
MIRROR IMAGE

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Touching Lives
with James Merritt

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SERIES OVERVIEW

In this series we are calling “Mirror Image”, we are not talking about what you see physically when you look in a mirror. We are talking about what you see spiritually, and morally, and ethically when you look in a mirror. We are going to be talking about the most important thing about all of us, and that is our character. What do you see when you look in the mirror? And I’m not talking about what you see on the outside. If your mirror were to reflect what you are in the inside, what would you see? Or consider this question: If your reputation met your character on the street, would they recognize each other? In this series, we are going to dive into 12 different character qualities in hopes that we can all come to a place where what we portray on the outside reflects who we are on the inside.

SERIES VERSES

Daniel 6:1-16
1 Samuel 3; 12:1-5
Luke 1:26-38; 48
Ruth 1:16-18
Galatians 2:11-16
Esther 4:9-17
John 1:1-3, 20-22; 2:10
Mark 12:41-44
Genesis 50:15-21
1 Corinthians 9:24-27
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PART 1: Integrity: Under The Microscope

Daniel 6:1-16

OVERVIEW

The first thing that people would know about you if you truly have the right character would be integrity. We are going to study a man who was the epitome of the word "integrity." It is because of his integrity that we even know who he was and why he has a book in the Bible. His name was Daniel. Anyone familiar with the Bible thinks about Daniel and the lion's den. But what is important about this story is not that Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. What's more important is what happened beforehand that resulted in him being thrown into the lion's den. This story teaches us three tremendous truths about integrity, why it is so important, and why we must have it.

KEY POINTS

1. Live A Life Of Integrity:

Though not everybody knew Daniel personally, everybody seemed to know about Daniel. If you read the book of Daniel, you will figure out that Daniel's reputation preceded him. For seven decades, Daniel had proven himself to be a man of absolute, complete, impeccable integrity. Daniel was put in charge of everyone else and was second in command only to the king himself because of his integrity.

What Daniel teaches us is that integrity trumps ability every time. There is no limit to how far anyone can go if they know they can always be trusted to the right thing. He was not promoted because of his temporal seniority, but because of his moral superiority. His character was a cut above everybody else. Even when the jealous administrators of the kingdom tried to find skeletons in Daniel's closet, they came up empty handed. After putting him under a microscope, all they found was a man who had been honest, hard-working, and holy for 70 years. Daniel is proof that when you live a life of integrity, life becomes surrounded with a force-field of righteousness and goodness that can withstand anything.

2. Count The Cost Of Integrity

It was once said that, "If anything counts it is going to cost. If it doesn't cost, it doesn't count." If you know the story of Daniel, this wasn't his first rodeo when it came to his integrity, but this would prove to be potentially the most costly. Since the kingdom administrators could find nothing immoral or unethical about Daniel, they decided to make his faith illegal.

This is where the rubber hit the road in Daniel's faith. He had spent his entire life displaying honesty, decency, and godly integrity in government service. He had served faithfully and loyally under every king. He had always done what was best for others, and now He had a choice to make between his faith and all that he had worked for. He could have played it safe and just quit praying for thirty days. He could have closed his windows and prayed in secret. He could have decided to take a month-long sabbatical and gone somewhere else. He could have laid in bed at night and prayed silently, but you see integrity never goes on vacation. Integrity never takes a break.

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PART 1: Integrity: Under The Microscope

Daniel 6:1-16

3. Pay The Price Of Integrity

Daniel had a pretty high price to pay for a lifetime of integrity. Because he refused to give up his faith or practice his faith in secret, he received a death sentence and was forced into the lion's den. I know what some of you are thinking. You are saying, "But wait a minute. Daniel was delivered from the lions' den if you keep reading." Yes, he was, but imagine for a minute that that is where the story stopped, because not everybody that gets thrown into a lions' den comes out alive.

The only way you will ever maintain your integrity is when you make the same decision that Daniel made. You've got to decide every day before you get out of bed, go to school or go to work. You've got to make up your mind that your integrity is more important than your safety, your security, your prosperity, or your popularity.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. If you looked in a mirror that could show you your character, would what you portray on the outside match what's on the inside?
2. Would you describe yourself as a person of integrity? Why or why not?
3. Has there been a time when you had to decide whether or not to practice integrity? Do you think you made the right decision in that moment, or do you wish you could go back and do things differently?

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PART 2: Honesty: Nothing But The Truth

1 Samuel 3; 12:1-5

OVERVIEW

Unfortunately, we are living in a world where lying is common, practically expected, and seemingly just the way we do business. But at the end of the day, character is still important, and it still matters. It matters not just morally, ethically, and spiritually, but practically. We began by saying that the foundation of character is integrity. In this message, we are going to learn that the first fruit of integrity is honesty. Integrity is more than just honesty, but there can be no integrity without honesty. There is a man in the Bible who exemplified this trait in an incredible way, and that is Samuel. What elevated Samuel, both in the eyes of God and in the eyes of his people was his absolute, unyielding, uncompromising honesty. What distinguished him was not the high positions that he held, but the honest person that he was.

