Chapter 4
Servant Leadership – Being a Leader with Character

Apart from Christ being our life (identity, indwelling, intimacy) character is the second most important quality in a leader. There are many leaders even in the Christian world that lack certain elements of character. When key character qualities are absent (faith, humility, integrity, trustworthy, honest) people will not follow or will follow with great reluctance. The developing of character is a unique combination of God’s work (brokenness) and our choice or will. Character is derived from abiding in Christ and will lead into how I develop community or teams.

We will examine character in four studies in addition to listening to the audio cassette of Andy Stanley on character. The five study sessions will be 1. Becoming a leader with character 2. The Making of a Leader’s Character 3. Character Qualities of a Leader 4. Servant Leadership Study 5. Servant Leadership Principles.

The following are the principles and highlights that relate Character to leadership and the Christ Life model.

4.1 Being a Leader with Character

Christ Life Leadership - Character
• Christlikeness will lead to transforming us into Christlikeness. Christlikeness may not lead to Christlikeness.
• The significance, security, freedom, and rest that comes from the life of Christ will allow us to embrace the difficulties that God uses to refine us
• Character is shaped and developed primarily by persevering through difficulties, pain and struggle.
• Character is revealed in the choices I make when I am alone. Our public behavior may or may not reveal who I am.
• The foundation of character is centered in Who I “in Christ”.
• Primary character qualities include honesty, humility and integrity.
• The character of a leader will determine who and why people follow.
• Only when I am secure “in Christ” can I truly serve those around me without any strings attached.
• Christ could effectively exercise servant leadership because he knew who and whose He was.

Surrender – Death to Self

“There is no such thing as a private life for a man who is brought into fellowship with Jesus Christ suffersings. God breaks up the private life of His saints and makes it a thoroughfare for the world and Himself. Why shouldn’t we go through heartbreaks? Through these doorways God is opening up ways of fellowship with Him. Most of us fall and collapse at the first grip of pain. We sit down on the threshold of God’s purposes and die away of self pity and so called Christian sympathy will aid us to our death bed. But God will not. He comes with the grip of the pierced hands of His Son and says ‘Enter into fellowship with me, arise and shine.’ If there is a broken heart God can bring His purpose to pass in the world, then thank Him for breaking your Heart.”

Oswald Chamber #306

• It is only in my weakness and emptiness that the power of Christ can dwell in me.
• Our ability to appropriate Christ is in proportion to the depth of our surrender.
• My brokenness and surrender leads me to greater dependence and identification with Christ.
• Leaders need to model humility and surrender in order for others to follow. It is only in how we follow Christ (humility) that others can follow us.
• Our surrender becomes the basis for our servanthood

Breaking is the first and highest thing we bring to the table, we are the greatest frustration to our work
Eph 3:16, Jn 12:24, Jn12:3
We can’t reduce the time of breaking, we can extend it
The cross puts the outer man to death, breaks the shell and releases the spirit
Whether a man can be used by the Lord depends more on his outer man than on his spirit. The problem with some is that the outer man has never been broken.
God can only use an available vessel. Things that we hold on to, that occupy us end up blocking God’s use of us. What are the things we have in our hands?
We are qualified for God’s work by availability, not ability, skill, knowledge.
The condition of the inner man is the condition of the outer man.

As you begin this section of study, what strikes you about the above principles?

How are you doing in developing Christ life character?

What are you asking God for?

* Begin your study on Character by listening to the tape by Andy Stanley on Building Character. Make notes in the space provided below.

**Leadership Principle:** Character comes from Christ within and is a leader’s foundation for doing the right things and treating people the right way.
4.2 The Making of a Leader’s Character

Being humble and contrite of heart is the most honoring and useful places a leader can be before the Lord. In order to get there each of us must die to self.

Consider

The following is a letter written by the Catholic priest – Francios Fenelon in the 1600’s to friends held in prison.

Let Go: Letter 4: The Death of Self

I cannot express to you how deeply I sympathize with you in your time of suffering. I suffer right along with you, but still, it cheers me up to know that God loves you.

And the very proof that God loves you is that He does not spare you, but lays upon you the cross of Jesus Christ. Whatever spiritual knowledge or feelings we may have, they are all a delusion if they do not lead us to the real and constant practice of dying to self. And it is true that we do not die without suffering. Nor is it possible to be considered truly dead while there is any part of us which is yet alive. This spiritual death (which is really a blessing in disguise) is undeniably painful. It cuts "swift and deep into our innermost thoughts and desires with all their parts, exposing us for what we really are." The great Physician who sees in us what we cannot see, knows exactly where to place the knife. He cuts away that which we are most reluctant to give up. And how it hurts! But we must remember that pain is only felt where there is life, and where there is life is just the place where death is needed. Our Father wastes no time by cutting into parts which are already dead. Do not misunderstand me; He wants you to live abundantly, but this can only be accomplished by allowing Him to cut into that fleshly part of you which is still stubbornly clinging to life. Don't expect God to deal with those vulgar, wicked desires which you renounced forever when you gave yourself away to Him. That part of you is already dead. But, He will deal with the parts of you that are still alive. He might even test your faith with restrictions and trials of all kinds.

