internationalgei.com/Global Entrepreneurs Institute](http://internationalgei.com/Global%20Entrepreneurs%20Institute)) course. "Hey, John! What are your thoughts about taking the GEI one-year character development program?" Immediately, I felt like the Lord was speaking to me, continuing our previous dialogue. She continued, "It includes reading and discussing forty La Red principles in a roundtable meeting, as well as completing homework, four book reports, and a final dissertation. A coach from GEI would come alongside you during this process."

With great joy she continued to inform me that the material reviews a series of ten lessons each on four major themes, created by La Red founder John Schrock: self-government, productivity, management, and leadership.

Between what I felt like I just heard from God and my kind friend's invitation, the timing seemed perfect, so I agreed. Shortly thereafter, I identified an accountability partner to join me on this journey.

Soon after we started the program, I felt attacks strike me with the force of lightning bolts. I found myself surrounded by people who suddenly proved unreliable, regularly saying one thing and doing another. And I needed these people to accomplish my goals. Feeling intense emotional pressure, I recognized the need to reformat my communications, expectations, and frankly, my character. The journey ahead didn't look like much fun, a foreboding that proved accurate, but profitable.

Reflecting at the end of that year, I felt as if I had taken on the role of a living epistle. Like an actor in a La Red play, I felt as though my circumstances closed in, each week, in such a way that I felt the full weight of a particular La Red teaching. The Lord had His way in transforming and renewing my mind as I voluntarily said, "Search me O God and know my heart and see if there are any unclean ways in me."

Indeed, each principle accomplished the goal which God had set. The La Red principles and the GEI coaching process reminded me of the Bible verse in Isaiah 55:11 "So shall My word

be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

I had to follow the refrain of the old hymn, *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*: “No turning back. No turning back.” No matter what the circumstances surrounding me, I knew I needed to walk in integrity, maintain pure motives, and develop high levels of character to fulfill the God given assignments in front of me. While this is what the Lord taught me, I didn’t learn without feeling stretched.

Despite the grueling and challenging nature of this journey, I loved it. The Lord Jesus set up a series of tests that propelled me to higher levels of discovering His character and nature. On a practical basis, this meant working through confrontations, criticisms, productivity problems, and leadership challenges, including dealing with a series of outright-defiant people known as “passive aggressives.”

Any leader who has maneuvered their way through these kinds of struggles knows they are only pleasant when examined in the rear-view mirror. Yet because of these challenge, I matured as a leader. When we open ourselves to learning and growth, God is faithful to take us to the next level of Christ-likeness, in holiness, righteousness and grace. The Holy Spirit is in charge as He guides us into all truth. The Word is sharper than any two-edged sword and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Character development is for courageous leaders who are willing to “deal with their stuff.” These principles will help leaders face the truth about simple concepts that are often quite painful to implement. Reviewing them will fast track self-improvement and a sense of purpose. Not with the benefit of some artificial, human-centered self-help philosophy, but through the wisdom of biblical principles and the Holy Spirit working from the inside out.

None of us is ever finished with this journey called life. But I believe the Lord is pleased with those who intentionally open their heart and let Him renew their minds, heal their thoughts, and improve their actions with a series of small steps.

I highly recommend that you experience the amazing support, encouragement, accountability and love of a GEI coach and the words of wisdom through its successful author John Schrock in these La Red principles. This is not a beat yourself up program of self-righteousness. It’s a program where the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth, and the teachings reveal areas that need sanctification.

Jesus shared His love language with these words, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and We will come to them and make Our home with them.” (John 14:23). How glorious is the reward of obeying His teachings? I hope my reflections will help you learn and implement God’s truths in your own life. I hope my authenticity and transparency will inspire courage to complete the good work He has started.

I guarantee this La Red/GEI journey will add great value to your life. Ask the Holy Spirit if He wants you to improve and change. Consider the counsel of King David to Solomon, “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished” (1 Chron. 28:20, NIV).

Put your seat belt on.