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[CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER]

Reflections Based on Galatians 5:22-23

Character of a Christian Leader: Reflections Based on Galatians 5:22-23

by James W. Lewis

Character names who we really are. Some would say this is particularly the case when others are not watching. Character answers the question, “Who am I called to be?” One’s life is to be lived with godly purpose and vision. We are what we “aim” at. This brings us to the life of Jesus Christ. A Christian’s character takes the shape of Jesus’ character. When Paul challenges the Church at Galatia to embody the fruit of the Spirit, he understands that to mean nothing less than the character of Jesus Christ (See Galatians 5:22-23). One can justify a view of Jesus as One who practices radical love. The fruit of the Spirit is love....” Just as a beam of sunlight passing through a prism refracts into the primary colors, the varied dimensions of love are joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Have you given much thought how your leadership would look if these fruit were operative in your life--not by accident but habitually? There are no limits on the embodiment of these virtues.

Leaders who desire to serve others as Jesus did must beware of reducing their leadership only to “doing.” One can become busy and preoccupied with “doing,” focused and driven with completing a schedule of tasks, aiming for efficiency and productivity. However, at the end of the day, such leaders are more appearance than substance. Yet, leaders having the character of Christ are challenged to emphasize “being” over “doing.” You might ask, “But isn’t *doing* still important?” Yes, it certainly is important. Yet, *being* is the proper context out of which our *doing* comes. Persons can make decisions without giving serious attention to themselves as decision makers or

moral actors in the world. We are often tempted to depend on leadership principles gleaned from those who propose to teach us how to manage in one minute. Character, of course, requires much more.

Character reminds us as servant leaders, for example, that our *doing* must be done with the right intentions and the right passions, and performed consistently over a lifetime. Therefore, persons of character realize the need for training in discernment. We must discern the intricacies of situations in order to choose only those actions consistent with godly purposes and ends.

Jesus demonstrates powerfully the notion of radical love. It is a love that centers on others, even to the point of his death as a common criminal on a Roman cross. According to the gospel of Mark, Jesus affirms that he comes not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). His whole life and public ministry displayed the character of God.

In like manner, such is the character of anyone who would participate faithfully in the kingdom that Jesus ushered in. Remember that you are called to the life of Jesus and, hence, to embrace Christ's character of love in all you think, say, and do. How is character developed in us? This is a more difficult question for me, but I suspect that God's Spirit must be the transformer of our lives. We must be people of character and develop godly character over a lifetime. It is a way of life. Character becomes the habits, dispositions, and skills that are cultivated within Christian community, for the wonderful journey called Christian discipleship.

Let me humbly offer these modest suggestions to promote attention to the cultivation of Christian character in the life of leader: 1) Pay attention to the ministry and

teachings of Jesus, especially in the gospels; 2) Seek then to follow the path of Jesus as revealed in the Christian story; 3) Worship God faithfully with other believers in the body of Christ. In worship we hopefully are shaped to “see” the real world – to see the world rightly; 4) Form a small group to study the fruit of the Spirit and desire to live out the fruit within every area of life; 5) Always remain open to change, for this attitude makes us pliable to conform to truth; 6) Submit to the discipline of a fellow traveler, whose character is validated as conforming to the character of Christ. Develop a “friendship” that provides mutual accountability between you and another; 7) Read biographies of “Saints,” both past and present, in order to expand and stimulate your imagination and passions for how to be a person of character, and 8) Be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Let your journey of faith exemplify a commitment to become a person of Christian character. “Who are you called to *be*?” You are called to be like Jesus Christ in all areas of your life in the world. As leaders in service to others, you are called to be nothing less than a person shining forth the character of Jesus Christ.