



## 6: Flipping the Character Coin

Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. Welcome to episode 6 of Praise Through It.



This is a podcast based on Philippians 4:8, which says finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Here, we practice seeing the praiseworthy side of our daily struggles. I'll offer a perspective that shifts our eyes from our daily grind, our daily struggles, to seeing the beauty in the mess, the order through the chaos, the glimmer of hope that inevitably shines. If that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.



Okay, today we are going to do some work. Will you do some work with me? You can just listen while we do the work, I promise.

Think of someone in your life that you love so much. A friend, a child, a spouse, a parent. Put them front-and-center in your mind. Now think of a character trait they have that drives you absolutely bananas. I mean, when this person does this thing or says this thing you're as good as driven up the nearest wall. Okay, got it? Now, we're going to do what I call Flip the Character Coin - take that character trait and think about how it translates over to something you love about them. Let me explain.

We've all heard the adage, there are two sides to every story. That's kind of how I like to think about character traits, there are two sides to every character trait. And I call it Flip the Character Coin.

I was a school counselor for 9 years in the previous act of my life before podcasting and writing. At the beginning of that career I had the pleasure of teaching pre-k at a center in Savannah, Georgia. It was focused on learning through play. It was the best. The very best. There are so many moments I still remember 13 years later, but one of my favorites is from when a group of boys was arguing. They couldn't agree on who should have what role in whatever they were playing. I brought one of them inside to talk to him and I said, "Buddy, what's going on?" And he said, "I just want all the power in the world."

First of all, don't we all? Even if we don't say it out loud, we all definitely act it from time to time, or all the time depending on your personality. Second of all, he was acting on only one side of a character coin, the domineering and controlling side instead of the leadership side. To be fair, he was four. He wasn't doing anything wrong; he was learning. But over time, to move him from controlling to leadership, his parents and his teachers would have to help him flip his character coin, because domineering and leadership can be two sides of the same coin. I recently saw on social media that he recently helped his mom get rid of a poisonous snake on their front porch, so it's worked to some capacity at least, and I'm sure more than that. He has wonderful parents.

We have all heard the term hangry. I don't remember if it came into play from a Snickers commercial. I feel like I can see it written on a Snickers wrapper. But we've all heard it - hungry and angry meshed into one very accurate description of a mood. And when we encounter a hangry individual in our household, it's a good idea to feed them rather than scold them. I have coined another term in my household because I can honestly say my daughter doesn't get hangry, but she definitely gets tangry, tired and angry. She even asked me one time--Mama, why does tiredness go along with angriness? In this case, when we encounter someone who is tangry, it is better to get that tangry person to rest instead of trying to get them to happily comply to all of our requests.

In a book called *The Whole Brain Child*, an easy read that teaches us what a child's brain is going through as it grows, this principle is called parenting to the state - the tired, instead of the trait - the angry. Being tired is a temporary state of self, and while being angry can also be considered a state because the emotions come and go, but we tend to talk about it and treat it in terms of it being a character trait. So we tend to the state - the tired, instead of the trait - the angry.

If we translate this to interacting with our grown-up people, we know that we can feed people instead of scolding them for being cranky. We can get them to a comfy chair instead of asking more of them when they're tired. We can tend to the frustration and sadness of an apologetic friend who is thirty minutes late rather than complaining that they're perpetually late.

That one sentence -- tending to the state of a person instead of the trait of a person -- has helped me keep my parenting and my wife-ing calmer than it would have been in some circumstances. And beyond my home, tending to people's states and considering their flipped character coin has upped my empathy, it has kept some relationships intact, and it's really given me the confidence to be who I am no matter what the other side is giving me.

Flipping the character coin is about seeing how I tend to be bossy and knowing that I have good leadership skills in there, too. Flipping the character coin is about my purely-motivated tendency to want to know everything; I'm an Enneagram 5 if that means anything to you. And how that can also sound like I'm interrogating and judging the object of my curiosity. Flipping the character coin is about how my tendency to be quiet and observant has made me look aloof and distant. Flipping the character coin is about how my husband's tendency to be an external processor gives the impression that he doesn't want to listen to or know about others, which is completely untrue. It's all part of the same coin, it just depends on how we flip it.