KEY POINTS

1. Honesty Means You Speak Truth With Your Lips

In 1 Samuel chapter 3, Samuel hears from the Lord, and the Lord tells Him that He is going to bring judgment on Eli and his family. Samuel is saddened, stunned, and shocked at this revelation. Remember, Eli was the man that has shown Samuel the ropes, a man that taught him all the tricks of the trade, a man who had poured his life into him. So Samuel certainly doesn't want to tell Eli what the Lord said.

Keep this in mind. This is a test for Samuel. He listened to the truth, now will he tell the truth? Even though it will be tough and difficult will he speak not on what Eli would want to hear, but what Eli needs to hear? Samuel learned at a very early age that honesty is the best policy. You always tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, particularly since it is given to you by God.

2. Honesty Means You Show Truth Through Your Life

Now let's fast forward about forty years. Samuel is in his mid-fifties, his ministry is coming to a close, Israel has decided they want a king and he leads them to find a king. It is time for him to leave the stage, and he is giving his swansong. As he does, he is able to once again portray complete honesty with his people. Is there any better thing in life than to come to the end of it and be able to review your life, your ministry, the way you walked, the way you talked, the way you acted, the way you lived and not be afraid or ashamed? What was the conclusion of the people who were appointed as both judge and jury over his life?

Samuel is going to walk away with a divine certification of his honesty, and his decency, and his integrity. There is nothing better, nothing greater, nothing higher in ending whatever career God has given you than to know what everyone else knows you always speak truth with your lips, and you show truth in your actions.

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1 Samuel 3; 12:1-5

3. Honesty Means You Share Truth In Your Love

There is a method to Samuel's madness when he is delivering his final speech in 1 Samuel 12. He has forced the nation to admit that he tells nothing but the truth, that they can believe everything that he says and that is important, because he is not going to stop now, because the nation needs to hear a word of truth that they will not like, but they will hear it, because Samuel loves them. The greatest mark of love for anybody is when you love them enough to tell them the truth.

Samuel pulls no punches. He goes on to share in this chapter, three ways of forgetting God, and the nation would always fall into these pits. There was the sin of idolatry - they would forget God and turn to some other god. There was the sin of immorality, particularly sexual immorality, and then there was the sin of iniquity when they just did their own thing their own way and put God on the shelf.

So, this superstar Samuel began his life by being honest and telling nothing but the truth and he ended his life by being honest and telling nothing but the truth. God is always looking for honest people. People who will be honest whether anyone is looking or not. People who will tell the truth even when it is not popular, who will keep their promises, and whose word is their bond, because when He speaks, He doesn't tell us anything but the truth and when we speak neither should we.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does being honest with others come easy to you, or do you struggle to tell the truth, especially when it's difficult?
2. Is there someone you haven't been honest with that you need to have a conversation with so you can tell them the truth?

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PART 3: Humility: It's Not About Me

Luke 1:26-38; 48

OVERVIEW

One of the greatest character qualities you can possess is humility. If you see good character in yourself, then you will be humble about it. Nothing will take you lower than pride, and nothing will lift you higher than humility. In this message, we are going to take a look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, and how she was an amazing picture of humility. What made her most blessed and most favored was not just that she was the mother of the Son of God, it was that she was incredibly humble. As we study this story, we are going to see time and time again how God places a supreme value on the sublime virtue of humility. We enjoy the greatest blessings of life today because of a woman who did not go as high as she could, but got as low as she could and because she went as low as she could, she went higher than any woman ever before or since.

KEY POINTS

1. God Looks For The Presence Of Humility

The first time you ever hear about the town Nazareth is right here in Luke's Gospel. It is never mentioned in the Old Testament. You won't find it in ancient history, because no one or nothing of importance had ever come out of Nazareth. Scholars have estimated it may have had at most 200 people. Nazareth was the kind of town you went through, not the kind of town you went to. So why in the world would God make the most momentous announcement in history in a small, nothing-town full of paganism? Because, he knew in that town was a little teenaged girl that was humble enough for him to use.

2. God Seeks People Of Humility

The first time we meet Mary, an angel of God is speaking to her. If you had walked by this girl before the angel had spoken to her, you wouldn't have given her a second look. She was an average young girl, born to the lower-class, from a peasant's town, in a poor region of Israel, engaged to a minimum wage laborer. She wasn't a movie star, a beauty queen, or a rich socialite. Furthermore, Mary was not even a full-grown woman. She was a teenager.

Here was a nobody girl, living in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere, and face-to-face with an angel. I'm sure she wasn't expecting to hear him say that of all the women on earth she enjoys a special favor of God and the special presence of God in her life. So you can certainly understand her confused response. In effect, Mary said to this angel, "You talking to me? Are you sure you don't have me confused with someone else?" It never occurred to her that she would be the mother of God's son. Mary would have never chosen herself; she can't believe God had. In this, we see a great picture of her humility. Humility is not thinking higher of yourself than you should; it's really not thinking of yourself at all.