Should you resist? Certainly not! You must learn to suffer all things! The death of self must be voluntary, and it can only be accomplished as far as you allow. Anyone who resists death and repels its advances shows that he is not willing to die. You must be willing to yield to the will of God whenever He decides to remove from you all the props on which you have leaned. Sometimes you must give up even your most spiritual friends, if they are props. "What fearest thou, oh thou of little faith?"

Do you fear that He may not be able to supply to you from himself that help which He may have taken away on the human level? And why does He take human help away, except to supply you from Himself, and to purify you by the painful lesson?

What are your reflections and thoughts?

What is God saying to you?
Examine

Let’s examine God’s word. What do the following verses teach about Dying to self, brokenness, and humility? Why is this character quality important to leadership?

Lu 9:23

Jn 12:24-26

1 Pet 5: 5,6

Js 4:10

God has a process to develop in every leader godly character, it is always through our handling of difficulty, suffering, and trials. What is critical is not the nature or severity of the difficulty, but my response to it. How should I respond according to these verses?

2 Cor 1:3-5

1 Pet 5:10

Js 1:2-4

Interact

What difficulty are you currently undergoing?

How are you handling it?

What is God teaching you?
The following are two more letters written by the Catholic priest – Francios Fenelon in the 1600’s to friends held in prison. They still hold much applicability today. Read and reflect on these in relationship to what God is doing in your life and your role as a leader.

**Let Go: Letter 24: Only Imperfection Is Intolerant of Imperfection**

It seems to me that you need to be a little more big-hearted about the imperfection of other people. I know you can't help but see these imperfections when they come right before your eyes and neither can you prevent involuntary opinions about others from popping into your mind. And nobody will deny that the imperfections of others cause us a lot of inconvenience! But it will be enough if you are willing to be patient with imperfections, whether they be serious or not so serious. Do not allow yourself to turn away from people because of their imperfections.

If there is one mark of perfection, it is simply that it can tolerate the imperfections of others. It is able to adjust. It becomes all things to all men. Sometimes we find the most surprising faults in otherwise good people. But we must not be surprised. It is best to let these faults alone and let God deal with them in His time. If we deal with them, we shall end up pulling up the wheat with the tares. I have found that God leaves, even in the most spiritual people, certain weaknesses which seem to be entirely out of place. This is true of all of us. And all of us need to be quick to recognize our own imperfection, letting God deal with them.

As for you, labor to be patient with the weaknesses of other people. You know from experience how bitterly it hurts to be corrected. So work hard to make it less bitter for others. Although I am not saying that you correct other people too much. That is not your problem. Your problem is that you became cool when you discover faults in other people, and you tend to quit associating with them. So you need to deal with that problem.

Now, after all that, I ask you more than ever to not spare me if I need correction. Even if you mention a fault which isn't really there, there will be no harm done. If I find that your correction wounds me, then my irritability simply shows that you have touched a sore spot in my life. But if there is no irritability and resentment, then at least you will have done me an excellent kindness in testing my ability to be humble, and in keeping me accustomed to reproof. Since I occupy a position of responsibility in the church, I think I am more responsible to be humble even than others are. God demands that I be dead to everything. I need this, just as you do, and I trust that our mutual need will be the means of cementing, rather than weakening, our attachment in the Lord.

What are your reflections and thoughts?

What is God saying to you?
Let Go: Letter 37: God Gives Grace in Proportion To Our Trials

I feel a deep sense of sympathy for your loved one who is suffering so much. And I can certainly appreciate the concern of those God-given friends who are trying to help her bear her cross. Tell her not to lose faith in God. The grace He gives will be in direct proportion to the amount of suffering she must bear. No one else can do this except the Creator who made us and knows how to renew our strength by His grace. None of us are wise enough to properly apportion grace and suffering. We cannot see the extent of our future trials, nor of the vast supplies of which God is storing up in us so that we can meet them. And because we cannot see those future trials, nor the grace that will be needed for them, we are tempted to become discouraged and despondent in our present situations. We see our trials rolling in toward us like great, overpowering, ocean waves. Our hearts fail us with fear at the prospect of drowning. We do not see that we stand within the point at which God, with a steady finger, has drawn the boundary line. Beyond that line the waves cannot pass.

