

LEADING LIKE JESUS 3

THE CHARACTER OF A LEADER

Character and Christlikeness are far more important attributes of an effective leader than is anointing or giftedness. The New Testament constantly stresses character and holiness over ability. (e.g. **Titus 1:6-9**) If we aspire to leadership, then we will want to work hardest at developing our character. It is easier to equip and train a person of character than it is to instil character into a supremely talented person.

'It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God!' (Robert Murray McCheyne - Journal 2/10/1840)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CHARACTER'?

Character is the substance of who we are. The word derives from a Greek word for an engraver's stamp; character is that which is stamped upon us, that which shapes us.

Character is life lived in relationship with God; it is about being the person God intends you to be for the sake of the people whom God brings across your path. People of character become leaders whether they hold a position of leadership or not. (Walter Wright)

Character reveals itself:

- In the small things; how we treat people on a day to day basis
- When under pressure, when the mask slips and the real me surfaces
- When in private, when there isn't an audience to play to.
How do my children and my partner see me?

'Character is who you are when no-one else is looking' (Bill Hybels)

The deepest revelation of our character is what we choose to dwell on in thought, what constantly occupies our mind. (Dallas Willard – Divine Conspiracy)

WHY IS ALL THIS SO IMPORTANT?

- *We are called to a holy life* **I Peter 1:15-16**
Character is important because we want to please God.
- *People won't follow those they can't trust.* Those who have no integrity will have little credibility.
- *People will model themselves on us.*
They will take their lead from us. The character of our Cells etc. will be shaped by our own character. Our own characters will have been formed, for better or worse, by those who have been influential people in our own lives. As we will see, this is why one key element in good character formation is devoting time to hanging out with Jesus and with those who are serious about imitating him.
- *Only those with Christlike character will be able to withstand the pressures of ministry and leadership*
The study and practice of leadership begins with our interior life - it is our own identity and self-understanding that influences all other leadership behaviours and relationships. Without an adequate 'ascetic' the best of talents and best of intentions cannot prevent a thinning out into a life that becomes mostly impersonation (Eugene Peterson)
- *Character issues nearly always lie at the root of leaders going off the rails or burning out.*
If we do not grow in godliness, cultivating good character traits, we will inevitably allow the opposite traits to grow in us. Power, wealth and popularity are the three most basic temptations which can easily draw us away from Jesus and render us ineffective.

'A weak person goes where he is smiled at' - African proverb

When you lust for power you are its slave. When you live for others you are a powerful servant of God. Only those who would live to serve can be trusted with the power of God. We seem to reverse this. We pray for God's power while we contemplate whether we will chose to serve God with our lives. But the power of God without the heart of God would result in unimaginable godlessness. God finds pleasure in entrusting His power to those who are serving him in their weakness. When you pursue power and prestige, you cease to pursue character. If your ambition is to be great in the sight of men, you are not pursuing greatness in the sight of God. Some things when pulled in combination will stop you in your tracks. (Erwin McManus)

- *It is very hard and emotionally destructive to live out a lie, pretending to be someone different from the character I really am.*

THE MARKS OF CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

Jesus consistently demonstrated holiness of character. No-one, not even his enemies, could ever accuse him of falling into sin or evil.

Vital character traits of a Christlike leader will always include:

- **Humility.**

- *Willingness to serve* **Philippians 2:5-11; John 13:1-17**

True authority is not found in titles, control, domination, manipulation etc. but in service.

The titles chosen by the early church to describe their leaders were ones which deliberately expressed not status nor exaltation, but service and humility.

- **Luke 22:24-27**

Thus we are prepared to press on even if we feel we lack affirmation or we are undervalued. The shepherds are there for the sheep. It is a position of responsibility and service, not status and power. The sheep do not exist for the shepherd; the shepherd was hired because of the sheep.

Leadership is about empowering, about adding value to others, and involves committing ourselves to the development of the potential in another.

