

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Christian Character: Syllabus

Notes —

CLASS #1:

- I. Introduction to Christian Character.
- II. Service.

CLASS #2:

- III. Humility (A study of the life of Moses).

CLASS #3:

- IV. Leadership (A study of Nehemiah's life).

CLASS #4:

- IV. Leadership (cont'd).
 - Appendix of Leadership Character Traits from Nehemiah.
- V. The Character Trait of Selflessness (The life of Francis of Assisi).

CLASS #5:

- VI. Discipline (The life of John Wesley). Exam.

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Christian Character : Exam

Possible 20 Point Questions

- 1) Describe the difference between being a servant and simply serving (pp. 6-8).
- 2) Discuss two important principles of the nature of humility (pp. 11-13).
- 3) Discuss humility in terms of how Moses looked away from himself (pp. 18-19).
- 4) Discuss three ways that Nehemiah the leader motivated his people (pp. 29-31).
- 5) Discuss how Nehemiah the leader managed and responded to opposition (pp. 31, 32).
- 6) Explain how freedom and joy were results of the life of selflessness led by Francis of Assisi (pp. 36,37).

Possible 10 Point Questions

- 1) Give a brief description of the culture of the “washing of feet” (p. 4).
- 2) Show how refusal to do “lowly” types of service is idolatry (pp. 5-6).
- 3) What is false humility (pp. 10, 11)?
- 4) How do prayer and humility relate to each other (p. 13)?
- 5) Briefly describe the historical context of the book of Nehemiah (p. 22).
- 6) Show how Nehemiah had a natural confidence/trust in God (p. 23).
- 7) Explain how Nehemiah avoided the problem of imbalance between authority and responsibility (p. 28).
- 8) Explain Nehemiah’s process of motivating others (p. 29).
- 9) Show one way in which Nehemiah led by way of self-sacrifice (p. 33).
- 10) Name one of the character traits of Nehemiah (see appendix) and give references (p. 35).
- 11) Define the idea of selflessness (p. 36).
- 12) Give a brief explanation of the difference between discipline and legalism (p. 39).

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I. Introduction to Christian Character.

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A. Character: The Reality of Who You Are and What You Do.

1. Character is a word that goes beyond such words as “personality” and “appearance.” Character is what you are. It is the reality of what is behind the appearance. It is the reality of what is in front of the personality.

2. It has been said:

Your ideal is what you wish you were.
Your reputation is what people say you are.
Your character is what you really are.

3. Our character forms the direction of our lives. It has also been said:

If we sow a thought, we reap an act.
If we sow an act, we reap a habit.
If we sow a habit, we reap character.
If we sow character, we reap a destiny.

B. The Contents of This Course.

1. This course studies some of the most important aspects of Christian character. Through this study, we will see more clearly what a Christian is and what a Christian does.
2. The following character traits will be studied:
 - a. Service (through a study of Jesus and the disciples).
 - b. Humility (through a study of Moses).
 - c. Leadership (through a study of Nehemiah).
 - d. Selflessness (through a study of Francis of Assisi).
 - e. Discipline (through a study of John Wesley).

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II. Service.

A. Jesus set the Standard for Christian Service by washing the disciples' feet in John Chapter 13.

1. The cultural background of John chapter 13: Footwashing was a common practice in the Middle East all the way back to the time of Abraham (Gen 18:4; 19:2).
 - a. The dry climate of that region made the dirt roads very dusty. People wore open sandals on their feet when they traveled. Thus, footwashing was a practical service.
 - b. Footwashing was also the lowest form of service in the Hebrew culture.
 - 1) The Hebrews would not even allow their Hebrew workers to do the service. They made their lowest Gentile slave wash the feet of guests.
 - 2) The only exception to this was when a disciple would wash the feet of a teacher as a demonstration of loyalty to him.
2. How did Jesus set a new standard for Christian service?
 - a. In Jn 13, Jesus, who was the teacher, washed the feet of His disciples. The message is clear.
 - 1) You serve Me because of my position as Leader (vs.13).
 - 2) Instead, I serve you (vs. 14a).
 - 3) Therefore, you should at least be willing to serve each other (vs. 14b, 15).
 - a) We should be willing to serve others because the One who is greater than us was willing to make His whole life a service for us.

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b) Specifically, when we compare ourselves to Jesus and realize our status relative to His, we will not try to say that we have certain rights and do not have to do certain forms of service.

(1) When we deny service because it is too “menial”, we place ourselves higher than Jesus who did the most menial act of service of His day. We commit idolatry when we do this.

(2) By symbolically doing the most menial act of service, Jesus set a standard so low that our pride can not rightly keep us from any service that helps someone, no matter how “menial” it may seem.

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Author’s Illustration:

Pastors should not say they do not have to do menial tasks in church just because they have Bible training.

In the same way, Christian professionals should not refuse to clean the church toilets simply because they feel that it is “too low” an act of service.

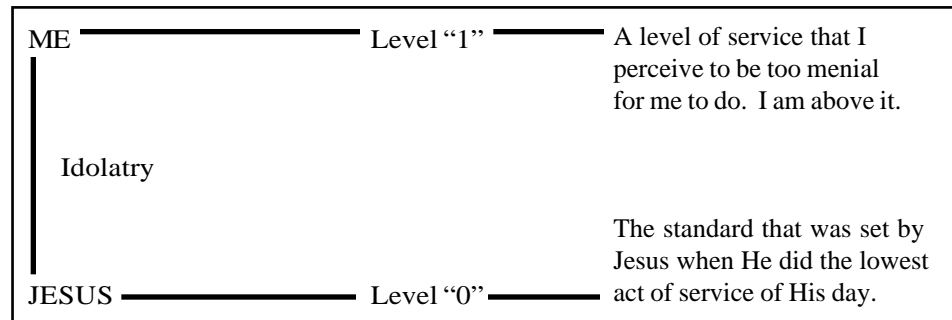
Insert Your Illustration:

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Discussion Point

Now use the following diagram to discuss and apply this concept.



Remember that when an act of service is below me, then I put Jesus below me also because I say that I do not have to do what He did. This places myself above Him. This is idolatry.

