

## Models of Character

### Consistent Character 8

We have elevated three Biblical models of character in this series so far. Stories from their lives have been recorded in scripture to teach us and be our examples - and they have been.

David was our model for confronting big challenges with character. Joseph was our model for confronting private challenges with character. And (last week) Job was our model for displaying character when life falls apart.

This has been, primarily, a model-based study. We have many reasons to believe that this is a helpful exercise.

Hebrews 11 in the New Testament immediately comes to mind. It outlines the beliefs and actions of the faithful throughout the Old Testament, first listing them by name, then eventually in verse 32 declaring:

32 ¶ And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39 ¶ And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Their character is commended throughout, obviously, but particularly at the end “Of whom the world was not worthy.”

One commentary says of this phrase: “A most honourable character and commendation from God, the true Judge and fountain of honour-that the world was not worthy of such men; the world did not deserve such blessings; they did not know how to value them, nor how to use them.”

The reality of their public and private lives was known to God and here related to us. There can be no mistake about who they were - for God declares their faith and faithfulness.

“They obtained a good report.” Of which another commentator says “Though they obtained this good testimony, they did not receive the promise, the testimony of the completed work of the Messiah on

their behalf. If these followers of God were steadfast without receiving the promise, those who have received the promise have even more reason to continue on through trials and difficulty.”

We are in a better position and have a better opportunity. What have we done, what will we do with this opportunity?

So...if it is true that models are helpful, perhaps we wonder what modern models we may have for character?

Author Tim Challies has addressed this question. Here is a rather lengthy introduction to his answer:

”As Christians, we all want to grow in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness. At least, I hope we do. We all want to become what we are in Christ, to put aside patterns of sin and unrighteousness and to replace them with patterns of holiness. Ultimately, we want to become like Christ, to think how he thought and to behave how he behaved. We do well to aspire to the highest standards of holiness and godliness.

The Bible holds out one group of people who are to serve as models of Christian maturity: Elders (referred to at times as elders, and at other times as pastors or overseers). Elders are qualified to the office primarily on the basis of their character. While the Bible provides one quality related to skill (the ability to teach) and one related to the amount of time a man has been a Christian (not a recent convert), all of the other qualifications are related to character. Yet while these traits are demanded of elders, they are not unique to elders.

D.A. Carson has said that the list of qualifications for elders is ‘remarkable for being unremarkable.’ Why is that? Because these traits are repeated elsewhere as qualities that ought to be present among all believers. Carson says, ‘The criteria mentioned are demanded of all Christians everywhere. Which is another way of saying, elders are first of all to be exemplars of the Christian graces that are presupposed as mandated on all Christians.’ Every church is meant to be full of men and women who display these traits.”

Thus begins Challies series on “The Character of the Christian” from 2016.

Before we go on, let us make a couple of things clear:

1. Christ is our primary example and the One to which we are to be conformed and
2. Men are, as we are, just flesh and blood

Praise God for the opportunity to have Godly examples, Pastors, in our lives. Let us not allow this understanding, the way in which they are seen as an example, to be a cause for undue scrutiny. Our mandates are the same, while our positions of influence and accountability may be different.

Therefore, as we approach 1 Timothy 3 today, we do so with the understanding that we have these men, who are examples, for a reason. They are to display for us, character, the kind we must have as well.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;  
3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;  
4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;  
5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)  
6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.  
7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The word “blameless” may seem a difficult one at first glance. We may mistakenly see it as perfection. It is not.

Another reasonable rendering is “above reproach.” This is the idea that a person could be accused, but not credibly. Someone may make a charge, but it won’t stick.

Not a person who hasn’t sinned, but a person who has dealt properly and thoroughly with sin. And a person that continues to deal thoroughly and properly with sin.

The Bishop is held to no higher standard than we are. For all disciples of Christ are, as we’ve already discussed in this class, commanded by Christ to:

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

...Matthew 5:48

This is the kind of perfection (blamelessness) we saw in Job last week. He walked with God and dealt with sin. He saw God in a proper way and his actions reflected this fear (reverence) for God.

These are the examples we must follow and be ourselves.

The Pastor is also “the husband of one wife.” He is faithful and true. He is showing in this relationship, the one relationship that is used as an example of Christ’s relationship with the church, that he has integrity.

This reflects his morality, his fidelity, his commitment, his devotion. He does not have a wandering eye or a wandering heart.

These characteristics are obviously Biblical and to be applied to all, no matter our relationship status. (A man tells us much when he shows purity and integrity in marriage.)

This, example to us, must also be vigilant or temperate. A person not given to extremes, but of clear thought, enough that they can recognize the subtle schemes of the enemy.

They are sober. Serious-minded people. Thinking people. Considered people. They are people of the word. The word guides them.

And they are “of good behaviour.” They are respectable. You’ll find this same word a few verses earlier in this text (1 Timothy 2:9), when it says women should adorn themselves in “modest” apparel. Same word. Seemly. Respectable.

They are also “given to hospitality.” They show care for others and are generous. They provide others with a warm greeting, a warm meal (perhaps), and a warm heart.

If we stop before we get to the section that is very specific to a pastor, can we recap?

If I were to tell you I had met someone: blameless, above reproach, who was a faithful and committed husband, clear-minded, serious-minded, and respectable, it would be obvious that I was giving them a “character” reference.

This person certainly hasn’t given themselves to alcohol, for it would only impair their sober and clear-mindedness.

They are not a violent person, but rather a gentle one.

They do not have an inordinate affection for money, to the point that it interrupts their decision-making and consumes their thoughts.

They can manage their household and maintain the respect of their family. Their affairs are in order at home. They are properly raising their children.

They have a dignity and a gravity about them that is evident.

Are these not the kinds of examples we must seek and the kinds of examples we must seek to be? Are these not men of character?