God often allows us to be tested as one is tested by a stormy sea. God stirs up the sea, and makes its great billows seem to threaten destruction. But He is always at hand to say, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther."

"God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). What are your reflections and thoughts?

What is God saying to you?

Apply

Why is dying to self important as a leader?

In what way is God breaking you now?

Leadership Principle: The breadth of ministry is determined the depth of a leader’s character.
4.3 LEADERSHIP Character qualities: FAITH

These five character qualities are essential to exercising leadership and having God use you.

- **Faith** - Leaders bring faith and courage to a team effort. Faith has its roots in hope and this is what motivates and inspires people.
- **Abandoned** – Humility, surrender and dying to self.
- **Integrity** – Being whole.
- **Trustworthy** – Followers trust you and you are worthy of that trust, “faithful”.
- **Honesty** – Being truthful and forthright.

**Consider**

After surveying thousands of people around the world and performing many case studies, James Kouzes and Barry Posner identified the most desired qualities in a leader. In virtually all of the responses integrity and honestly were identified more frequently than any other.

*Why would you think this might be?*

*General George Patton in World War II as he looked for and developed leadership in the men around him, he majored on the character qualities of honesty, integrity and trustworthiness.*

*Why would these qualities be so important in a military general?*

**Examine**

What is God looking for in a leader according to these verses? Why would these be important?

- 2 Tim 2:2
- Ps 15:1,2
- Prov. 11:3
- 1 Sam 12:1-4
- Heb 13:8
**Interact**

How do these character qualities affect leadership?

Which of these is the most difficult for you? Why?

How did Christ model these character qualities?

**Reflect**

People are not impressed by facades or manipulation, but authenticity and by those who are truly other centered. Character is not a matter of an outward technique but an inward reality. What are you like when no one is looking? How do you respond when someone finds you?

How did God work in David’s life to develop these character qualities?

**Apply**

God wants you to develop in character more than you do. This should be a comfort to you because we so often fall short. How can God help you with being consistent and growing in character?

**Leadership Principle:** Leadership is sustained by character. The primary character qualities needed for leadership are faith, integrity, humility, honesty and trustworthiness.
4.4 Jesus on Servant Leadership

Jesus, in the course of His three year ministry with the disciples, had to address a number of issues with the chief one being pride and humility. This issue surfaces five times in a year and one half time frame. Knowing that Jesus called the disciples after about one year into the ministry, they were only together for about six months before trouble arises. I believe in each case Jesus is addressing a different aspect of servant leadership – which was Jesus primary leadership role. Examine each of these passages and reflect on the leadership principle involved and make an application to your life.

1. **Pride and Comparison**

Matthew 18:1-6

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Mark 9:33-37

And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." 36And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37"Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."


"Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." 45But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement. 46And an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the greatest. 47But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, 48and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great." 49And John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us." 50But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you."

How is the issue of pride manifest itself with this situation?

How does comparison feed the sin of pride?

What did Jesus teach as to the solution to this problem?
How do you see comparison in your ministry context?

Where do you struggle with it?

What action step will you take to deal with pride?

Who are you called to serve in your leadership? How will you do this?

2. **Position and Ambition**

**Matthew 20:20-26**

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." 22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,"

**Mark 10:35-45**

And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 And they said to Him, "Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 And they said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40"But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43"But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
How does position and ambition enter into leaders and organizations?

Where have you observed this problem?

How have you dealt with this issue?

What new application would God have you make in relation to ambition and position?

3. **Integrity**

The last week of Jesus life has begun and the disciples still do not seem to have victory in this area.

**Matthew 23:1-12**

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. 4 And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. 6 And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. 8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He
who is in heaven.  10"And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.  11"But the greatest among you shall be your servant.  12"And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

How does this passage (especially v3) relate to having integrity?

What was the problem Jesus was addressing and what was His conclusion?

How does integrity relate to servant leadership?

What issues of integrity do you struggle with?

What will you do differently as a result of Jesus teaching?

3.  **Modeling**

This washing of the feet occurred in Jesus last day and was a supreme example or model of servant leadership.

**John 13:1-20**

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.  2And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,  3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God,  4rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about.  5Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.  6And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?"  7Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter."  8Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."  9Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."  10Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."  11For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."
And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.' From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

How does Jesus’ teaching and example relate to servant leadership?

How do our actions and words affect our leadership?

What do you learn from Jesus’ teaching?

How have you seen this best modeled for you in other leaders?

What will you do as a result of applying this principle?

5. Power / Relationships

Within the hour of the foot washing on the way to the Garden of Gethseme, the disciples again struggle over the issues of servanthood, power, and how that affects relationships.

Luke 22:24-32

And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. And you are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

What are five things Jesus taught in answer to their dispute?
How does this issue of servanthood affect our relationship with the Father and how will it impact our ministry?