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3. God Works Through The Power of Humility

Because Mary became the mother of Jesus as an unmarried virgin, malicious gossip followed Mary all of her life. Common sense suggest that Mary knew this was a double-edged sword. Yes, this birth would be a blessing that she would enjoy, but it would be a burden she would carry to her grave. Knowing the cost of this birth and the price that she would pay here is her response, "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

Now, we see the true greatness of Mary. The word "servant" refers to the lowliest kind of servant. It refers to someone who voluntarily would sell themselves into slavery. It was the most humble act that a person could perform in that society. Do you want to know what made Mary such a great woman? Perhaps the greatest woman who has ever lived? It was that statement that put her at the top of the list.

Mary was a nobody who became greater than almost everybody, because she simply said four words and she not only meant them, but she lived them, "It is not about me." Because she went lower, she went higher than she ever imagined and so can we.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Would you consider yourself a humble person? Or is humility something you struggle with?
2. Is there a time you can remember where you didn't act in a humble way? What would you do differently if you could go back and live that moment again?
3. Is there someone in your life who sets an example of humility? What would could learn and emulate from this person's character?

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PART 4: Loyalty: I'll Be There

Ruth 1:16-18

OVERVIEW

In this message, we are going to talk about a trait that is becoming more and more rare but is still desperately needed, and that is loyalty. There is a book in the Bible that has as its main character, a woman named Ruth, neither of which we would have heard of had it not been for her incredible loyalty. Ruth is one of the greatest love stories not just in the Bible, but in history. Movies, novels, and books have been written about this beautiful story, but there would have been no love story had it not been for Ruth's loyalty. It is a story that will take you from the agony of defeat to the thrill of victory. It's a story that will make you appreciate your family, your friends, your future, and your faith more than ever.

KEY POINTS

1. Be Loyal To Your Family

Ruth's loyalty began where loyalty is planted, fertilized, and grown and that is in your family. By choosing not to abandon her mother-in-law, she is really truly giving up everything. She is giving up her country, her social standing, her friends, her relationships, her chances of remarrying and ever having children all to spend it with a woman she is not physically related to and whom must probably will struggle to make ends meet. We should all strive to be loyal to our family the way Ruth was.

2. Be Loyal To Your Friends

I am absolutely convinced that the one thing that separates your true friends from your pseudo friends, from your fair-weather friends, from your I'll be your friend as long as things are cool friends is loyalty. When Ruth said these words to Naomi, Naomi knew that Ruth was more than just a daughter-in-law to her. She was a friend that would stick closer than a sister. You will never learn who your real friends are in prosperity. You will only learn who your real friends are in adversity.

3. Be Loyal To Your Faithfulness

Ruth basically says to her mother-in-law, "Even if it costs me my life. I am not going to leave you or forsake you. I am going to live my life with you and if necessary, I am going to give my life for you. I am not going to leave you. Wherever you live I am going to live. Wherever you die I am going to die." She had made a life-time commitment with her life that Naomi would never be alone and never be abandoned.

One of the ways we need to learn to be loyal is to be loyal to ourselves, loyal to our convictions and what we believe, loyal to our promises and what we say we will do, loyal to paid our debts, loyal to keep our vows, and loyal to always stand for what is right and stand against what is wrong.

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Ruth 1:16-18

4. Be Loyal To Your Faith

By far, the most important thing that Ruth says is the most important part to loyalty that one will ever have is the loyalty she expressed to God. "... Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Here is a young woman who has everything going against her and every reason to reject God, and yet she says, "Your God will be my God."

Ruth's life had been radically changed by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She had turned away from every other false god she had ever known and put everything on the line to worship the one true God. It is one of the most courageous confessions of faith you will ever find in the entire Bible. When you read the rest of the story you will see that God honored her loyalty.

When you go to the genealogy of Jesus, there are four women that are mentioned in the family tree: Tamar - guilty of incest, Rahab - a prostitute, Bathsheba - an adulteress and a Moabite named Ruth. Because of her loyalty, God used her not to bear a son, but to change the history of the world. Our God is a loyal God. Our God will never leave us or forsake us. Be the person you should be in your family, to your friends, to faithfulness, and to your faith, because we all need someone that we know that will always be there for us.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are you loyal to your family and friends like Ruth was to Naomi? Do you stick by them regardless of whether things are going well or not so well?
2. Do you surround yourself with loyal people? Do you have a community of people who support you through every season of life?
3. What are some ways you could practice being more loyal, whether it be in your earthly relationships or in your relationship with your Heavenly Father?

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PART 5: Authenticity: The Real Deal

Galatians 2:11-16

OVERVIEW

When you are authentic, you are the real deal. You aren't one thing in public and another thing in private. You aren't one thing with this group and another thing with that group. To be authentic, you never put politics above people and popularity above principle. A conversation between Paul and Peter gives us a great example of what it looks like to be authentic. Paul reminds Peter that a big part of character is authenticity. It is being the same person in public as you are in private. You being you regardless of where you might be or who you might be with. Paul shows us what authenticity looks like, how authenticity acts, and why authenticity is important.