B. There is a Difference Between Someone Who Serves and Someone Who is a Servant.

1. Real service and real love.
 - a. After Jesus gave a very clear message to His disciples about serving (referred to above), He told them that they would be sent out into the world by Him (Jn 13:16).
 - 1) We are sent out to be disciples of Jesus. We must share in His spirit of service and accept a way of life that conforms to the way He chose for Himself.
 - 2) We must remember that Jesus did not simply provide the ultimate service. He became the ultimate Servant.
 - 3) Thus, we must not simply do acts of service. We must be servants.
 - b. We can see that real service is the result of real love.
 - 1) Someone who does acts of service may do them from hidden motives. Someone who is a servant does acts of service from pure motives.
 - 2) In the MOTMOT course on Marriage, two types of love are compared.

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- a) “Worldly” love is called “50/50” love. This means that each partner gives half of their total being, or gives 50% of their effort in the marriage. Each person gives with the expectation that the other person will give an equal share.
- b) “Agape” love is unconditional love or “100/100” love. This means that each partner gives all of their total being, or gives 100% of their effort in the marriage. Each partner desires to help the other partner without the expectation of a return, even when the giving is at their own expense, or is costly.
- c) Similar to these types of love are “50/50” service and “100/100” service.
- (1) “50/50” service is a selfish and fake service.
- (2) “100/100” service is a selfless, real service that is done unconditionally.

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Discussion Point

Use the following diagram to discuss the previous concept:

TYPE OF SERVICE	WHAT IT SAYS	COMMENTS
Conditional Service 50_____50 Percent of Giving	I will serve if you serve. I will do half. (I will serve if I get something in return.).	<i>Within this philosophy, there is no real service. Your eyes are focused on the other person. You will only serve when you have been served. The other person is waiting for you to serve.</i>
Unconditional Service 100_____100 Percent of Giving	I will serve no matter what you do. I will do it all if necessary.	<i>Within this philosophy, there is real, free and constant service. Your eyes are focused on your own responsibilities. Your service does not depend on the other person.</i>

- c. To be a servant you must forget your own desires and remember the desires of others.
- 1) You must also remember your own responsibilities and forget the responsibilities of others.
- 2) In other words, you must die to self and live to God and others.

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2. Choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant.

- a. When we choose to serve, we often remain in charge of who, when, why, where, and how we will serve. This necessarily limits our service and also makes it possible to feel manipulated and used by others.
- b. When we choose to be servants, we give up the “right” to be in charge of those factors. There are no limits to our service in Christ and we cannot feel manipulated or used because we have already given up our rights (thus, there are no rights left to manipulate or violate).
 - 1) The attitude of being a servant is born of pure motives and results in unconditional service in Jesus Christ.
 - 2) Paul described himself as being a slave for Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; etc.). Jesus said that the greatest will be the slave (Mt 20:27).
 - a) This type of pure servant gives up all of his rights as a slave does.
 - b) Giving up rights and holding on to rights is the difference between one who serves and one who is a servant.

Discussion Point

Use Phil 2:6, 7 to discuss this concept.

- c. Jesus used the parable of the servant, who came in from serving in the field to continue serving in the house as a clear example of these principles (read Lk 17:7-10).
 - 1) In the parable, a slave has no rights. He does not earn rights or credit when he does his work, because he is only doing what is expected of him. Jesus said that we should have the same attitude.

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Discussion Point

Use the following diagram to expand upon the previous concept:

Worldly Attitude of Service			Kingdom of God Attitude of Service		
Hurting Others	Not Serving/ Not Hurting	Serving Others	Not Serving/ Not Hurting	Serving Others	The grace of God
Negative Position (Punishment)	Neutral Position (No Reward/ No Punishment)	Positive Position (Reward)	Negative Position (Punishment)	Neutral Position (No Reward/ No Punishment)	Positive Position (Reward)

- 2) The world teaches that to not serve is a neutral position. In the kingdom of God, a lack of service results in punishment (sins of neglect). Furthermore, in the Kingdom of God, to serve is to only be neutral. It is an assumed obligation. It earns no reward. Reward is the result of the grace of God.

Discussion Point

Use the following diagram to expand upon our previous thoughts concerning the difference between those who choose to serve and those who choose to be servants.

A SERVER	A SERVANT
<p>Who to serve — Conditional</p> <p>What to do — Conditional</p> <p>Where to serve — Conditional</p> <p>Why to serve — Conditional</p> <p>When to serve — Conditional</p> <p>How to serve — Conditional</p> <p>If these conditions are violated, then the service ends.</p> <p>A server does acts of service for the moment. It is something that he does. Something that you do comes to an end.</p>	<p>Who — (whoever as God commands)</p> <p>What — (whatever as God commands)</p> <p>Where — (wherever as God commands)</p> <p>Why — (whyever as God commands)</p> <p>When — (whenever as God commands)</p> <p>How — (however as God commands)</p> <p>There are no conditions that can be violated that would end the service.</p> <p>A servant does acts of service because he is a servant. It is something that he is. Who you are does not come to an end.</p>

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III. Humility.

A. Introduction to Humility.

1. Jesus' first public sermon (called the Sermon on the Mount) emphasized many important character qualities of people in the kingdom. It is not by chance that the first character quality concerns humility (Mt. 5:3).
 - a. In many ways, the ability to do the rest of what Jesus emphasized in that first sermon depends on the degree in which this first character quality is achieved.
 - b. Humility is the one Christian character trait that opens the door to many others. It is a prerequisite for building a Godly character.
2. To study humility, we will focus on the life and character of Moses. The Bible says that he was the humblest man on earth (Num 12:3). Thus, a study of his life provides us with a good outline that helps us understand "humility."
3. The outline includes three major points:
 - a. The nature of humility.
 - b. The way to humility.
 - c. The "signs" of humility.

B. The Nature of Humility.

1. Let us first consider what humility is not (false humility).
 - a. One might think at first glance that Num 12:3 is an exaggerated description of Moses **reaction** to his sudden fame and importance.
 - 1) Some authors describe the humility of Moses as something that he tried to convey to others in order to protect himself from becoming proud.
 - 2) They describe his humility as a reaction to men instead of a response to God. It was something that he tried to attain.