What do you learn from this teaching?

How will you apply this to your leadership?

Leadership Principle: Jesus primary leadership quality was servanthood through humility. The barriers to servanthood include: pride, ambition, comparison and power.
4.5 Servant Leadership Principles – “The Order of the Towel”

Let us dig deeper into being a servant leader.

**Consider**

*Pat Riley, the outstanding NBA coach, wrote about the “danger of me”. He said, “The most difficult thing for individuals to do when they’re part of the team is to sacrifice. It’s so easy to become selfish in a team environment. To play for me. It’s very vulnerable to drop your guard. But that is exactly what you have got to do. Willingness to sacrifice is the great paradox. You must be willing to give up something in the immediate present—comfort, ease, recognition, quick rewards—to attract something that is better for the future.*

**Servant leadership**

It takes a secure and humble leader to be able to serve others helping them succeed.

*As long as we insist on writing our own stories, he cannot write his living will onto our hearts*  
*As long as we insist on forging our own paths, he cannot lead us into his paths of righteousness*  
*As long as we insist on governing our own lives, he cannot be our sovereign King and Lord*  
*As long as we insist on living life according to our own desires, he cannot impart his desires or guide us into his wholeness, fruitfulness, and blessings.*  
*As long as we feel that we are in control of our fate, we cannot experience fully the destiny he has for us.*  
*We are His workmanship. When we act otherwise, we are breaching our trust relationship with God and are refusing to submit our lives fully to Him. Charles Stanley*

What insights do you gain from these men?

**Examine**

*Jesus model for leadership was servanthood. Servanthood can only be founded upon a growing, vital relationship with Christ and allowing God to have free reign in shaping your character.***

Study John 13: 1-17

What principles do you see Jesus modeling to His disciples?

Why would these be significant to them?
**Interact**

Servant leadership has the best interests of people as primary, this is lived out by valuing and caring for people. People have equal value. As leaders our focus is bottoms up versus a top down approach with people. Character qualities of humility and security are crucial in order to be a servant leader.

Describe where you have seen these principles lived out?

How did you feel about them?

How are you doing with them?

**Reflect**

The following are principles on servant leadership from a book - *Upside Down-Stacey Rhinehart of the Navigators*. Reflect on these and ask God to help you apply them to your leadership.

**Diversity instead of Standardization**

Allows freedom to vary methods, styles, forms, and visions because the diversity of the body is valued and the power of God is released.

**Empowerment, not conformity**

Equip and develop people in ways that empower and release them to live according to their gifting and God-given calling

**Centered in the Scriptures rather than Pragmatism**

**Authenticity above Productivity and Control**

Authenticity values the spirit and relationships and frames how we evaluate the outcome.

**Equipping God’s People**

**Resources for Equipping God’s People**

God assumes the ultimate responsibility for developing people.

God articulates His design for equipping in His written word.

God give multiple gifts to balance the equipping process.

**Reasons for Equipping God’s People**

Each individual believer has immense worth to God.

The ministry’s burdens and blessings were meant to be relational.

The people gathered will not reach the world.

Jesus and the apostles modeled a Train-n-Release ministry.

**Principles for Equipping God’s People**

The process must cooperate with God’s unique design for each believer.

The process must enable the people of God to minister as a community and not simply as individuals.

The process of equipping the saints is done among, and for the sake of, the lost.
Apply

What is God telling you to change or focus on?

What action items will you begin to put this into practice?

Leadership Principle: Servanthood always puts the needs and interests of people first.
Chapter 4.6 The Devotional Life of a Leader

**Devotional Spirituality** by Dr. Ken Boa

Read this article reflecting and journaling about how big your God is and how this will affect your leadership.

**Our Image of God**

“There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6).

We do not exist for ourselves—we exist for the Father and through the Son. The world tells us that we derive our existence from it and that we should live for ourselves, but the Word teaches us that all we are and have comes from the Father who formed us for His pleasure and purposes.

Ultimate reality is not the cosmos or a mysterious force, but an infinite and loving Person. The implications of this, if we think about it, are astounding and pervasive. The infinite-personal Lord of all is an unbounded loving community of three timeless and perfect Persons. In the superabundance of His joy and life, He is at once solitude and society, the one and the many, supernal being as communion. The magnificent God who abounds in personal plenitude has no needs, yet He invites us to participate in the intense and interpenetrating life of the three eternally subsistent Selves. Jesus prayed on our behalf “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us . . . . I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:21, 23). The impenetrable mystery of us being in the divine Us, and the divine Us being in us transcends our imagination, but if it is true, all else pales in comparison.

Devotional spirituality revels in the glorious attributes of God and aspires to lay hold of God’s aspiration for us. It prepares our souls for the “mystic sweet communion” of living entirely in God and in one another as the three Persons of God eternally live and rejoice in One another. It instills in us a passion for Christ’s indwelling life and inspires us to swim in the river of torrential love that flows from His throne of grace.