Leadership in God's Kingdom is always about a downward rising. We are also called to clothe ourselves with humility. We are to relate to one another in such a way that the other is always valued above ourselves. Imagine a world where everyone competed to outserve the other. (Erwin McManus)

- *Willingness to receive the ministry of others* **Luke 7:36-50**

A leader is still one of the *laos* of God. We must be always ready and willing to receive from God through others. Great leaders are great followers. Receiving encouragement, prayer, instruction from others elevates the other to a place of worth and deflates our own sense of self-importance pride, and independence. Independence especially is a profoundly dangerous thing - it tends to promote independence from God.

- **Honesty (Acts 5:1ff)**

Especially about our faults and limitations. Show people that it is possible to grow through our mistakes and failings. Always be ready to apologise when we have got something wrong.

Vulnerability - being ready to admit need at the moment, rather than that which I have previously mastered.

'Many a man's reputation would not know his character if they met on the street.' - Elbert Hubbard

- **Compassion** **Matthew 9:35-8**

Whilst uncompromising about sin, Jesus' had a radical love for those caught up in sin and approached them with grace rather than condemnation **Luke 19, John 4**
'Leadership is for lovers of people'

We will seek to be gentle in our dealings with others **John 10:11ff**

- **Diligence** **Romans 12:8** **1 Cor 4:1-2**

Our only ambition is to see the Kingdom of God grow. We are Kingdom builders, not Empire seekers. Faithfulness to the Father, willingness to do what he is doing. Hard work and sacrifice.

- **Obedience to the Holy Spirit** **John 5:19; Acts 20:22**

Willingness to suffer for the Gospel and not to count the cost.

Submission is not about powerlessness; it is about meekness. To be meek is to have controlled strength. ..We cannot be entrusted with authority over others if we cannot be trusted to live under the authority of others. That's one reason why children who are never taught to honour and submit to their parents make such poor adults. (Erwin McManus – *Uprising*)

- **Integrity** **Matthew 19:16-26**

Jesus was always concerned with truth and was never deflected from God's right path. He never shrank from expressing God's challenge to others and facing others with God's absolute requirements. **Matthew 21:12-13 Hebrews 4:14-16**

Self Control (**1 Tim 3:2ff, 2 Tim 1:7**) is a key discipline to cultivate.

- **Courage** **John 16:33**

Courage is not an issue of birth, it is an expression of the heart. To be courageous is literally to be strong of heart. Courage is not absence of fear but absence of self.

One way to deal with our fears is to surround ourselves with security and predictability. We may look courageous when all we've done is minimise our risk.

The history of God's people is not a record of God searching for courageous men and women who could handle the task, but God transforming the hearts of cowards and calling them to live courageous lives.

- **Zeal/Passion (John 2:17)**

Passion for God and for his work is infectious. One of the greatest things we can kindle in others is true spiritual passion.

'I have a fear that the church in the West will disqualify itself from being a missionary-sending region by portraying to its membership a Christianity that is a nice religion but that lacks a radical edge.' (Ajith Fernando - *Jesus Driven Ministry*)

- **Generosity** **1 Thess 2:6-12** **Colossians 1:28-29** **Acts 1:3**

Leaders are 'other' focussed. They are never concerned to keep for themselves that which God has given to them but are always concerned to share it with others. Their longing is for others to grow in every way and their energies will be directed towards the development of others.

'Good leaders give away more than is humanly reasonable. This more than any other distinctive may be what marks out the character or different thinking of creative leaders.' (Martin Robinson – *'Invading Secular Space'*)

One of the keys to unlocking generosity is gratitude, thankfulness to God for his abundant grace expressed to us.

- **Perseverance** **Luke 19:11-27**

We must be aware that the small things matter. How we deal with the smaller issues gives an indication of whether we can be trusted with greater responsibility.