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- b. That description is a description of false humility and has nothing to do with the humility that we see in the life of Moses.
 - 1) Study Col 2:18-23.
 - 2) False humility is in contrast to that which “grows with a growth that is from God (vs. 19b).” It results in having “no value against fleshly indulgence (vs. 23b).”
- 2. Let us now consider the nature of true humility.
 - a. Humility consists of three key principles.
 - 1) Humility does not seek after greatness, it seeks after God.
 - a) Another way to say this is that Humility does not strive to lead, it strives to be led by God.
 - b) The life of Moses was a life full of doing what God told him to do. It was a life of being led.
 - (1) We even see that Moses was led to his death (Deut 32:48-52).
 - (2) Read Deut 34 to see how Moses followed these directions.
 - 2) Humility points a person away from himself in the midst of greatness.
 - a) We often want to focus on ourselves when we discuss our triumphs and victories, but humility points us to God.
 - b) Moses, like so many other humble men of God, pointed to God in the midst of his greatness.
 - (1) Consider Joseph’s words in Gen 41:16 and also Daniel’s words in Dan 2:27-30.
 - (2) Moses avoided the temptation of giving himself credit for success. Note how in Ex 18:8, Moses focused on the Lord as he tells Jethro about the Exodus.

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- c) This principle also includes the idea that humility does not selfishly take advantage of success.
 - (1) For example, in the midst of Moses' success, he was offered an opportunity to become "a nation greater and mightier." However, he was more concerned with God's reputation among "the nations who have heard of thy fame"(see Num 14:12-17).
 - (2) Also consider how Daniel did not try to take advantage of his fame (Dan 5:17).
- d) The nature of humility leads people to look to God's fame, honor, reputation, and glory, instead of looking to their own self-interest.
- 3) True humility results in being almost unconscious of your importance.
 - a) Like John the Baptist (Jn 1:21) and Paul (1 Tim 1:15), Moses was unconscious of his own stature. Notice how Moses was unaware that his face was shining after being in God's presence (Ex 34:29).
 - b) We must emphasize that humility is not a lack of esteem or confidence. Humility leads to a high "God-esteem" and "God-confidence," instead of a high "self-esteem" and "self-confidence."
 - (1) This type of confidence comes from a trust and reliance on God. The esteem comes from an obedience to Him and an understanding of who He is.
 - (2) Remember that like low esteem, false humility is actually a manifestation of pride. It sometimes appears like humility, but is actually a prideful response in that it focuses on self. A low esteem that says "I cannot do it" is often the result of pride focused on self instead of God.

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- (a) It seems that even the earth's most humble man had to overcome this sort of false humility. Moses' low esteem showed his pride in that he focused on his own abilities instead of God's abilities.
 - (b) See Ex 4:10-14 and notice that "the anger of the Lord burned against Moses" for this reason.
- b. The nature of humility also includes faith and prayer.
 - 1) Faith.
 - a) Moses was a man of faith because he understood his helplessness and nothingness without God.
 - b) Faith begins with an acceptance of the truth found in Jn 15:5. Humility is the thing that will enable you to accept this truth.
 - c) Thus, faith and humility are naturally connected to each other.
 - (1) The opposite of humility (pride) is the rejection of faith. As we die to faith in self (pride), we replace it with a faith in God, and we begin to "walk humbly with our god" (Mic 6:8).
 - (2) To be a great man of faith, it is first necessary to be a great man of humility. Moses was a great man of faith because he was a great man of humility.
 - 2) Prayer.
 - a) To pray is to humble yourself before God. It is "proper" to say to God, "I cannot but you can." Prayer leads you to give up on yourself and to trust only in God.
 - b) Thus, it is no surprise that the humblest man on earth was also a great prayer warrior. Moses spoke to God out of dependence, emptiness, and humility.

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C. The Development of Humility in the life of Moses.

1. Specific events and situations.

a. Forty years in exile.

1) The initial development of Moses as a humble man began with a situation that highlighted the pridefulness within him.

a) In Ex 2:11-14, we see a man who got ahead of God and took matters into his own hands. Moses' lack of humility resulted in his attempt to deliver Israel by killing a Midianite who supervised the Hebrew slaves. In doing so, he neglected God's timing and sovereignty.

b) God ironically used this demonstration of pride to force Moses to enter into a situation that would teach him humility.

2) For the next 40 years, Moses, the great man of Egypt, became a humble shepherd of the flock of Jethro in the wilderness. Undoubtedly, God used a second 40 year period in the life of Moses, to teach him humility.

b. The call of God upon Moses' life.

1) At the calling of Moses by God in Exodus 3 and 4, we see the fruit of those 40 years of training in humility. In his own eyes, Moses was no longer the special adopted son of the court of Pharaoh, who was able to deliver Israel from their enemies. He became the one who said, "Who am I?", when God commissioned him to deliver Israel (Ex 3:10,11).

a) Moses also realized his own inadequacy.

b) Consider others who received great callings (Jer 1:6; 1 Sam 9:21; Judg 6:15). Moses understood and felt the helplessness of the gap that existed between his personal ability and the mission that he was given.

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- 2) We must remind ourselves that, at this point in his life, the humility of Moses still needed to mature (see the above comments concerning low esteem).

- a) It is not enough for humility to say, “I cannot do it.” Humility must complete that thought with the words “God Can do it.”
- b) Moses was not yet humble enough to look away from his own weakness and inadequacy, and to look to God’s strength and adequacy. Thus, the anger of the Lord burned against him (Ex 4:14).

NOTE: Moses’ humility did mature. He did learn to look to God’s adequacy. Then, instead of God looking at Moses in anger, He looked at him with favor (see Ex 33:12-17).

- c. A humility lesson for Moses at Rephidim.