In 1677, Henry Scougal observed in his little book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* that “The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.” Our souls become emaciated when their pleasure is affixed to position, possessions, and power, because these things are destined to corrupt and perish. But as we gradually (and often painfully) transfer our affections from the created and finite world to the uncreated and infinite Maker of the world, our souls become great and glorious. As we take the risk of seeking God’s pleasure above our own, we discover the ironic byproduct of a greater satisfaction and contentment than if we sought these things as ends in themselves. As we learn to fix our eyes on Jesus, not for His benefits but for Himself, we find that we have all things in Him.

Scripture teaches us that we steadily become conformed to what we most love and admire. Hosea declared that the people of Israel “became as detestable as that which they loved” (Hosea 9:10). But when we turn the focus of our love away from the idols of this world system to the beauty of Christ, we discover the liberty of the Spirit of the Lord. We become like our focus: as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We gradually come to resemble what we worship. If our heart’s desire is fixed on something in this world, it becomes idolatrous and soul-corrupting. But if we draw our life from loving communion with the caring, radiant, majestic, and unfathomable Being who formed us for Himself, our souls become noble as they grow in conformity to His character.

**God’s World, His Word, His Works, and His Ways**

God in His inner essence is a mystery beyond our comprehension; we will never know Him as He knows Himself. The great pilgrims along the way have discovered that progress from superficial to substantive apprehension of God is not so much a movement from darkness to light as it is a plummeting into the ever-increasing profundity of the cloud of unknowing. Kallistos Ware in *The Orthodox Way* distinguishes the essence of God and the energies of God. In His essence, God is radically transcendent, but in His energies, He is immanent and omnipresent. As Ware notes, “The Godhead is simple and indivisible, and has no parts. The essence signifies the whole God as he is in himself; the energies signify the whole God as he is in action. God in his entirety is completely present in each of his divine energies.” As we reflect on God’s revelatory
actions, we come to know Him more clearly, and this enables us to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly. God makes Himself known to us through His world, His word, His works, and His ways.

**Loving God through His World**

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Psalm 19:1). “O Lord, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your possessions” (Psalm 104:24). Read Psalm 19:1-6 and Psalms 104 and 148 carefully and prayerfully and you will be struck by the manifold ways in which God designed the heavens and earth to display His glory, wisdom, and greatness.

Mediation on the created order is too often neglected as a meaningful component of devotional spirituality. This is unfortunate, because creation abounds with resplendent wonders on every order of magnitude from the microcosm to the macrocosm that point beyond themselves to the beauty and unimaginable brilliance of the Creator of the cosmos. Consider these marvels of order and design: particles and atoms, light and colors, microbes and diatoms, snowflakes, insects, seeds, flowers, leaves, shells, rocks and minerals, fruits, vegetables, plants, small and large birds, small and large fish, whales, small and large animals, trees, mountains, clouds, weather, the seasons, our earth, the planets, stars, nebulae, our galaxy, clusters and superclusters of galaxies.

“You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:13-14). Of all God’s created works, the human body best displays God’s creative skill and design. I recommend two books that will help you worship God by reflecting on the marvels of the human and spiritual body: *Fearfully & Wonderfully Made* and *In His Image* by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. These books portray the way physical systems like cells, bone, skin, motion, blood, the head, and the sensation of pain teach spiritual truth.

Let me mention two things that have helped me love God through His world. The first is an occasional trip to special places where I am encompassed in the natural order. In such places I sometimes sit back and stare at the stars until I realize that I am no longer looking up, but also down, and that I am wholly enveloped by the splendor and grandeur of the heavens. An experience like this is humbling because it dramatically shifts my perspective and reminds me that apart from God and His grace, I am nothing. I gain a similar sense of awe by looking at recent photographs of star clouds and distant galaxies. The veritable explosion in scientific knowledge in our time gives us access to new avenues of appreciating God that were never before available.

The second thing I use to stimulate wonder is a set of field lenses and a miniature high intensity flashlight. I use this “nature kit” from time to time to observe otherwise invisible colors and patterns in flowers, insects, rocks, and so forth. The very act of slowing down enough to observe and appreciate the rich intricacy and diversity of the created order is a healthy exercise in recollection and renewal.

There is no limit to the images and insights that can be gleaned from nature if we take the time and have the eyes to see. We would do well to cultivate a childlike sense of amazement and awe at the things we tend to overlook every day. Our artificial environments and busy schedules make us forget that we are surrounded by mystery and majesty. I encourage you to make the effort to enjoy more frequent and deliberate contact with God’s creation and to develop a deeper appreciation for the complexity, beauty, and resplendence of the heavens and earth. As you do this, you will sense that the God who designed all this and spoke it into being is utterly competent, trustworthy, and lovable.

