

## Session 5: CHARACTER

*'Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.'*<sup>1</sup>

*'Reputation is what people think we are; character is what God and the holy angels know we are.'*<sup>2</sup>

*'Character is what a man is in the dark'*<sup>3</sup>

Bill Hybels describes character as *'who you are when no one else is looking.'*<sup>4</sup>

We live in a world obsessed with style, image and presentation; it is easy for a while to portray ourselves in a light which is other than the reality. But we cannot hide the substance of who we are, which is our character, for too long, certainly not from those closest to us, it is not easily hidden.

*Our character will most clearly reveal itself in three key ways:*

**In the small things:** Those day-to-day activities and interactions where we don't need to prepare or present ourselves before hand or think too much about what we do and say, we just respond, we just act, spontaneous, ordinary, normal life.

**In the pressure moments:** On good days it is fairly easy to keep up good appearances. But what happens to us when the pressure is on, when we are squeezed what comes out. When it's one of those days, we get a better idea of our character development.

**In the private moments:** In the times when there is no audience, no public performance, no one to impress, then what do we do, how do we behave? What things do you do or want to do when no one else is looking? What would you do if you knew no one would ever find out?

What we are like in these moments is a far greater reflection of who we really are, than those times when we know we are under the spotlight, have prepared ourselves and have an audience to impress.

### Why is all this important?

Because we are called as Christians to a Christ-like life and are called to bring glory to the God we worship, something which is either enhanced or hindered by our character and example.

And in relation to leadership we need to realise that people won't follow those they cannot trust. In Christian leadership, character determines how far people will follow.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wooden John, quoted in, Lawrence, J, Growing Leaders, Bible Reading fellowship, 2004, p123

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W & Wiersbe, D, 10 power principles for Christian service, Baker Books, 1997, p20

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W & Wiersbe, D, 10 power principles for Christian service, Baker Books, 1997, p20

<sup>4</sup> Hybels, B, Who you are – When no ones looking, Kingsway Publications, 1987, p7

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence, J, Growing Leaders, p125

## Character development

*Character development comes through different ways, I want to highlight three:*

### 1. Dependence:

We need to remain in the vine. *'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'* (Jn 15 v 5)

Christ-like character comes from God and is shaped by God and therefore when we are no longer dependent upon God and looking to God we cannot expect to see our character develop as it should. However, if we are God's children, God will see to it that one way or another He gets our attention and cooperation, He loves us too much to leave us as we are (Heb 12 v 7-11).

### 2. Decisions:

Paul told Timothy to flee the bad traits and influences, such as the love of money, envy, strife, deceit, malicious talk and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness (1 Tim 6 v 11). Paul tells us to think about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praise worthy, and to put into practice whatever we have learned, received, heard, or seen in him (Phil 4 v 8-9).

Our intentional decisions, to choose the good, and reject the bad, will be a big part of our ongoing character development.

### 3. Difficulties:

God purifies us like silver or gold. He allows us to face adversity and trials in order to refine our character into the likeness of Christ.

**Malachi 3:3** says: *"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness."*

#### **Illustration:**

*This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible Study.*

*That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities.*

*The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot then she thought again about the verse that says: "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver." She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.*

*The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?"*

*He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy - when I see my image in it."*

## Christ-like Character

Let us consider then some of the aspects of godly Christ-like character that we are called to imitate. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but an example of what we should be making every effort towards (**2 Peter 1 v 5-8**), for this is what the Spirit will be transforming us into.

*'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'* (**2 Cor 3 v 18**)

**Faith** *'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.'* (**Heb 11 v 6**)

**Goodness** Peter says *'make every effort to add to your faith, goodness.'* (**2 Pet 1 v 5**)  
We are talking about a life characterised by purity of thought, word and action.

**Knowledge** There is a very real sense in which the extent to which we know God and His revelation in Christ, will be the extent to which we become like Him.

**Self-Control** Self-control is about not being mastered by anything. It is about moderation in our natural desires. *"Everything is permissible for me" – but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me" – but I will not be mastered by anything... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.'* (**1 Cor 6 v 12 – 20**)

**Perseverance** Trials are a normal part of the Christian life, because this is the only way to develop the character of perseverance. *'Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.'* (**James 1 v 2-4**)

**Godliness** This speaks of a reverence and respect towards God, a life more concerned with pleasing and honouring God than anything else.

**Brotherly Kindness** We should be growing in our affection toward one another. We're a family so we should act like it.

**Love** *'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.'* (**Jn 15 v 12**)  
*Agape* – a love that concerns the decision of the will as much as any feeling or emotion. It describes the deliberate effort – which we can make only with the help of God – never to seek anything but the best for others even for those who seek the worst for us.

***And some more to think about....***

**Integrity** Jesus was *'tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.'* (**Heb 4 v 15**) Everything in Jesus life matched up. Integrity is where the value system that we profess shapes every area of our lives, public and private. There is a togetherness about our personality and way of life.

*'The bottom line when it comes to integrity is that it allows others to trust you. And without trust, you have nothing. Trust is the single most important factor in personal and professional relationships. It is the glue that holds people together. And it is the key to becoming a person of influence.'*<sup>6</sup>

**Servant Hearted** *'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'* (Jn 13 v 14-15) *'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.'* (Phil 2 v 5-7)

A willingness to do whatever will contribute to the good of others.

**Compassionate** *'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'* (Matt 9 v 36-38)

Our own lives and leadership need to be characterised with compassion, an ability, like Jesus, to embrace the tragedies' and sinfulness of people's lives, to weep with those who weep, to suffer alongside those who suffer, to reach out to those who are harassed, helpless and in need.

**Truthful** Jesus commanded that we let our 'yes' be 'yes' and our 'no' be 'no' (Matt 5 v 37). In a world where spin and fabrication and exaggeration and lies are commonplace in order to present ourselves in a better light or work other people and situations for our advantage, we must work for truth on all occasions.

**Faithful** *'Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.'* (1 Cor 4 v 2) *'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.'* (Matt 25 v 21)

Jesus consistently obeyed His Father's commands, only seeking to do what He saw His Father doing. No matter the cost to His own life or reputation. Success and appreciation did not concern Jesus, just faithful obedience to the Father.

**Forgiving** Jesus commanded us to pray *'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.'* (Matt 6 v 12) Paul says *'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.'* (Col 3 v 13)

Un-forgiveness is not an option for us, it will destroy every area of our character, eating away at us like a cancer, and it will destroy our relationship with our Father. *'For if you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'* (Matt 6 v 14-15)

<sup>6</sup> Maxwell, J. C., Becoming a person of Influence, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997, p27