- 1) The maturing of Moses’ humility was an immediate necessity. After the great events related to the miracles in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses was very vulnerable to pride and self-confidence.
- 2) Interestingly, God brought Moses into a situation at Rephidim (Ex. 17:1) that obviously forced Moses to remember his own inadequacy.
 - a) Indeed, in the midst of almost being stoned to death (Ex 17:4), Moses was reminded of his total dependence upon God. He grew in humility as he saw how much he needed God.
 - b) F.B. Meyer writes, “when we have reached the end of self, we have come to the beginning of God.”¹

2. General processes of humbling.

- a. All of Israel went through a process of being humbled. Moses was no exception.
 - 1) God humbled the Israelites (Deut 8:3) and tested them (Deut 8:16).

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2) In general, the whole process of wandering in the wilderness and being completely helpless certainly should have produced humility within the Israelites.

a) Those who experienced the years of wandering in the wilderness were very familiar with suffering.

b) Many scholars define the Hebrew word that is translated as “humble” in Num 12:3 as being directly associated with suffering. The idea is that suffering produces humility.

b. As we read through the account of the final 40 years of the life of Moses, we can see how he became more and more disinterested in himself and his own desires. More and more he was only interested in God’s desires and in serving the people of Israel. The process that Moses went through in losing interest in himself and his own desires was the same process that he went through in growing in humility.

D. Signs of Humility.

1. Introduction.

a. In this section we will consider some of the attitudes and actions that mark humility.

b. This section presents three main aspects of humility.

1) Moses looked away from himself.

2) Moses looked toward others.

3) Moses respected others.

2. Moses looked away from himself.

a. A lack of humility causes boasting about yourself.

1) People boast about what they are and what they have done.

2) People also brag about what they are not and what they have not done (their false perceptions of themselves).

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- 3) Moses does not fall to this temptation. His humility kept him from accepting the glory for himself when it obviously belonged to God.
 - a) For example, after the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses sang a beautiful song of victory. We might ask the question: Where is Moses' name in the song? The answer is that it is not there (see Ex 15).
 - (1) There are 46 references to God in the song of Moses. There are no references to Moses.
 - (2) Moses had a proper (humble) perspective of himself. He had learned that man is an instrument in God's hands. That instrument can only function with God's permission and assistance. This principle is developed in 1 Cor 4:7.
 - b) In a time when it would have been very easy to look at himself, Moses looked away from himself and pointed to God.
- b. A lack of humility results in accepting glory for yourself.
 - 1) In Ex 34:34, 35, we see that Moses could have shown off his shining face after being in the presence of God. Instead, he covered it when he needed to speak to others.
 - a) Humility motivated him to not accept glory.
 - b) Humility motivated him to be sensitive to others.
 - 2) Again, we see that Moses looked away from himself.
- c. A lack of humility tries to take advantage of any opportunity to benefit oneself.
 - 1) Moses had many opportunities to take advantage of his popularity, influence, and fame. He probably could have attempted to gain control of the whole country of Egypt (consider Ex 11:3).
 - 2) Anything less than true humility might have caused him to try to take advantage of the situation. Moses, however, obeyed God's directions and did not fall to such a temptation.

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- d. A lack of humility results in being easily offended by others.
 - 1) Moses lived in the midst of constant unjust accusations. He did not ignore these accusations, but his humility kept him from being offended. He did not seek revenge against his accusers.
 - a) Consider Ex 14:11-13; 16:2-8; and Num 12:1-5.
 - b) Moses, like Christ, left any necessary vindication to God. He was reviled, but he blessed those who reviled him (see 1 Cor 4:12).
 - 2) Those who are humble do not judge others. They trust that God is capable of correctly judging the case.
 - a) Thus, humility is closely related to the concept of “rest” and peace. Humility enables a person to give everything to God (including bitterness).
 - b) Perhaps with that thought in mind, we can better understand the connection between humility and “casting all your anxiety upon him (1 Pt 5:5-7).”
- 3. Moses looked toward others, not himself.
 - a. A lack of humility chooses to accept glory and honor and does not give consideration toward others.
 - 1) In Ex. 32:10-12, Moses pleaded with God on behalf of the people of Israel, at the expense of receiving glory for himself. The humility of Moses allowed him to negate his own contentment and to desire the contentment of others.
 - 2) Also consider a similar situation that is in Num 14:12-19.
 - b. A lack of humility desires to have all of the blessing. It does not share.
 - 1) Read Num 11:29 and Num 12:1, 2.
 - a) Humility produces a sincere desire to share blessings. Humility is the thing that makes a person want to see the other person succeed.

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Discussion Point

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Consider the previous point in the context of Phil 2:3, 4.

- b) Pride produces a secret desire to see the other person fail. It leads to jealousy and bitterness with respect to the abilities and talents of others.

Discussion Point

Discuss how the previous point relates to Rom 12:3-6.

- c. A lack of humility can not give away and multiply ministry.
 - 1) The humility of Moses allowed him to give away ministry without trying to hold it back. He joyfully gave away his ministry. Observe how there is no sense of struggle as Moses commissioned Joshua in Deut 31:7 and Num 27:16-23.
 - 2) To multiply ministry, you must be willing to give it away. Moses was willing to do this. We need much more of this aspect of humility in the Church today.
- 4. Moses respected others.
 - a. A lack of humility results in a lack of respect for others.
 - 1) The humility of Moses enabled him to respect others.
 - 2) Consider Moses interaction with his father-in-law (Jethro).
 - a) In Ex 4:18, we see that Moses had just received divine direction from God Himself. Yet, he did not regard himself as being so special that he did not have to show respect to his elder. Moses and Jethro had an agreement (Ex 2:21) and Moses was humble enough to respect that at a time when he could have easily ignored it.

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- b) In Ex. 18:17-27, we see that Moses was the leader of a miraculous Exodus. He was famous throughout the land. Yet, he still was able to receive council from Jethro, who at the time, did not seem to have anything to do with the problem at hand.
 - c) Humility enabled Moses to respect Jethro. That respect enabled him to be able to receive and benefit from his council.
- b. A lack of humility often leads to a life of complaining.
- 1) Moses was not one to complain although he had many opportunities in which he could have complained. His humility did not allow him to complain.
 - a) Humility includes an acceptance of the fact that you have no rights to hold onto. It understands that you do not deserve anything. God gives and takes away as He pleases, because He is God. He has every right to do as He pleases. A humble man accepts that. The result is that he does not complain.
 - b) Humility tends to reduce a person's consideration of his "rights." Pride tends to increase a person's expectation of what he deserves. This ultimately leads to complaining.
 - 2) Moses did not even complain when he could not enter the promised land.
 - a) If any man ever had a "right" to claim something before God, it was Moses. He had given his whole life to lead the Israelites into the promised land. However, God decided not to allow Moses to enter the promised land.
 - b) Moses did not complain. His humility enabled him to accept his judgment without even questioning God. He did not rebel. He did not try to "claim" his rights. He did not question God's justice. Instead, he praised God (see Deut 32:48-52; Deut 33).

