

14. Jesus Taught to Transform Character

In our last lesson, we saw that Moses was told how to transform lives through his teaching. Exodus 18:20 says, “And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.” We saw that balanced teaching, and equipping, transforms the head (knowledge), the heart (character), and the hands (ministry). Today, we will see how Christ showed us that effective teaching transforms the heart and develops godly character.

Right at the beginning of His public ministry, Christ began to tell individuals how their character would be transformed, as they allowed His teaching to penetrate their hearts. In John 1:42, we read, “And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, ‘You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated, A Stone).” Cephas was the Aramaic word for stone and Peter was the Greek word for stone. Here, Christ was telling Peter, the very first time He met him, that Peter would become like a rock.

Nearly a year later, we read, in Luke 5:4-8, “When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’ And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” As Peter saw the power of Christ, he realized his own sinfulness. That day, Christ taught him a very important lesson that was needed in order for him to become like a rock.

Another lesson Christ taught His disciples is found in Matthew 9:36-38. Those verses say, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’” Christ first taught the disciples compassion by His own example. Then, He taught them how to show compassion by first, praying, in Matthew 9, and then, going, in Matthew 10. They could only learn these lessons by observing the example of Christ.

When Christ sent the disciples out to preach in Matthew 10, He also taught them another lesson that would help to transform their character. That lesson was to help them learn to live by faith. Matthew 10:9-10 says, “Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.” Later, as Christ looked back and talked about this time of ministry to the disciples, He said, in Luke 22:35, “And He said to them, ‘When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?’ So they said, ‘Nothing.’” They had to learn to live by faith, because they would be living that way for the rest of their lives. We need to help developing leaders learn that same lesson from our example.

As they saw the example of Christ and listened to Him teach, Peter, and the other disciples, learned many other lessons that transformed their character. Two of these lessons are seen in Matthew 16. Matthew 16:13-18 says, “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’” Here, we see that Peter had transformed his thinking and realized that Christ was the Son of God. This was important in the life of Peter, because it meant that he would recognize the authority of Christ in his life.

The second lesson, in that chapter, is found in Matthew 16:21-23. There we read, “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’” Here, we see that Peter had to have his character transformed so he could begin to think from God’s viewpoint, instead of from a worldly viewpoint.

Jesus also had to deal with the spirit of anger and revenge in His disciples. Luke 9:53-56 says, “But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.’ And they went to another village.” Jesus had to show them, by His example, how to accept rejection and continue to love those who reject.

The Lord also had to deal with a spirit of pride and a desire for power in the lives of His disciples. Mark 10:35-37 says, “Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.’ And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.’” Then, Mark 10:41 says, “And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.” Here, we see that all twelve had the same pride and desire for power.

Christ used this opportunity to teach the disciples about servant leadership. Mark 10:42-45 says, But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Christ showed, by His own

example, that spiritual greatness comes by becoming a bondservant to all. One of the greatest needs in Christianity today is people who are showing others how to serve instead of being served.

Perhaps the greatest example of godly character was shown to the disciples on the night before Christ was crucified. Matthew 26:48-50 says, “Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.’ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Even in the very act of betraying Christ, Christ still showed love and acceptance to Judas. When Christ said to Judas, “‘Friend, why have you come?’” Jesus continued to show love to His betrayer. The other disciples saw that Christ was able to show godly character in every situation. The reason they were able to see that was due to the fact Christ had taken them with Him when He went to the garden to pray.

Godly character can never be learned in a classroom. Godly character can only be learned by the example of those who show godly character in difficult situations. Christ took the disciples with Him so they could learn by observing His example in many different situations. In the same way, people will only learn to develop godly character as they see it modeled in our lives. This is why it is so important for mature Christians to take newer Christians with them, so the newer Christians can observe them in many different situations. We teach godly character by example, not by a sermon or Bible study.

Just as Jesus showed the disciples, by His own example, that their lives and character could be transformed, Christ calls us to do the same. That will only happen as we take developing leaders with us in many different situations. They need to have opportunities to see how we handle rejection. They need to have opportunities to see us when we face very difficult situations. That will only happen as we make it our goal to transform lives by providing an example of godly character that others can see and imitate. Paul said, in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” The new Christians learned to develop godly character by watching the example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. In turn, they became an example for others to follow. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders develop godly character in their lives, because they are following your example as you follow the example of Christ.