KEY POINTS

1. If I Am Authentic, I Will Confront Hypocrisy

Paul lets us know right up front he did not talk about Peter behind his back. He didn't just get one side of the story. He did what we all ought to do if we hear something about someone that gives us a problem or if we have a problem with someone, and that is we go to them directly. That is what authentic people do. Authentic people don't gossip, and they don't listen to gossip. They don't talk about people; they talk to people. If they have a problem with someone, they man up and woman up and go to the person they have a problem with and talk it out.

2. If I Am Authentic, I Will Confess Hypocrisy

The point Paul is making with Peter is to let your love be authentic and your life be real. Don't be a phony. Say what you mean, mean what you say. Say the same thing with one group that you will when you are with another group and stick by what you believe. Now Paul is about to add another stinger. When your life doesn't match your lips, when your behavior does not match your belief, admit it.

Don't miss what a big deal this was. If Paul had not confronted Peter and at least confessed for Peter his hypocrisy, the church would have either gone back to the ways of Judaism and legalism or there would have been a permanent division between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. Paul did not confront Peter out of jealousy or one-upmanship. He didn't want to prove who was the real boss of the church. He did it for one reason – the truth of the gospel was at stake. Nothing will be more important ever in the life of our church, than to make sure that we preach the truth of the gospel and we practice the truth of the gospel.

3. If I Am Authentic, I Will Correct Hypocrisy

As Paul continues talking to Peter, he makes it clear that whether you are a Jew born into the covenant family of God by birth or you are a Gentile born outside of that covenant family, you will not be saved by or accepted by God based on your goodness and how many commandments you keep.

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To press the point, Paul uses that phrase, “not by works of the law” three times in this verse. There is one thing you will never find from the first book of the Bible to the last book of the Bible. No one ever got right with God, no one was ever justified by God, or accepted by God, because they kept the law or because of their goodness. In fact, the law was given not to show how good we can be, but how bad we are. God’s law is a mirror that condemns us, not a medicine that cures us. The law is like a CAT scan. It can show you what is wrong with you, but it can’t cure you.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Would you say you are the same person in public that you are in private?
2. Are there areas of your life where you could grow in your authenticity?
If so, what are those areas?
3. What are some ways you can practice being more authentic?

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PART 6: Courage: Go Big, Go Bold

Esther 4:9-17

OVERVIEW

As we continue this series on character, we are going to deal with a character trait that I believe is lacking more and more in every part of our society. It is why we refuse to listen to each other, refuse to face and solve our biggest problems, refuse to face up to reality, and refuse to call things the way they are and that is courage. The type of courage I am talking about is moral courage. It is the kind of courage that exposes you to ridicule, criticism, ostracism, and the judgmental wrath of others. It is the kind of courage described in the story that has been preserved for more than twenty-five hundred years, and that is the story of Esther.

KEY POINTS

1. Courage Shows Up

It is costly to be courageous and courage never goes on sale. You are going to face times in life where risk and fear is staring you in the face. I believe that is why the Bible says, "Fear not" three hundred and sixty-five times, because God knows every day there is a chance for fear to make us crawl under the bed, hide in the closet, and retreat from the battle. That is why the first step of courage is just showing up. The best-selling leadership author, Brené Brown said this, "Sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is just to have the courage...to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.

There will come times in your life when you have to decide and decide quick what is first in your life and who is first in your life. When you have to decide if you are going to do the right thing or the wrong thing, your thing or God's thing. Are you going to be courageous or a coward? Are you going to show up or wimp out?

2. Courage Stands Up

We all have those "such a time as this" moments when we have to on-the-spot decide if we are going to keep our seat or stand up? Are we going to go with the crowd, go with the flow, do as the Romans do, or do the right thing even if we have to do it alone, stand up even if we have to stand alone and take the right path even if we have to take it alone?

At that moment, courage will always be asking you, not what is the easiest thing to do, or what is the popular thing to do, but what is the right thing to do? Someone has said that courage is not the absence of fear; it is the mastery of it. The Bible adds a very important element to courage and that is trust in God. You see, this is what courage is - courage is willing to do what you know God wants you to do when the consequences are unseen and unknown.

3. Courage Speaks Up

Nothing will measure you or mature you like those times when life puts you on the spot, you've got to make the call, choose the path, and make the

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decision. You know there is a right way and a wrong way. There is a right door and a wrong door. A right call and a wrong call. The choice that you make will make you for the rest of your life.

The cost of courage is great, but the cost of cowardliness and compromise is even greater. So, teach your kids and model for them a life that shows up when the rest of the world is hiding, stands up with the rest of the world is sitting, and speaks up when the rest of the world is listening. Go big and go bold.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Would you describe yourself as a courageous person?
2. Is there something you feel like the Lord is leading you to do, but you've been too scared to take that step of obedience?
3. What is one thing you could do this week to foster courage in your relationships, your goals, or your decision making?