What some call too emotional or sensitive lives on the same coin as empathy and compassion. Asking questions that seem disobedient and disrespectful often lives on the same coin as harmless curiosity and creativity.

Passivity often lives on the same coin as appreciating and pursuing peacemaking.

Arrogance often lives on the same coin as confidence.

Delayed responses can often live on the same coin as being conscientious. I know seeing the word “typing” in WhatsApp or seeing those three little bubbles in Facebook messenger and on iPhones can be maddening. Let’s appreciate that they’re thinking about their words before sending them.

Fear can often live on the same coin as being wisely cautious.

Overbearing can often live on the same coin as guardianship.

Bulldozing can often live on the same coin as good leadership.

All of these character traits have alter-egos, and each side of these character traits exist in you and me and people we know. Saying “that’s not who I am” or “that’s not who they are” isn’t really a true statement because if it came out of us, it is a part of us. And I think we forget that, and then we punish each other for the sides of the character coin that we don’t like without considering that without *this* part of the person we wouldn’t have *that* part. And we love *that part*.

So when you or someone you know displays a character trait that’s frustrating, flip that coin over. When we consider a behavior, an action, a social media post, a text, an email, or a spoken word that we really don’t like, maybe we flip the character coin and wonder if this thing they said or did shows this trait we don’t like, but without *this* trait that we don’t like they wouldn’t have *that* trait that we do like.

When we’re raising our children, we consider these character coins and realize that if we want a confident daughter, we’ll have to teach through the bossy daughter.

We realize that if we want a son who is a leader, we’ll have to teach through the son who might get haughty and arrogant.

We realize that if we want the creative child, we’ll have to teach through the “But Mama!” child.

We realize that if we want the curious child, we will have to teach the order of “Obey and then ask”.

We realize that if we want the observant, watchful child, we won’t make a big, tragic deal of our quiet, seemingly non-participatory child.

And this is not about making your kids into who you want them to. It’s more about seeing who they are and seeing that both sides of the character coin have positives and negatives, and really -- it’s all about teaching the balance.

In our marriage, when we’re considering our spouse’s character and his or her actions, we take into account that if we cherish the leadership of our spouse, sometimes that’ll come out as bulldozing.

We consider that if we appreciate our social spouse who can make friends everywhere, we’ll put up with the spouse who talks incessantly thanks to that social butterfly part of their DNA.

We take into account that if we appreciate the confidence our spouse brings to the table, sometimes we put up with the overconfidence our spouse can display from time to time.

We take into account that if we love our spouse's curiosity when it comes to our interests, we check our attitude when that same character trait feels annoying or intrusive or untrusting. We take into account that they make a great parent because of their peaceful disposition, so we make sure that when they seem passive we don't scold them for not setting boundaries.

It's all about expressing what we need, and also showing grace and mercy.

In our friendships, when we're considering our friends' propensity for tardiness, maybe we also appreciate how thorough and present she is when she's arrived (because she was probably fully present wherever she came from, too).

We consider that our friend sometimes shares a little too quickly what she thinks about our choices, but we also appreciate that her honesty fosters trust.

We think about how our friend complains about everything that's wrong with a situation, and we appreciate that whatever she does is done with the utmost excellence.

We think about the friend who seems absent at every gathering and we might wonder if they're actually interested in being friends and spending time together, and we remember that she prefers writing to speaking and she writes the most thoughtful birthday cards.

It's all about giving each other the benefit of the doubt. And remembering that the doubt comes from our own built-in biases, thought patterns, and perspectives.

When we consider the arrogant surgeon, we're so grateful for their confidence while they're fishing around the inside of our body.

When we consider the self-righteous lawyer, we appreciate that they know their case and they will fight for it.

When we consider the seemingly passive school counselor, we appreciate their proclivity for peacemaking.

When we consider the co-worker who always asks for the attention, in deed if not in word, we appreciate that they also keep us laughing through the really tough days.

When we think about the client who takes eons to decide, we appreciate that they won't ask for a refund because they will have taken their sweet time in making that decision.