**Loving God through His Word**

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18). The Word of God restores the soul, imparts wisdom, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, reveals God’s righteousness, and endures forever (Psalm 19:7-9). Scripture was revealed not merely to inform us, but to transform us. In *Shaped by the Word*, M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. contrasts two approaches to Scripture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATIONAL READING</th>
<th>FORMATIONAL READING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeks to cover as much as possible</td>
<td>Focuses on small portions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A linear process</td>
<td>An in-depth process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks to master the text</td>
<td>Allows the text to master us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text as an object to use</td>
<td>The text as a subject that shapes us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is an important place for informational reading of Scripture and for exegetical and topical methods of Bible study. But those who approach Scripture in this way often overlook the formational approach that centers on speaking to the heart more than informing the mind. The Bible is not merely an object, but a divinely inspired oracle that is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12) and has the power to transform those who receive it in humility and obedience (James 1:21-22). Devotional spirituality stresses the formative power of revealed truth and encourages us to love God through His Word. We will look at a time-tested method of doing this in the next chapter.

**Loving God through His Works**

Say to God, “How awesome are Your works!”
Come and see the works of God,
Who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.
I shall remember the deeds of the Lord;
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
I will meditate on all Your work
And muse on Your deeds.
You are the God who works wonders;
You have made known Your strength among the peoples.
You have by Your power redeemed Your people.
(Psalm 66:3, 5; 77:11-12, 14-15)

The psalmists frequently reviewed and reflected upon God’s historical acts of redemption, protection, and provision. Both testaments abound with accounts of how God has worked in specific and dramatic ways in the lives of people and in the destiny of nations. He has demonstrated His just and loving purposes in the arena of human history, and prayerful consideration of His mighty works of creation, redemption, and consummation is another way of enhancing our worship and devotion for the triune Godhead.

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created. . . . Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. . . . To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 4:11; 5:9-10, 12-13).

**Loving God through His Ways**

“He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel” (Psalm 103:7). Moses not only knew the Lord through His works, but he also knew and loved the Lord through His ways. God’s ways concern His personal involvement in our lives and our experiences of His peace, power, provision, protection, compassion, and care. It is good to build a personal “history” of God’s providential care by reviewing and remembering the things He has done at various points along your spiritual journey. Remember His surprising answers to prayer, the way He drew you to Himself, the way He carried you through turbulent waters, the way He provided for your needs when circumstances looked hopeless, the way He encouraged and comforted you in your distress, the way He exhorted you through others and disciplined you for your good, and the way He seeks to strip you of your hope in the things of this world so that you will learn to hope only in Him.

Come and hear, all who fear God,
And I will tell of what He has done for my soul.
Certainly God has heard;
He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.
Blessed be God,  
Who has not turned away my prayer  
Nor His lovingkindness from me.  
Your way, O God, is holy;  
What god is great like our God?  
(Psalm 66:16, 19-20; 77:13)

“I will tell of what He has done for my soul.” Grateful reflection on what God has done for your soul is a vital component of devotional spirituality.

God’s ways also relate to the multifaceted attributes of His person, powers, and perfections. Since our capacity to love God is related to our image of God, we do well to pray for the grace of growing apprehension of the glories of His attributes: His unlimited power, presence, and knowledge; His holiness, justice, goodness, truthfulness, and righteousness; His goodness, grace, compassion, mercy, and love; His beauty, glory, greatness, transcendent majesty, and dominion; and His self-existence, eternity, infinity, and immutability. As Dallas Willard puts it in The Divine Conspiracy, God is “an interlocking community of magnificent persons, completely self-sufficing and with no meaningful limits on goodness and power.” He is the absolute answer to the perennial quest for the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Three Psalms on the Beautiful Attributes of God

Psalm 139: The Omniscience, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, and Holiness of God

There is no higher calling than to love and worship the infinite and personal God of creation and redemption. A. W. Tozer observed that what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Our image of God shapes our spiritual direction and future, and is forged in the times we spend in communion with Him. In complete contrast to the world, God's economy measures greatness not in terms of ability or accomplishments, but in the vitality and integrity of a person’s walk with the Lord. King David was a gifted man who was rich in achievements, yet the key to his greatness did not lie in these, but in his choice to give his heart wholly to God. In the midst of the struggles he faced, he took time to meditate and stretch his vision of the living God, and this provided him with a renewed perspective about the things that really matter.

If we unthinkingly take life for granted and lose our sense of wonder at God and His creation, our capacity to worship will atrophy. David's ongoing amazement and wonder is captured in Psalm 139, a beautiful meditation on the knowledge, presence, power, and holiness of the Ruler of all creation.