'We are not used to experiencing frustration and pain. So when we face such we tend to shrink from it. But frustration and pain are essential features of incarnational ministry.'
(Fernando 'Jesus Driven Ministry' p22)

We need to be dependable and committed, to be there for people for the long haul, no matter what happens in their lives. (Wright)

- **Forgiveness** **Colossians 3:12-14** **Matthew 6:12-15**

Relationships will at times be difficult and people will let us down. We oppose the world's values and resist the devil and his work by offering forgiveness and striving for reconciliation.

EXERCISE

- Reflect back on the list of leadership character qualities above. What has struck you most as we have gone through them?
- Which one or two qualities do you most want to see developed further in your own life?
- Pray for one another, laying on hands, and asking that God's Spirit would work these things out in our lives.

We do well, as leaders, to remember that each of us will, one day, have to give an account of ourselves to the Lord (**Romans 14:12**).

DEVELOPING CHARACTER

Character formation is one of God's greatest concerns for us. Like anything worth having, character is formed slowly and painstakingly. It is a partnership between ourselves, other people, and God in which we all have a part to play.

We have become a culture that diagnoses and medicates our children from a template that reduces antisocial behaviour rather than one that nurtures and develops the wholeness they need. It might be fair to say that we have given up on well-being. In the midst of our growing fragmentation we are more and more focussed on the individual. Narcissism is a life in which everything is about us. It may seem like a contradiction to say that we have given up on becoming genuinely whole and are consumed with lives that are about ourselves, but strangely these two go together. (Erwin McManus)

i) Our Part - Making time to be with God

The Biblical leader reveals a character shaped in relationship to God that spills over into all relationships. Such leaders live and model the kind of values that they would like to see expressed in the way the organisation or community conducts its corporate life. Leadership flows from character, and leaders add value to all of the relationships in which they are engaged; that is why people care about leadership. (Wright)

As we spend time with God so we begin to resemble him, to think and act like him and to rid ourselves of ungodly attitudes, habits, mindset and behaviour.

The more we allow the Spirit to fill our lives, the more we manifest his fruit, and the less place remains for ungodliness and negative attitudes.

ii) The role of others - Entering Accountability relationships (Hebrews 10:23-24)

- Some sins will only lose their hold over us when we confess them to someone else
- Openness to others facilitates openness to God
- Honesty and vulnerability are qualities to be cultivated
- Others have a responsibility to work with us in seeing our character shaped to the glory of God (**Matthew 7:3-5**). Often we need the help of others to see ourselves as we really are.

iii) God's part - Shaping us through adversity

The clear message of the Bible is that God's primary tool for shaping our character is allowing us to experience suffering and difficulty. This truth appears quite opaque to those of us who are shaped by a soft Western culture, but is readily acknowledged by the New Testament writers.

The ultimate end of character transformation is freedom to be once again all that God designed for us to be. The Creator of the Universe built you to be a creative expression of Himself. Character is formed in the crucible of faithfulness and refined through the gauntlet of perseverance. ***Remember, the shape of our character is the shape of our future.***
(Erwin McManus)

Like diamonds, Christians are most significantly formed under pressure.

EXERCISE

Read through the following Scriptures looking to see what they teach us about the ways in which God shapes our character.

- **Luke 4:1-2, 14**
- **Hebrews 2:10**
- **Hebrews 5:7-9**
- **Hebrews 12:5-11**
- **Romans 5:3-5**
- **2 Corinthians 1:4, 8-10**
- **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**
- **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**
- **James 1:2-4**
- **1 Peter 1:6-7**

PROJECT

- With your Mentor, talk through some of the most significant things God has been teaching you thus far through the Leadership Course. What goals might you set yourself over the coming month in terms of personal growth and development as a leader?
- Meditate on Jesus' life through one of the Gospels. What one aspect of his character do I sense God is longing to form in me?
- Ask God to show you one or two people (of the same sex) with whom you might enter into an accountability relationship. Sound them out about forming an accountability group.

FOR FURTHER READING

UPRISING – Erwin Raphael McManus (Nelson)

INTEGRITY – Jonathan Lamb (IVP)

Teal Trust website has good materials on character, servanthood and integrity in leadership.

Ian Parkinson, March 2007