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E. Conclusion.

1. Humility is an essential part of Christian character. The life of Moses provides us with an excellent example of how God can form that part of character in His people.
2. It might be suggested for every Christian to make it a regular part of his prayer life to pray for the humility of Moses.
 - a. That prayer should include a request for God to convict us of the pride that is in our thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions.
 - b. If we desire and ask for this, the Holy Spirit will then begin to work in our lives. He will convict us of pride, and by His power He will replace that pride with humility.

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IV. Leadership.

A. Introduction.

1. In Deut 28:13, God made a very important promise to his people. He told them that if they would obey Him, then He would make them “the head and not the tail.”
 - a. Christians live in a world affected by Adam’s sinful fall. However, they are told that they must be the salt of the world. They must be the light (Mt 5:13,14). They must be leaders in this world of sin to lead its fallen captives to freedom.
 - b. When Christians are not the leaders, then the world suffers from the tragic results of “the blind leading the blind (Mt 15:14).”

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2. In this course concerning Christian character, it is essential to study the various aspects of the character of a leader. The best way to do this is to study the character of Nehemiah.
 - a. The setting of the book of Nehemiah revolves around the building of a nation.
 - 1) In 587 B.C., the Babylonians sent Judah into exile. After Babylon fell to the Persians, Cyrus reversed the previous Babylonian policy and permitted Jews to go back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. The first Jews who returned to Jerusalem built an altar and rebuilt the Temple (Ezra 1-6). Yet the City remained unprotected. It had no wall.
 - 2) In 445 B.C., Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. In 52 days the massive project was completed (Neh 6:15). God used Nehemiah to lead the people of Israel to complete this great task.
 - b. Especially in the first six chapters, we can see the obvious leadership skills of Nehemiah. More importantly, we can study these chapters to begin to form a model of the Character of a leader.
3. The following study includes three major points within its outline:
 - a. The character of the leader as he relates to God.
 - b. The character of the leader as he relates to others.
 - c. The character of the leader as he relates to himself.

NOTE: All biblical references relate to the book of Nehemiah unless otherwise indicated.

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B. The Character of the Leader as he Relates to God.

Notes —

1. The Leader has a natural reliance on God.
 - a. Nehemiah's first and immediate response to the existence of a problem was to seek God. (Consider how Nehemiah did this in 1:5.)
 - b. Nehemiah immediately considered God when it was necessary to make a decision. (Consider how Nehemiah did this in 2:4.)
2. The Leader is a man of prayer.
 - a. As we learned from the life of Moses, the character of a leader includes the desire to be led by God. A person who is led by God must often wait on God.
 - 1) Nehemiah waited and prayed for four months before he acted (the month of Chislev (1:1) to the month of Nisan (2:1) is analogous to the month of December to the month of April).
 - 2) The character of a leader must enable him to persevere. He must often wait because God is not always as quick to act as we are!
 - b. A leader must seek the plan of God instead of trying to implement his own plan. Thus, his prayer is not one that he determines in his own mind and will. Before praying for anything specific, he first prays to **receive** direction from God concerning what to pray and believe for.
 - 1) We might say that the leader prays the prayer of seeking God's will before he prays the prayer of faith (then his faith has something to stand on).
 - 2) Nehemiah spent four months praying the prayer of seeking God's will before he prayed the prayer of faith in 1:11.

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- c. In prayer, a leader does not so much lead God toward those he is leading as much as he leads those he is leading toward God. He does not tell God what to do. He presents others before God, intercedes for them, and asks God to help them and to lead them. He goes to God on behalf of his people.
 - 1) Here we must mention the importance of identification with the people you are leading. It is very difficult to go to God on behalf of a people if you are not identified with that people.
 - 2) Identification includes a sense of “corporate responsibility.” A leader must identify with the sin and guilt of his people. The New Testament shows us that we should suffer together (1 Cor 12:26), bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), and mourn for a brother’s sins (1 Cor 5:2).
 - a) Study 1:6, 7 to see how Nehemiah pleaded with God as an advocate for the people.
 - b) Other great leaders such as Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, and Daniel did this type of pleading with God.
 - (1) All of them were jealous for God’s reputation (the leader in relation to God).
 - (2) All of them had a deep and sincere love for others (the leader in relation to others).
 - (3) All of them were not concerned about their own lives. They were selfless (the leader in relation to self).
- 3. The Leader is a man of faith.
 - a. In 1:5, we see that Nehemiah was a positive thinker. He was a man of faith. What was this positive thinking and faith based on? It was based on three things.
 - 1) It was based on his firm belief that his God was able to meet his need. Faith starts with who God is. His prayer began with a statement of who God is, which focused on God’s ability “O lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God.”

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- 2) It was based on his firm belief that his God was faithful and willing to answer his prayer. Faith continues with the belief that God is for you, not against you. His prayer continued with a reminder that God is a God of justice and love “who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness.”
- 3) It was based on his confidence of being in the right position himself. Faith includes an understanding of who you are. Nehemiah’s prayer ended with a description of the people who God was willing to help. They were the ones who had a relationship with God and who obeyed Him “for those who love Him and keep his commandments.”
- b. This definition of “positive thinking” is somewhat different than some popular, modern teachings about positive thinking. The biblical definition focuses on the promises of God and what God has already said. Modern teaching often focuses on the desires of man and what man says.
- c. Remember, faith can wait on God. Modern day teaching about faith often stresses the idea of immediate gratification. Regarding a prayer need or a promise from God, this teaching says that we can “name it and claim it.”
 - 1) Biblical teaching on faith often stresses the process of faith and the waiting (and often suffering) that is involved (read through Heb 11). Regarding a promise from God, it says that we should “receive it and believe it.”
 - 2) While waiting, faith can see ahead without having to deny the reality of the present (this goes against some aspects of the popular “positive confession” theology of faith).
4. The Leader knows God.
 - a. Nehemiah was a man who knew God and his promises (see 1:8,9). We can see that how well one knows God, who is the true leader, will determine how well that person can lead others.