The All-Knowing God (vv. 1-6)
“O Lord, You have searched me and known me.” As he reflects on the omniscience of God, David is overwhelmed by the truth that God has thoroughly exposed him and intimately knows him. The same is true of us: God has “mined” us to the depths of our being, and His knowledge besieges us all around (“You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me”). He knows our actions, our words, our thoughts, and our motives. Such knowledge is overwhelming, not only because it is beyond our comprehension, but also because it exposes all our pretenses. Yet it is comforting to know that there is no need of pretense before God; He knows us through and through, including our darkest thoughts and deeds, and still loves us unconditionally.

The All-Present God (vv. 7-12)
“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” Not only does God know us, but He is with us all the time; He “sees the invisible and penetrates the inaccessibile” (Derek Kidner). There is no escape, nowhere to hide—height or depth, day or night, past or future—nothing can conceal us from the “Hound of Heaven.” This can be a very disturbing thought, especially in times of disobedience and rebellion; the impulse to hide from God’s presence dates back to the first sin (Genesis 3:8). But this truth can also be a source of great comfort and assurance, because we know that as believers in Christ, we are never alone. He gave us His promise that He is with us always (Matthew 28:20), and we can find our security in His enfolding presence.

The All-Powerful God (vv. 13-18)
“I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.” The third stanza of this psalm portrays the omnipotence of the Creator by a poetical description of the wonder of human birth. What artist would create his magnum opus in total darkness? Yet God wove us together with all our variegated colors in the hiddeness of the womb (“the depths of the earth”). He formed us in all our complexity to be a unity of body, soul, and spirit with all our capacities for thought, communication, morality, and aspiration. His eyes saw our embryos and He
appointed all the days that were ordained for us on this planet. The all-powerful Lord of creation is worthy of all worship and trust, since nothing is too difficult for Him (Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:37).

The All-Holy God (vv. 19-24)
As David leaves his meditation, the reality of his plight with his opponents ("men of bloodshed") confronts him once again. He responds by aligning himself with the God of holiness and justice and declares that God's enemies are his enemies, and God's cause is his cause. In the last two verses he takes us full circle ("O Lord, You have searched me and known me"): "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." As he faces opposition, the psalmist wants to remove any doubt about his walk with God. Does He really know my situation? Does He care? Am I really committed to His purposes? The answer is a resounding yes—He knows us intimately and is present with us in any adversity we face. The Lord also knows what is in our hearts, and we would be wise to follow David's practice of inviting Him to illuminate areas of disobedience and rebellion in our lives so that He can lead us in the everlasting way.

Psalm 145: The Greatness, Goodness, and Grace of God

Imagine someone from an illiterate culture who stumbles upon a New Testament left inadvertently by a traveling missionary. The native picks up the strange object and brings it to the elders of his village, but since they have never heard of reading or writing, they are unable to discern the meaning of the mysterious black markings on the pages. They may even come to revere the alien object, but unless an outsider comes and explains it to them, the living words it contains will never be more than dark squiggles on a gossamer white substance.

Our world is like that book; unless an Outsider explains it to us, we will reduce its glory to the impersonal forces of time plus chance, or we will worship the creature rather than the Creator. But this is a failure to grasp the higher levels of meaning—the markings are letters, the letters combine into words, the words conform to grammatical principles and form sentences, the sentences convey ideas, the ideas lead to aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual truth, and all truth comes from the infinite-personal God.

The Word of God calls us to view the world and all of life from a divine rather than a human perspective. Our final integration point and source of meaning is upward, not downward, heavenly, not earthly, the Creator, not the cosmos. The world would define us by default; do nothing, and it will fill your eyes and ears with its system of values. The Word will only define us by discipline; we must choose to sit under its daily tutelage, or our minds will never be renewed and transformed by eternal values.

The last of the Davidic psalms exhorts us to fly with the wings of the Spirit to the pinnacle from which we can see everything from a biblical viewpoint. The more the eyes of our heart become accustomed to that vision, the more we will be amazed by the greatness, goodness, and grace of the living God. Psalm 145, a skillfully constructed acrostic poem, invites the people of God to let their spirits resonate with His Spirit as it alternates calls to praise and reasons for praise.

The Greatness of God (vv. 1-6)

"I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever" (vv. 1-2). This paean of praise is prompted by the psalmist's meditation on "the glorious splendor" of God's majesty, and on His wonderful works (v. 5). "Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts" (vv. 3-4). David understood that the human mind cannot begin to fathom God's greatness, and he would surely have agreed with these affirmations from Isaiah and Romans: "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.' . . . Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33). We will never be bored in heaven, because God's greatness and knowledge are boundless; the surprises will never end, and the joy will ever increase.

