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## CHAPTER 3 - A Sterile Heart

### Leadership that lasts starts in the heart

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

~ Proverbs 4:23 ~

Before we can lead a team, a ministry, or a congregation, we must lead ourselves. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts, "for everything you do flows from it." Leadership begins in the inner life. Our engagement in spiritual disciplines, our emotional health, and our thought patterns will either support or sabotage our leadership. What we engage in daily will form us and guide us into who we are becoming.

It is easy to run on empty while trying to pour into others. But sustainable leadership comes from overflow, not depletion. That means prioritizing our soul. Make space to sit with God: not just to prepare to lead others, but to let Him lead us. Our personal time in the word and prayer is our most important priority as a leader.

Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Watch your life and doctrine closely."

Healthy leaders invest in soul care, cultivate habits of holiness, and know when to rest. If we neglect ourselves, our leadership will eventually crumble. There is not only one specific way to do this. If you need help building a good self-care plan, one of the church leaders can help you with this.

Read 1 Timothy 4:16. Is there anything that stands out in your life that you need to let go of or start doing more of, in order to grow as a leader?



## ● Charm Might Open Doors But Character Keeps Us There

In the world, leaders are often praised for being confident, talented and/or magnetic. In the church, we are tempted to chase only those qualities. In the Kingdom of God, character **always comes before charm**. We need to develop godly character alongside these other gifts to be a well rounded leader.

It does not matter how gifted we are if our lives are not grounded in Christ-like character. Leadership is not just about **what we can do**, it is about **who we are becoming**.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. How do you see yourself being transformed?

## ● What is Under the Surface

Think of life like a tree. The visible parts: our ministry, our skills, our ideas - these are what people see. But the roots are our character. If the roots are weak, the whole tree is vulnerable. A weak rooted tree will fall if a storm hits, or it will die quickly if there is a drought. We need to be rooted in our faith to withstand as a leader.

Character is the hidden, consistent part of who we are:

- How we speak when no one is listening
- How we respond to pressure or offense
- How we treat those who cannot benefit you

Jesus said it plainly: "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit."~ Matthew 7:18

Write out Psalm 1:1-3. Spend time memorizing this verse this week.



## ● The Fruit of the Spirit Is the Mark of Maturity

We do not need a title to lead, but we do need fruit. This fruit is not achieved; it is cultivated. It comes from walking closely with the Holy Spirit. Most of us grew up hearing “actions speak louder than words” and this is proof of that. What we do says more than anything we say.

The best leaders grow in:

- **Love** – even when it is hard
- **Joy** – even when it is hidden
- **Peace** – even in chaos
- **Patience** – especially with people
- **Kindness** – when it is inconvenient
- **Goodness** – when no one is looking
- **Faithfulness** – when it is hard to show up
- **Gentleness** – when it would be easier to be harsh
- **Self-control** – when everything wants a reaction
  - {Galatians 5:22-23}

Compare Galatians 5:22-23 and Ephesians 4:1-3. Write down what the Lord is speaking to you.

## ● When Leaders Lack Character

A leader without character is like a candle with no flame. We may look the part, but we will not bring light.

When a leader lacks character and accountability, that leadership will be focused on self-exaltation, self-preservation, self-interest. Abuse of power, lack of transparency and honesty corrupt practices, prioritizing of personal gain, lack the moral compass that guides ethical decision making.

Sometimes, gifted people burn out, hurt others, or cause division, not because they were not called, but because they were not **rooted**.

God would rather we grow slowly and deeply than quickly and shallowly.

Read Psalm 1 and compare/contrast the one blessed person and the wicked person.

## ● Who We Are > What We Do

Our ministry role may change. Our foundation in Christ is key to who we are and to how we serve. But who we are in Christ is eternal. Build that first in Christ.

God wants our willing hands, and He wants our **whole heart**.

Read 2 Timothy 2:21. Take time to sit in prayer, confessing anything that may be hindering you from spiritual growth..

## ● How Is God Growing Our Character?

Transformation and evolution of our personality, beliefs, behaviors, and values over time often involves:

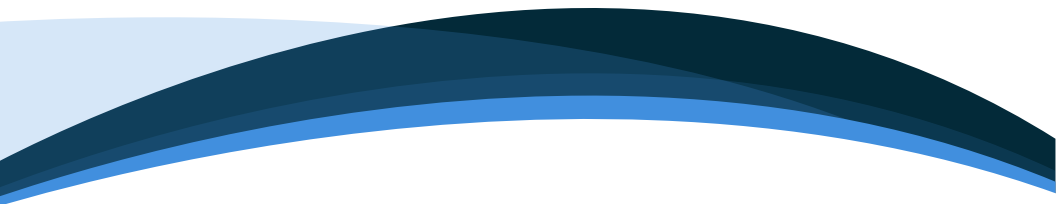
- Responding to experiences, challenges and interactions
- Learning from mistakes and adapting
- Shifting motivations, flaws and strengths
- Developing emotional intelligence
- Nurturing relationships

It is through life experience that our character grows. It is not in the easiest times. It is in the pressure we go through. A diamond only shows its identity after a piece of coal goes under extreme pressure. God often shapes leaders in:

- **Obscurity**– learning to serve without applause. When something is obscure it is hidden in darkness, not clearly seen or easily distinguished.
- **Frustration** – learning patience when things do not go your way
- **Failure** – learning humility through mistakes
- **Correction** – learning to receive truth in love

These moments are not always signs your off track. They can be signs God is getting you ready for what is next.

In Romans 5:3-5 there is a progression to growth. Write out this progression. Where do you find yourself here?



## ● How Does God Build Character?

God builds a godly character within us. It is not something we just have. He does this through spiritual disciplines and through lived experiences. Through the journey of becoming a better version of ourselves, which is often driven by internal conflict and a desire of self-improvement. We intentionally cultivate certain traits and qualities that define our character and guide our behavior. It is about laying a strong foundation for our identity and includes:

- Identifying core values: understanding what is important to us and aligning our actions with those values.
- Practicing positive habits: Developing virtues like resilience, self-discipline, and integrity, through consistent effort and practice.
- Setting goals and working to achieve them: this builds traits like determination and accountability.
- Learning from exemplars and mentors: studying and emulating those who embody desirable character traits can provide guidance.
- Seeking feed back and mentorship: Constructive criticism helps identify blind spots and accelerate character building.

Spiritual Disciplines include:

Meditation	Prayer	Worship
Fasting	Study	Solitude
Service	Submission	Confession
Guidance	Celebration	Generosity

We have the choice to learn from our lived experiences and grow closer to the Lord through them, or we can allow ourselves to become bitter, angry, discontent through these experiences.

James 1:2-4 gives us another characteristic we build when going through trials. What is that?



● **Reflection Questions:**

Which fruits of the Spirit do you see growing in your life?

Which fruits of the Spirit are harder for you to live in?

What spiritual disciplines do you currently practice?

How do you refill spiritually when you feel depleted?

How do you react when someone corrects you or disagrees with you?

What character traits is God asking you to work on right now that may be working against your spiritual growth?

● **Personal Challenge:**

Pick one spiritual discipline to add to your daily spiritual life. Write down how you will engage with that discipline.

● **Leadership Challenge:**

This week, ask someone you trust (a spouse, a mentor, pastor, fellow believer):

“What part of my character do you think God is refining right now?”

Be open. Don't defend - just receive. Then bring it to prayer and let God continue shaping you.

● **Prayer & Journaling:**

Lord, help me care for my soul as much as I care for my ministry. Draw me closer to You...