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Author's Illustration:

An effective quarterback on a football field knows what his coach is thinking on the sideline.

More practically, it is the quarterback that the other players look to for direction since he, better than any other player, knows and understands the signals from the coach on the sideline.

Insert Your Illustration:

- b. In the same way, a godly leader knows God's voice and His ways.
5. The Leader fears God.
- a. Nehemiah was willing to reject the tradition of the leaders of his day (see 5:15).
 - 1) Sometimes the rejection of tradition is motivated by a rebellion against authority, bitterness, or a desire to gain a following.
 - 2) However, Nehemiah's motive was a pure one. He rejected the tradition of the leaders of his day because he feared God.
 - a) He only wanted to please God. He was not concerned with pleasing himself or other men.
 - b) Thus, his "radical" action became normal action relative to the desire of God (Rom 12:2).

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b. A godly leader must be close to God.

- 1) His devotion and zeal for the Lord must motivate and influence others to draw closer to God.
- 2) This obviously happened through the leadership of Nehemiah as he inspired an oppressed people to attempt and complete a nearly impossible task.

Notes —

C. The Character of the Leader as he Relates to Others.

1. An effective Leader understands management and organization.

- a. A basic principle of good management is to determine what the need is before making a plan.
 - 1) Nehemiah followed this principle through asking important questions that were focused on people (1:2).
 - 2) An effective leader evaluates the needs first, and then builds a strategy according to those needs.

Author's Illustration:

A coach does not make a strategy without considering first the strengths and weaknesses of his players. He first evaluates his players abilities and then forms a strategy around them.

Insert Your Illustration:

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- b. A basic principle of organization is to organize people according to already existing social networks or structures.
 - 1) Nehemiah followed this principle and organized his workers according to family units (3:1, 3), towns (3:2, 13), crafts (3:8), callings (3:1, 28), tribes (3:17), and official positions (3:9, 12, 15-17).
 - 2) Nehemiah was obviously a skillful organizer. At least 39 different groups of workers were involved in his building program.
- c. A critical part of good management is the delegation of authority. A leader who does not delegate is really no leader at all. He will eventually destroy those who he is leading, and will ironically destroy his own leadership.
 - 1) Effective leaders delegate authority and responsibility because they are willing to trust others. They are secure in their positions, power and authority. Remember the Biblical principle from Mt 16:25, if you try to keep something then you will lose it.
 - 2) Some indicators of true leadership are evident in the selection, training, and promotion of others. The list of builders in chapter three reveals Nehemiah's willingness to delegate responsibility and authority.
- d. An effective manager avoids an imbalance between authority and responsibility.
 - 1) A worker who is given more authority than responsibility will be frustrated and bored.
 - 2) A worker who is given more responsibility than authority will be overwhelmed and ineffective.
 - a) Nehemiah avoided this imbalance. Each person was assigned a specific area of the wall that he was responsible to build. He was given authority over the work on that area (see 4:15).
 - b) The result was that the builders were more motivated and effective because they knew exactly what was expected from them.

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2. An effective Leader is able to motivate others.

Notes —

a. Discouragement can be a leader's worst enemy. If you take away the motivation to pursue the goal, it is like driving a car or pulling a wagon with a flat tire.

1) In Nehemiah's case, discouragement came upon his workers through a loss of strength, vision and confidence (4:10), and a loss of security (4:11).

2) How did Nehemiah respond to the discouragement?

a) He unified his worker's efforts toward a common goal (4:13).

b) He directed their attention to the Lord (4:14).

c) He maintained a balance between thought and action (4:15,16).

d) He determined and defined a point for everyone to rally around (4:20).

e) He encouraged and organized ways for the people to help each other (4:21,22).

b. An effective leader motivates others by setting a good example.

1) Good leaders do not push. They pull by providing a good example to follow. Consider 5:14-19.

a) Nehemiah set an example of compassion and by the surrendering of his rights (5:14, 15).

b) He set an example of sacrifice (5:16).

c) He set an example of hard work (4:23).

2) When the example is not followed, the leader must be ready and able to enforce effective discipline.

3) Nehemiah proved himself capable in this area of management in the case of the greedy nobles (5:1-13).

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c. An effective leader motivates through building strong, personal relationships.

- 1) Nehemiah's knowledge of the names of his leaders, and the repetition of the phrase "repaired another section" (3:11, 19-21, 24-27, 30), reveals his personal awareness of the efforts of his workers.
- 2) Recognition from the leader creates a sense of belonging and a sense of security within the followers.
- 3) Commendation and recognition are necessary elements of motivation.

d. An effective leader learns how to motivate with internal motivations.

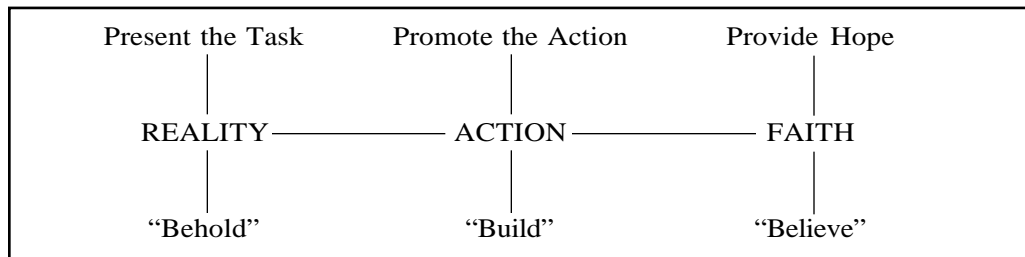
- 1) External motivation (money, vacation) only motivates temporarily.
- 2) Internal motivation (job satisfaction, a sense of purpose) motivates continuously.
 - a) Indeed, many studies in business management have revealed the great value of internal motivation and the limited value of external motivation.
 - b) Nehemiah used internal motivation in 2:17 when he appealed to the worker's national pride.