The Goodness of God (vv. 7-13)

"They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works" (vv. 7-9). Because of His greatness, God is in control and will accomplish His purposes in spite of the malevolent forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Because of His goodness, God loves us unconditionally and without limit. Those who trust in Him are therefore secure in the One who “loved them to the end” (John 13:1), knowing that He is always committed to their best interests. The more we embrace these biblical truths by faith, the more stable our lives will become,
because our hope will be founded on the unchanging character of God rather than ebb and flow of outward circumstances and subjective feelings.

**The Grace of God (vv. 14-21)**

“The Lord sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and kind in all His deeds. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them” (vv. 14, 17-19). The greatest human need is for that which we do not deserve and can never earn—the grace of God. When we acknowledge our desperate need for God's grace, this is itself an evidence of His grace in our lives, since the natural pull of the flesh is toward the arrogance of autonomy. Begin each day by asking to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and choosing to walk in the power of His Spirit.

**Psalm 117: The Loyal Love and Faithfulness of God**

**God’s “Worthship”**

“Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of the imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy of that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.”—William Temple

When we contemplate the gracefulness of a flower or the grandeur of a tree, we properly respond with aesthetic admiration. Similarly, we respond to our pets with personal affection, and at times to other people with self-giving love. If nature is worthy of admiration, animals of affection, and human beings of sacrificial love, how then should we respond to the infinite and personal Author of all biological and spiritual life? The biblical answer is clear—God alone is worthy of worship. Blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever belong to the Creator and Redeemer (Revelation 5:13), and every tongue in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, including all who have rebelled against Him, will confess this to be so (Philippians 2:10-11).

The “worthship” of God is the theme of Psalm 117, the shortest in the Psalter. In spite of its brevity, this two-verse psalm captures the essence of God's character and purpose for humanity. “Praise the Lord, all nations; laud Him, all peoples! For His lovingkindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord is everlasting. Praise the Lord!”

We were born to worship God. In his book, Desiring God, John Piper modifies the Shorter Catechism's answer to the question, “What is the chief end of man?” For him, the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. We honor God most when His glory becomes our greatest pleasure; we worship God best when we pursue our joy in Him above all.

The psalmist begins with an invitation to praise that reaches beyond Israel to all the nations. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:11 to support his argument that in fulfilling God’s covenant promises to Israel, Christ also extended grace and mercy to the Gentiles.

**The Loyal Love of God**

The second verse furnishes two wonderful reasons for worshipping God. The first is that “His lovingkindness is great toward us,” or more literally, “His loyal love prevails over us.” According to the Scriptures, God's love is causeless, measureless, and ceaseless (see Romans 5:5-11). The more we think about these truths, the more astounding the implications become. As A. W. Tozer once prayed, “We are sure that there is in us nothing that could attract the love of One as holy and as just as Thou art. Yet Thou hast declared Thine unchanging love for us in Christ Jesus. If nothing in us can win Thy love, nothing in the universe can prevent Thee from loving us. Thy love is uncaused and undeserved. Thou art Thyself the reason for the love wherewith we are loved. Help us to believe the intensity, the eternity of the love that has found us. Then love will cast out fear; and our troubled hearts will be at peace, trusting not in what we are but in what Thou hast declared Thyself to be.”

All of us need the security of unconditional love and acceptance, and this is precisely what we discover in Christ. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us more, and nothing we can do will make Him love us less (see Romans 8:35, 38-39). Our prayer as believers in Christ should not be that we have more of Him, but that He has more of us.

**The Faithfulness of God**

The second reason in Psalm 117 for worshipping God is that His faithfulness is everlasting. He has revealed His plans for His children, and His promises transcend anything we could have imagined. His purpose for us is our complete
transformation—body, soul, and spirit—into the image and character of Jesus Christ. Since this is so, we must “hold fast the
confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23; cf. Romans 4:21; 1 Thessalonians
5:24). Because He is faithful, God's plans and promises for us will never waver. There is no real security in people,
possessions, or position; sooner or later, all of these will let us down. Our only true security is in the unchanging character and
promises of the Lord.
God's loyal love and faithfulness should be the cause of childlike wonder and awe, but for most believers, these have become
religious platitudes, mere words that no longer grip their hearts or imaginations. It is easy to lose our first love and forget what
we were before we knew Christ and what we would be without Him. Ask God for the grace to make you a worshipper; one
who is amazed by His steadfast love and astonished by His faithfulness. Nourish your heart on high thoughts of God through
devotional reading of the Scriptures, and worship Him in Spirit and truth.

What are the major ideas you learned about God?

How will this impact you?

How does this picture of God affect leadership?

*Leadership Principle: the impact of our ministry is only equal in proportion to the size of our God.*