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PART 7: Perseverance: Run The Stop Sign

John 1:1-3, 20-22; 2:10

OVERVIEW

In this portion of our study on character, we are going to talk about one of the greatest values and virtues you must have if you are going to be person of character and that is perseverance. You will never read biographies of great quitters. You will never see a long line of followers behind great quitters. You will never see trophies and awards given to great quitters. There is a man in the Bible who is in the Bible and has a book about him in the Bible, because of one thing - his perseverance. He ran the stop sign and didn't quit, but he had every reason to. His name was Job. No man in the Bible, outside of Jesus Christ himself, suffered more than Job. It would even be fair to say that outside of Jesus, no man suffered more unjustly and more unfairly than Job. If Job had responded the way the vast majority of people would and do this book would have never been written and Job's name would have never been known. We learn a great character trait called "perseverance" from this man who teaches us that tough times never last, but tough people do.

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KEY POINTS

1. We Shall Face Problems That Will Make Us Want To Quit

The next time you think you've got problems, go read the Book of Job. It may not make you feel better at first, but it will put your problems in perspective. When all of these terrible things started happening to Job, he began to ask the same questions we all would ask, "Why?" and "Why me?" After these questions usually comes the worst question of all: "How do I get out of this?" The question we should be asking is, "What should I get out of this?" s you are going to see, problems are not meant to defeat you, depress you, or even discourage you; they are meant to develop you. Problems are not tools to tear you down; they are tests to build you up, but Job's troubles are not finished yet.

2. We Will Hear People Tell Us To Quit

It is one thing to be tempted to quit, to be tempted to give in, or give out and give up. It is another thing to be told to do it and especially by the people closest to you. In the midst of Job's pain and suffering, he needed a helping hand to pull him out, but instead those he loves and trusts the most put their foot on his head.

The one thing that Job had continued to do in all of this was the right thing. He had done the right thing by not responding in the wrong way. Yes, later on in the book, he will confront God, but he will never curse God. He will try to reason with God, but he will never reject God. He will try to stand up to God, but he will never walk away from God. Just imagine your husband or your wife, the best friend you have in the world, basically telling you to commit suicide, to end your own life, but do it while you are cursing God and shaking a fist in his face. There are two things that Satan will always try to get us to do, particularly in tough times - quit on God and quit on your faith in God.

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John 1:1-3, 20-22; 2:10

3. We Must Have The Perspective That Ensures We Don't Quit

Here is what we know about a man named Job. He didn't wallow in self-pity. He didn't walk away from God but went to God in worship. No blame, no bitterness, no whining, no cursing, no "How dare you do this to me knowing what an upright man I've been." He gives God the one thing that God always deserves in the good times or bad - worship. Job's entire world had walked out on him, but he would not walk out on God. Because of God and his faith in God, he did not quit on himself and that is why you can read this fantastic testimony about him.

You may question God, but don't you ever quit on God, because God never quits on you. When God starts a work in you, he finishes it. God promises he will never quit on you. What if Jesus had quit before he got to the cross? What if Jesus had quit on the cross - but he didn't, so we wouldn't, and we shouldn't.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What was a time in your life where you gave up and you wished you hadn't? What did you learn from that experience?
2. What was a time in your life where you were tempted to quit and give up, but you persevered? What did you learn from that experience?
3. Have you ever faced discouragement from the people you love in the midst of adversity? How did you handle that discouragement?

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PART 8: Generosity: Give It All You've Got

Mark 12:41-44

OVERVIEW

There is one particular story about Jesus that is so remarkable, first of all, because it even made it into the Gospels, and also because it didn't involve a miracle. The reason the story is so phenomenal is because of what Jesus saw and what Jesus said. What Jesus said was so remarkable, because what Jesus saw was so refreshing. He saw the greatest example of generosity anyone has ever witnessed. A generous person is the epitome of what generosity is all about. It really is amazing that this story makes it into the Bible, because this woman that is talked about does something that to the ordinary eye was so small, so unimportant, so inconsequential, that nobody would have given it a second thought except Jesus. In fact, only one person left that day talking about it, but because Jesus did talk about it, we are still talking about it two-thousand years later.

KEY POINTS

1. Jesus Anticipates When We Give

As this story starts in Mark 12, Jesus is studying what people are giving. Today, that would be considered rude. You would be thought of as sticking your nose where it does not belong or something a busybody would do. News Flash: Jesus still watches the offering! He still watches what we give or what we don't. Jesus was very observant. He was anticipating what people were giving. He knew exactly how much everybody was putting in. He was well aware that rich people were putting in these large sums of money.

2. Jesus Calculates What We Give

The most generous givers do not necessarily or always give the largest gifts. Simply put, generosity is not always measured by what you give. There is a difference between giving the greatest amount and being the most generous giver. A million dollars may be a dream gift, but a tenth of a penny may make you a dream giver.

What the poor widow teaches in this story is that you don't have to be rich to be generous. You don't have to have a lot to give, and you don't have to have a lot to give a lot. One of these days, we are going to find that some of the most generous people who ever lived were some of the poorest people we ever knew. Jesus is not impressed with the greatness of what we give, but with the generosity of what we give.