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e. The process of motivation.

- 1) A effective leader realistically presents the task to be accomplished. Then he must promote action. Finally, he must provide a sense of hope. This process moves from reality, to action, to faith.
- 2) Use the following diagram to show how Nehemiah used this process of motivation (refer to 2:16,17).

THE PROCESS OF MOTIVATION



3. An effective Leader knows how to properly handle the opposition.

- a. If a leader never gets criticized, it probably means that he is not doing his job correctly (consider also Lk 6:26).
- b. Opposition often accompanies success. The greater the success, the greater the opposition. Leaders must be able to respond with wisdom to their opposition.
- c. Nehemiah effectively responded to his opposition in 6:1-8.
 - 1) He discerned the source of the opposition in 6:12.
 - 2) He then discerned the motive of the opposition in 6:13.
 - 3) He did not allow the actions of the opposition to distract him or his workers. They moved ahead with their eyes on their goal and not on the opposition. They stayed focused on the mission.
 - 4) He used prayer (4:4, 5, 9) and persistence (4:6) to fight the opposition. He also used common sense (4:9).

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Author's Illustration:

If you think that someone might break into your car, you pray and trust God to protect it. You also lock the doors (common sense).

Insert Your Illustration:

- a) Nehemiah did not have presumptuous faith. He was a man of prayer and action. Note how in 4:9 it said, “we prayed **and** set a guard.”
- b) Action does not negate faith. It actually is a part of faith.

D. The Character of the Leader as he Relates to Himself.

- 1. A Christian Leader pursues selflessness.
 - a. A Christian leader is motivated by concern for others, not by concern for self. The leader must be “other” oriented, not “self” oriented. A Leader will focus on other’s accomplishments and not on their own.
 - 1) Nehemiah, in his listing of the workers and their accomplishments, did not put the focus on himself. He focused on the accomplishments of others.
 - 2) A Christian leader is willing to take more of the blame than he deserves, and less of the credit that he deserves.

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- b. A Christian leader must be able to take his eyes off of himself in order to put his eyes on others. If he is too worried about himself and his own problems, then he will not be able to help others. He must be free (from himself) to serve. He must be free to feel compassion for others.
 - 1) Jesus was able to feel compassion for the multitudes because He was able to look away from Himself and his own needs and look toward others and their needs (consider Mk 6:31-39).
 - 2) Nehemiah also took his eyes off of himself and felt compassion for those who he led (see 1:4).
- 2. A Christian Leader demonstrates sacrifice.
 - a. A Christian leader should sacrifice for his people. He should “give himself up” for those whom he is leading.
 - 1) According to the Bible, the husband is the head (leader) of the wife (Eph 5:23). His responsibility as the head (leader) is summarized in Eph 5:25. He is to “give himself up for her.”
 - 2) If a leader is not sincere in this way, then he is not able to effectively lead his people. If he is not willing to lay down his life for those he is leading, then he eventually loses motivation because he eventually loses his sense of purpose.
 - a) Without a strong sense of a well defined purpose, it is difficult to be a leader. That purpose needs to focus on blessing those who are being led.
 - b) Leaders cannot allow themselves to be hindered by a conflict of interest. They cannot allow their own interests and desires to get in the way of the interests and needs of the people.
 - b. Christian leaders must be ready to sacrifice with respect to how they live.
 - 1) They should refuse to live in luxury when those who they are leading are living in poverty.
 - 2) This point is important, perhaps for more than any other reason, because it proves the sincerity of the leader (see 5:14, 17, 18).

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Discussion Point

Discuss how Nehemiah's actions showed his sincerity and integrity.

3. Christian Leaders demonstrate humility.

- a. Christian leaders must look at themselves in a humble way. They cannot have a haughty or arrogant attitude about themselves. Humility should result in the ability to work side by side with people.
 - 1) In 2:17, Nehemiah included himself with the people.
 - a) He did not say: "This is your problem. This is what you must do."
 - b) He says: "This is our problem. This is what we must do."
 - 2) In 4:23, Nehemiah put these words into practice.
 - a) He worked with his people. He stood by their side and got his hands dirty also.
 - b) He was not too proud to work hard. He was humble enough to take part in the common work as he led the common people.
- b. Christian Leaders are made at the cross.
 - 1) A Christian leader must identify himself with Jesus, who identified Himself with the cross. Only in this way does the victory of the resurrection come to pass in a leader's life and ministry.
 - 2) This aspect of leadership, more than in any other way, is formed through a strong and intimate relationship with God.
 - 3) We might say that a good leader may be able to perform well when he is in the spotlight. However, a great leader is able to perform well when he is all alone. Great leaders are made during their time spent with God.

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E. Appendix of Leadership Character Traits from Nehemiah.

Notes —

1. Faith (4:14, 15, 20; 6:16).
2. Prayer (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4, 5, 9; 5:19; 6:9,14).
3. Sensitivity (2:12).
4. Fear of God (5:9, 15).
5. Depends on God (2:8, 18).
6. Knowledgeable (1:2; 2:8, 12-15).
7. Discernment (6:12).
8. Action oriented (2:17).
9. Practical (3:21-23, 28-30).
10. Perseverance (4:21).
11. Discretion (2:12-16).
12. Integrity (5:9-12, 14-19).
13. Preparation (2:6-8, 11-16).
14. Courage (6:11).
15. Tactful (2:5-8).
16. Righteous anger (5:6).
17. Protects vulnerabilities (4:13).

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V. The Character Trait of Selflessness.

A. Introduction to Selflessness.

1. Perhaps the closest we can come to a one-word definition of Christian character is that it is to be “**selfless**.”
 - a. Selflessness is that part of a person’s character that is able to forget about personal needs and desires in order to remember the needs and desires of others.
 - b. Selflessness is the quality that allows Christ to live in us. “for it is no longer I who live (selflessness), but it is Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20).”
2. Briefly, we will consider some of the aspects of the life of Francis of Assisi, a figure from church history who lived about 1200 A.D., in order to understand more fully the idea of selflessness in the character of a Christian. Of course, many fine examples of church history leaders (such as Martin Luther, etc.) could have been chosen.