It's all about considering that we rarely see the whole of a person, and considering that there's likely more than what meets the eye. I know that that is an old saying, but there's a reason it's tried-and-true, because there is usually more than what meets the eye.

And I know those examples aren't perfect. I personally know humble surgeons and lawyers, overtly proactive school counselors, quiet co-workers, and people who know exactly what they want from their vendors. My goal is to get us thinking about how we can flip the character coin as we consider things about ourselves and our people that we don't like. How do those things we don't like translate over to something we do like? And if we have control of that individual--mostly ourselves and to some degree our children--how can we do the work to move from one side of the coin to the other? If we don't have control over that individual--mostly everyone else and to some degree our children--can we flip that coin on our own without getting into a tet-a-tet?

Dr. Caroline Leaf talks about this, too. She's a neuroscientist and she talks about Switching on the Brain. I talked about her in episode 5, too, and I will link her in the show notes. Switch On Your Brain comes from the idea that all of these character traits live within us; it's just a matter of what we switch on and off by our choices, our habits, the words we repeat out loud and to ourselves. All of that comes into play when we consider turning on and off these character traits, when we consider flipping the character coin.

My daughter and I were having a "special" talk. Yes I put that in quotations. If you're a parent you know exactly what I'm saying. I told her my expectation for her behavior. She was laying in my lap and she looked up at me and said, "Mama, I'd like to tell you something. Nobody is perfect."

I couldn't help but giggle. She's right. None of us is perfect. We work toward becoming whole by being life-long learners of ourselves, but in that work we're going to make mistakes. Sometimes we're going to show the wrong side of the coin. What we need is the willingness of one another to see that, to act on the compassion and the benefit of our own doubt. What we need is to live by Ralph Waldo Emerson's words: Treat a man as he could be and he will become as he should be.

This week, may you be given the benefit of someone flipping the character coin on you when you're not at your best, and may you extend the grace just the same.



Thank you for listening to episode 6 of Praise Through It.

I love connecting here with you every two weeks. If you ever want to connect beyond your speakers or your earbuds, I'm mostly on Instagram as myself, Elisa Preston. You can also find me at [elisapreston.com](http://elisapreston.com). I'm still doing daily Lent reflections through Easter morning if you're looking for something to wrap up the season-- you can find in the show notes and under the blog on my website. I'll also put the link in the show notes. You'll also find more about my books, speaking at your event, and some fun extras. I do love one-to-one chats. If you ever want to say hi or tell me about something an episode made you think of, you can send a message to [hello@elisapreston.com](mailto:hello@elisapreston.com) - I'm always up for that. I've created public playlists on both Spotify and Apple Music if you'd like a Praise Through It soundtrack to go about your day. Just search the title of this podcast, Praise Through It, on either app under their Playlist feature.



So, today is right around the anniversary when our entire lives shifted. Last week and this week contain significant anniversaries for what would become 2020. The 2020 you see in all the memes. Last week and this week contain anniversaries for school closings, businesses shutting their doors--some for awhile, some forever. Anniversaries for nursing home regulations changing, life-altering events that we didn't see coming until they were on our doorstep.

I thought about talking about that today but I kept with this Flip the Character Coin and here's why: who you have been this last year does not define who you are. I'm gonna say that again: who you have been this last year does not define who you are. The character traits that bubbled to the surface and poured out of you, out of all of us, while we dealt with personal and collective trauma - they do not define you. Every fit of rage you felt or expressed, every ounce of depression you felt or sunk into, every bit of agitation and arrogance and resistance you had and showed to the world these last twelve months -- they do not define you. Those feelings and traits are not the sum of who you are. It's just one side of a two-sided coin.

If you're looking for resources to continue healing from the collective trauma of the last 12 months, I'll be linking some of my favorite sources and follows in the show notes. Life can be messy and chaotic and hard, we can see that side, and *together*, we can find the glimmers of light that shine through our everyday. No rose-colored glasses, but true things that bring hope and joy and peace.

Thanks for listening. I'll see you next time for another episode of Praise Through It.