3. Jesus Evaluates Why We Give

Keep in mind, the generous widow was not going to get a tax deduction. She didn't give out of show. Not only did she not know that anyone was looking, but she probably would have been embarrassed if somebody was. She for sure didn't give flippantly. For the moment, she carefully thought this through and though she didn't say it out-loud she was making a clear statement to God. Actions speak louder than words and did her actions

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PART 8: Generosity: Give It All You've Got

Mark 12:41-44

ever speak loudly and clearly, because when this woman gave everything she had she was saying three things: God, I look to you to provide my needs; God, I love you more than I love money; and God, I live for you and you alone.

Two thousand years later, we still remember her and talk about her because of her generosity. You are not going to be remembered by how much you made, how much you spent, or even how much you saved. You are going to be remembered for how much you gave.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. If you are already practicing generosity and giving to the Lord, why do you choose to give?
2. If you are not giving to the Lord's work, why do you choose not to give?
3. What is one area of your life where you could practice being more generous, whether it be with your time, your talents, or your treasures?

NOTES

MIRROR IMAGE

PART 9: Forgiveness: When The Doctor Heals Himself

Genesis 50:15-21

OVERVIEW

You will discover there are two situations you cannot avoid. It is a situation that befalls all of us no matter how good a person you may be, no matter how hard you try, and no matter how nice you are you will be in one of these two situations. You will need to be forgiving or you will need to be forgiven. One of the reasons why the Bible is so valuable is because it gives us real life examples and shows people who faced real hurt and heartache just like we do. Rather than becoming victims they became victors. Rather than sinking into the quicksand of bitterness, they were able to get to the oasis of forgiveness. The poster child for forgiveness is a man named Joseph. How did Joseph keep from being burned by the fire of bitterness? Avoid drowning in a sea of bitterness? Becoming immune to the poison of bitterness? It is because he refused to do four things that even though stated negatively will bring a positive result for you if you will refuse to do them as well.

KEY POINTS

1. Never Take The Place Of God

Joseph understood something about forgiveness that you need to understand. God is like us in that he has to forgive others who do wrong to him. He is continuously in the position of the forgiver, but he is unlike us in that he never needs to be forgiven like we do. The simple reason why we always need to forgive others and we must forgive others is because we are not God. Joseph has no desire to play God and he is not going to take the place of God.

What Joseph was saying was "I may be the Prime Minister of Egypt, but God is the Preeminent Master of the Universe. Since I sometimes need to receive forgiveness then I must always be willing to give forgiveness. C.S. Lewis said, "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." You can forgive, you must forgive, and you will forgive when you remember just as God has forgiven you, you are to forgive others.

2. Never Forget The Providence Of God

When people hurt you, mistreat you, disappoint you, throw you under the bus, the first step to forgiving them is to acknowledge they have. But, you have to remember when it seems like everything is out of control, God is in control. Behind everything that happens to you, even the bad, the evil, the horrible, God intends it ultimately for your good.

God never has to say, "Well that wasn't in the script." With God, everything is in the script. In the movie of your life, there are going to be valleys and deserts, bad times and good times, good and evil, but when the movie ends it will all work out for your good. Remember all the bad things that happened to you and all the bad people that do them, with the providence of God, God will use them and what they do ultimately for your good.

3. Never Doubt The Plan Of God

I don't know what you have gone through in your life or what you are going through right now. I don't know how unfairly you have been treated or are being treated, how unjust your circumstances have been or are now, what kind

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MIRROR IMAGE

PART 9: Forgiveness: When The Doctor Heals Himself

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of bad hand you have been dealt with or you are being dealt now, but I will tell you what I do know. Whatever else you are thinking or you are hearing, God is saying to you right now, "Everything is going according to plan."

What you are going through right now may not be good, but what is guaranteed is God will take all of the bad and all of the evil and turn it into good, because that is God's plan for the life of every one of his children. Please remember this. God's plan for you is bigger than you and bigger than your plan for you.

4. Never Question The Purpose Of God

God doesn't play games with your life. God has a purpose for your life. He has a purpose for every life. He has a purpose for everything. Joseph didn't know it, but the purpose of everything that happened to Joseph was so that he could place Joseph in a place to be a savior for his people. He was not just to be a savior for his people, but so that his people could bring a savior into the world.

Behind every plan there is a purpose. You need to understand something about God's plan for your life. It wasn't drawn up last night. He doesn't make it up on the fly. He doesn't have to improvise or adjust. God's plan for you and me are wrapped around the purpose he has, not just for you and me, but for the entire world. God's plan is in accordance with God's purpose. There is a method to God's madness. God has a purpose in everything that he does and he not only has a plan he wants to achieve, he has a purpose he wants to accomplish.

The God in you, is bigger than the evil that others do to you. Our job is to forgive what others do to us. God's job is to providentially fit what others do to us into his plan and purpose for our good and his glory. By the way, he has a one-hundred percent success rate.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is there someone you need to forgive that you haven't forgiven yet? What steps could you take this week to extend forgiveness to that person?
2. In what ways have you seen God's plan and purpose manifest themselves through the hurtful times in your past?