Discussion Point

Francis of Assisi led a life of selflessness. His greatest desire was to be free of himself through an imitation of the life of Christ. His life was a revived life because he embraced the spirit which led Christ to the cross (Mt 16:25). He embraced the spirit of selflessness. In what ways can you pursue selflessness?

B. Freedom and Selflessness.

1. Freedom is to selflessness what slavery is to selfishness. Selfishness makes us slaves of ourselves. Selflessness makes us free from ourselves and free to serve God and others.
2. Francis of Assisi gained freedom through his selflessness.
 - a) Once, as he was considering the freedom of a bird. He followed it onto the roof of a house. He walked slowly toward the edge of the roof where the bird was standing. Then the bird flew away. The bird was free.

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- b) Francis wanted to fly also. He wanted to be free. He understood that in order to fly he had to be very light. He had to free himself of the heavy burden he was carrying. He had to die to himself.
 - c) Consider the meaning of Mt 11:28-30 with respect to this description of freedom.
3. Freedom sent Christ to the cross. There is freedom in selflessness and “where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor 3:17).”

Notes —

Discussion Point

Discuss the significance of Gal 5:13 and 1 Pt 2:16 as they relate to these ideas about freedom and selflessness.

C. Joy and Selflessness.

- 1. Joy is a result of selflessness. Depression is a result of selfishness.
 - a. Francis told his followers that it was their own responsibility to be full of joy and to lift up the hearts of others.
 - b. Francis was a man of joy because his selflessness was real. He did not force himself to die to himself. He died willingly because he wanted to be like Christ. Thus, his suffering and discipline were done in joy.
- 2. Sincere selflessness is proven by a joyful spirit.
 - a. Francis loved to fast. It was not a burden to him. He did not enjoy it because he was a masochist (one who enjoys punishing himself). He enjoyed it because his motives to fast were sincere.
 - b. A religious or selfish spirit leads to depression. A sincere or selfless spirit leads to joy.

Discussion Point

Discuss how this is true in the following passages:
Mt 13:44; 2 Cor 8:2; Phil 2:17,18.

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NOTE: The following are quotes attributed to Francis related to selflessness.

D. Quotes From Francis of Assisi.

1. “Above all graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit that Christ gave to the Church, is to overcome oneself, and willingly for the love of Christ endure pains and insults and shame and wants (see Lk 6:22, 23).”²
2. In referring to wisdom, simplicity, poverty, humility, love, and obedience as virtues, Francis states: “For it is from the Lord, most holy virtues, that you proceed. And there is not one among you that we may practice without being dead to self.”³

VI. Discipline.

A. Introduction to Discipline.

1. To study Christian character, we should also consider the idea of discipline. A Christian life should be a disciplined life. This discipline should be motivated by a love for Christ.
2. The word disciple is derived from the same root word that creates the word discipline. A Christian disciple is one who follows after Jesus Christ and disciplines their life into the pattern given by Him.
3. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was a man of discipline. He was very methodical (from which came the name “Methodists”) in his walk with God.
 - a. However, he was not a legalist. His Christianity was not something he forced on himself.
 - b. He was a sincerely devout Christian. His Christianity (and the discipline that went with it) was something that he did freely and with joy.
 - c. His discipline was, more than anything else, a way to focus and organize the overflowing energy, commitment, and desire that he had for Christ.
4. We will use the life of Wesley to briefly study how discipline is an important aspect of Christian character. Many fine examples from church history (such as John Calvin) could have been chosen.

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B. The Holy Club.

Notes —

1. Early in Wesley's life, he led a group called the "Holy Club." This club practiced certain disciplines together.
 - a. They fasted two times each week.
 - b. They had a time of praise, prayer, and Bible study together from 5:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. every day.
 - c. They prayed for the poor from 6:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. every day.
 - d. They read devotional and theological books together from 7:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. five nights each week.
2. The members of the Holy Club were very disciplined. However, they were not disciplined in their lives simply to be disciplined. Their discipline was motivated by their love for God and their burning desire to know Him.

C. Freedom Not Legalism.

1. The structured discipline of early Methodism might be seen by some as bordering on legalism.
 - a. However, the Methodist movement was not based on the disciplined ability of man, but on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and a desire to fellowship closely with God.
 - 1) Discipline was practiced because of a desire for holiness. It was not an end. It was only a means to an end, which was to know God more fully.
 - 2) The focus of the discipline was not on forcing people to do something. It was on inviting people into a more consistent and fruitful relationship with Christ.
 - b. Forced discipline can lead to legalism. However, discipline that is the result of the inspiration of the Spirit and the voluntary decision of the individual will lead to freedom and life.

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Notes

2. Discipline is not a cause of salvation. It is an effect.

- a. It is that response to God that says, “I want to give you my whole life because you gave me your whole life.” Discipline is a tool that can and should be used to “work out your salvation” (Phil 2:12).
- b. Thus, discipline is associated more with sanctification than it is with salvation. As we submit to the work of the Spirit to sanctify us, we will become more and more disciplined in all areas of our lives.
- c. The focus of discipline in Christian character should be on holiness and relationship with God.
 - 1) A Christian must be disciplined to be able to control his flesh (1 Cor 6:12-20).
 - 2) This discipline must be more than a “bodily discipline.” It must be done in the context of godliness (1 Tim 4:7, 8).
 - 3) More than anything else, Christian character that includes discipline should be pointed toward spending time with God. We should discipline our minds to constantly be in the presence of God. We should discipline ourselves to plan and live according to a daily schedule that will give priority to spending time with God.

Discussion Point

Discuss how the early Christians manifested discipline in their character.
Discuss the implications and challenges of Acts 2:42.

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Christian Character: Endnotes

Notes —

¹F.B. Meyer, Moses (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1978), p. 101.

²D.K. Chesterton, St. Francis of Assisi (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1957).

³Ibid.

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