NOTES

MIRROR IMAGE

PART 10: Self-Control: Caging The Lion

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

OVERVIEW

There is a lion within every one of us called “self.” You will find that the biggest enemy you will have to your success, to going where you can and should go, and being who can and should be will always be you. If you want to win the battle of life the first battle you have to win is the one over yourself. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul talked about living the Christian life which is a life lived for the glory of God and under the power of the gospel in terms of running a race and he tells us that if you are going to win this race and live what we call the cross-shaped life, it begins and ends with self-control.

KEY POINTS

1. You Must Have A Real Desire To Win

Obviously, everybody wanted to win. In the race of life, we are all born running. If you have got to run anyway, why not run to win? Why not make every day of your life count for God? The first step to doing that is to have a real desire to win. A real desire to live a life that pleases God and blesses others. The first step to winning anything is you’ve got to want to win. Almost without exception, when two individuals or teams are competing for a championship, it is the one that really wants it the most that wins. Their fire burned a little bit hotter. Their desire was just a little bit higher.

The bottom line is we all do what we really want to do and what we really have a desire to do with our life. If you really want to come to church, you will. If you really want to read your Bible you will. If you really want to spend time with God, you will. If you really want to be faithful in your finances, you will. If you really want to worship, and serve, and be sent, and grow as a disciple, you will.

2. You Must Exercise Rigorous Discipline To Win

You have to pay a price to be a winner and the currency is called discipline. Discipline is what we need most in our life but want the least. At the end of the day, it is the difference between ability and achievement, between potential and the prize. I’ve never met anyone who was very successful in life that always did only what they pleased and only what they wanted to do. Zig Ziglar said, “When you do what you need to do, when you need to it, then you can do what you want to do when you want to do it.”

3. You Must Go In The Right Direction To Win

If you are running in the wrong direction, it doesn’t matter how hard you run, how fast you run, or how far you run. You don’t win a race by just running around in circles or running where you think you ought to run. You have to run toward the finish line. You don’t win a boxing match by just throwing punches in the air. You don’t win a boxing match by swinging wildly and hoping something connects. In both cases, you’ve got to be focused on the finish and focused on the fight. If your aim is not right, you will hit the wrong target every time.

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MIRROR IMAGE

PART 10: Self-Control: Caging The Lion

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

You've got to decide, "Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?" Too many people are just shadow boxing. Most people in life are not serious about life. Let me tell you why. You are not serious about life, until you are serious about God, and if you are not headed toward God, the will of God, the work of God, the worship of God, you are headed in the wrong direction. You are just running around in circles. You are just throwing punches into the air.

I don't want to run the race of life only to realize at the end of the day, I was running in the wrong direction. If you are living life the way it was meant to be lived, every day brings you closer to Jesus, not farther away. You need to focus on the finish and the finish is not a place; the finish is a person named Jesus. To win the race, you've got to go in the right direction.

4. You Must Maintain A Relentless Determination To Win

At the end of the day, either self is going to control you or you are going to control self. The one that wins is the one that has the greatest determination. That is why every day what you may think are little things are big things. It is the little things that will keep you in the race, will keep you going in the right direction, and making the right decisions. It takes discipline and determination. It takes discipline and determination to get into the word of God. It takes discipline and determination to be disciplined in a small group. It takes discipline and determination to make worship with God's people a regular habit. It takes discipline and determination to be sent to share the Gospel both here and around the world.

Life is too short and too valuable to pretend anything. Get real with the one who ran his race to the finish line of the cross. Who crossed the finish line coming out of an empty tomb and let him live in you and you live for him. Then you are guaranteed to win your race.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. When was a time in your life where you didn't exercise self-control? What did you learn from that experience?
2. When was a time in your life where you did exercise self-control? What did you learn from that experience?
3. Do you feel like your life is headed in the right direction? Or do you think you need a change of direction to align yourself with the Lord?

NOTES

MIRROR IMAGE

PART 11: Faithfulness: You Can Count On Me

Genesis 22:1-19

OVERVIEW

I have heard it said that the greatest ability is availability. I no longer believe that. I believe the greatest ability is reliability, because if you are available without being reliable things would be better off if you were simply unavailable. Today, we are going to look at a man that was inducted into God's hall of fame, because of his faithfulness. A savior ultimately came into this world because of his faithfulness. A nation that at one time history had given up for dead is in miraculous existence today, because of his faithfulness. He has been called "the father of the faithful" and "the brightest star in the Hebrew heaven," because of his faithfulness. His name is Abraham. There was an incident that took place in his life that is both at first glance difficult to believe and fathom it is in the Bible. Yet, it gave him an opportunity to define once and for all what true faithfulness really is.

KEY POINTS

1. Go Where You Need To Go

You need to understand something about you and God. You are in the trusting business. God is in the testing business and testing can be a very good thing. Why does God test us? God tests us for two primary reasons. Testing is an opportunity for God prove his faithfulness to us. Testing is an opportunity for us to prove our faithfulness to God. Faith is shown in faithfulness and faith is grown through faithfulness. He not only gives us faith, but he grows our faith by testing our faith.

So let me give all of us a test question right now. Which do you love more: the _____ God has given to you or the God who has given you the _____? Now fill in there any word there you want to. You could put the word "children," the word "money," the word "life," or the word "success." Then you have to ask, "Am I willing to go where I need to go no matter what I have to do?"

2. Give What You Need To Give

The way that our faith and God's faithfulness operates is this. God will not reveal his faithfulness until we exercise our faith. Faith means going all in. It is an all or nothing sell out. You can't be half faithful to God. You can't be faithful part of the time to God. You can't be faithful to God only when you feel like it, or want to be, or it doesn't cost you anything.

As you go through life, you will find God will test you and he will stretch your faith and in the end he will provide. He always has provided, and he always will provide. If you are ever asked to give up your Isaac just understand God will provide. What happens next proves that you can give what you need to give and in fact will make you want to give.

NOTES

MIRROR IMAGE

PART 11: Faithfulness: You Can Count On Me

Genesis 22:1-19

3. Get What You Need To Get

Abraham is about to do the unthinkable, the unbelievable when God stops him. What is the whole point of this story? This is a test. Now Abraham understood God did not want Isaac; he wanted Abraham. He did not want Abraham's son, but Abraham's surrender. He did not want Abraham's family; he wanted Abraham's faith demonstrated in faithfulness. Understand, God knew what was in Abraham's heart, but God want Abraham to know what was in his heart.

The proof of your faith in God is your faithfulness to God. If God never fails to do what he will say he will do, we never have to hesitate to be faithful to do what he tells us to do.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What would fill in the blank for this question: Which do you love more: the _____ God has given to you or the God who has given you the _____?
2. Now, how would you answer that question? Which do you love more?

NOTES

MIRROR IMAGE

PART 12: Respectful: Honor Above All

1 Samuel 24

OVERVIEW

As we close out this series, we are going to look at a character trait that is certainly not in abundance. Disrespect is found in greater quantities everywhere – in the home, in the government, in the media, in our schools and on our highways. There is a story of a man in the Bible who one day would be king, who had every reason not just to disrespect the one who was king, but to destroy him and bring his kingdom to an end. But, the fact that he did not and the reasons that he did serve as a great reminder over 2500 years later why respect is so important and what it looks like. This story teaches us three tremendous lessons that we need to not only learn, but desperately need to pass on to the next generation who desperately need to recover.

KEY POINTS

1. Respect The Principle Of Authority

David lived in a kingdom. He was under kingdom authority. Saul, as the king, was the embodiment of that principle of authority. That is so important to grasp. You don't live your life by popularity - that is what everybody else thinks is right. You don't live your life by practice - by what everybody else is doing. You live your life by principle - by a conviction of what is right. David perfected the principle of authority. Saul was still the king. David was still under his authority. What set David apart from his men was he understood that what is right is not what we think is right at the moment or how others feel is right at the moment, but what God says is right at the moment.

One of the marks of maturity is the willingness to abide by the principle of authority even though you may not always agree with how that authority acts. It doesn't mean that we support wickedness. It doesn't mean that we approve of evil any more than David approved of what Saul was doing, but it does mean that we respect all authority unless that authority asks us to do something that is immoral, unethical or unbiblical.

2. Respect The Position Of Authority

He may not be the king he should be. He may not be the king God desired him to be, but he is still the king. He is still David's king. The king may not always be right, but he is still the king. By the way, your parents may not always be right, but they are still the parents. Your boss may not always be right, but he is still the boss. Your teacher may not always be right, but she is still the teacher. Your coach may not always be right, but he is still the coach. Don't confuse respecting the position that a person holds with the person that holds the position.

David knew one day he would be king, and he would be in that position. If David wanted to get the respect the position deserved, then he had to give the respect the position deserved.

NOTES

MIRROR IMAGE

PART 12: Respectful: Honor Above All

1 Samuel 24

3. Respect The Power Behind Authority

David didn't have a high view of Saul the man. He didn't have much respect for Saul the person, but he had a supremely, extremely high view of God and the power of God that put Saul on the throne. Did Saul personally deserve much respect? Not at all. But, it wasn't Saul's character that was on the line. It was David's. He didn't focus on what Saul had tried to do to him. He focused on what God had done for Saul and would do for him.

There is something we can all know about every ruler who is ruling anywhere, anytime, anyplace whether that ruler realizes it or not and that is behind every ruler is the sovereign power of God. He is the power behind all power and David was not going to replace what God had put in place. He was not going to dethrone what God had enthroned and since God was the one who put Saul in, God would be the one to take Saul out.

Remember this. Disrespectful people will always try to drag you down to their level. Respectful people will always try to bring them up to their level. Because someone chooses to disrespect you does not mean you have to disrespect them. Let us respect the God who sent Jesus and let us give others the respect that God has given us.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to respect people in positions of authority?
2. Do you trust God to still be in control even when you don't agree with the people he's placed in authority over you?
3. Who is someone you could show more respect to in your life?

NOTES

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