The True Measure of Character

SCRIPTURE

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good... for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." Luke 6:45 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

When we evaluate our spiritual lives, we typically look at our actions. We ask ourselves, "Am I doing the right things? Am I avoiding the wrong things?" While right actions are essential, the Bible presents a much higher calling: a perfect standard of character.

But what exactly is character? It is more than just outward behavior; your character is primarily made up of your thoughts and your feelings. Jesus taught that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. In other words, our actions are merely the visible fruit of the invisible root of our minds. You can force yourself to do the right thing on the outside while boiling with anger, judgment, or selfishness on the inside.

God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). We must realize that before God can truly change our ways, He must change our thoughts. If our religion only manages our outward behavior but leaves our inward feelings untouched, we are no different than the Pharisees. They looked perfectly righteous on the outside, but inside they were filled with prejudice and pride.

Today, do an honest inventory of your inner life. When no one else is watching, where do your thoughts wander? When someone offends you, what thoughts and feelings do you entertain toward that person? Ask God to transform the hidden life of your heart, not merely the life others can see.

PRAYER

Lord, I confess that I often focus on looking good to others while ignoring the condition of my heart. Purify my thoughts and my feelings today. Let my outward actions be a genuine reflection of Your inward grace. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Galatians 5:22–23
- Matthew 7:16–20
- 1 Corinthians 13:1–7
- Isaiah 55:8
- Luke 9:51–56

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What reveals character more clearly than outward profession?

2. Read Galatians 5:22–23. How does this passage deepen today's understanding of God's work in our lives?

3. What would it look like for you to evaluate the fruit of your responses under pressure?

What Manner of Spirit?

SCRIPTURE

"But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Luke 9:55-56 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

In Luke 9, Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem and sought lodging in a Samaritan village. Because the Samaritans harbored deep prejudice against the Jews, they rejected Jesus. The disciples, James and John, were absolutely furious. They felt justified in their anger. After all, the Samaritans had just rejected the Messiah! They turned to Jesus and asked, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?".

Notice the drastic difference between the thoughts and feelings of the disciples and those of Christ. The disciples felt slighted, offended, and vengeful. They were ready to commit genocide in the name of religious zeal. But Jesus turned and rebuked "them", not the Samaritans. He told them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of".

How often do we manifest the spirit of James and John? When people reject our beliefs, mock our faith, or treat us unfairly, our natural inclination is to retaliate. We want God to vindicate us and punish them. We think our anger is "righteous indignation." But Jesus makes it clear: the desire to destroy or condemn others does not come from Heaven. The Son of Man came to save. When faced with rejection, Jesus didn't call down fire; He simply "went to another village". He did not allow the prejudice of others to dictate His peace or His mission.

Today, examine your reactions to those who oppose you. Are you operating in the spirit of the Accuser, or the Spirit of the Savior?

PRAYER

Jesus, forgive me for the times I have wanted to call down 'fire' on those who disagree with me. When I am rejected or offended, give me Your spirit of meekness. Help me to remember that You came to save, not to destroy. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Luke 9:51–56
- James 1:19–20
- Matthew 5:43–48
- Galatians 5:22–23
- Matthew 7:16–20

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can correct convictions be expressed in a wrong spirit?

2. Consider Luke 9:51–56. What does this passage add to the main lesson of today's devotional?

3. What would it look like for you to respond to disagreement without hostility?

The Danger of a Mixed Religion

SCRIPTURE

"They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence." 2 Kings 17:33 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

To understand the deep hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans, we have to look at history. The Samaritans were a mixed race. When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they took the Israelites captive and repopulated the land with pagan nations. Over time, the remaining Israelites intermarried with these pagans. But it wasn't just their bloodline that was mixed; it was their religion. The Bible says in 2 Kings 17 that the Samaritans "feared the Lord, and served their own gods". They incorporated the worship of Jehovah, but they mingled it with heathen traditions, idolatry, and pagan customs. They claimed to follow the God of Israel, but they did it their own way.

This historical reality has a profound spiritual application for us today. Who are the "Samaritans" in our modern world? They represent those in the broader Christian world who sincerely fear the Lord, but who have mixed biblical truth with the traditions of men. They love Jesus, but they may observe pagan-rooted holidays or keep the wrong day of worship because of inherited traditions.

It is easy for those of us who have been blessed with the truth to look down on those with a "mixed religion." Like the Jews, we can easily become arrogant. But God does not call us to despise them; He calls us to reach them. Christ’s method of dealing with the Samaritans was vastly different from the religious leaders of His day. He didn't harbor the same prejudice that His fellow countrymen held. No matter their background or ethnicity Jesus viewed every person as having an equal need of His mercy, grace and life-changing power.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the clarity of Your Word. Keep me from becoming proud of the truth I have been given. Give me a heart of compassion for those who are caught in the mixture of truth and human tradition. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- James 3:9–12
- Matthew 6:24
- James 1:26–27
- Luke 9:51–56
- James 1:19–20

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is a mixture of religious profession and unchristlike attitudes dangerous?

2. How does James 3:9–12 help clarify the spiritual principle in today's reading?

3. What would it look like for you to identify an inconsistency between your worship and your treatment of others?

The Prejudice of the "Pure"

SCRIPTURE

"Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." John 4:9 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

Because of the Samaritans' mixed religion and heritage, the Jews utterly despised them. The Jews considered themselves the "pure bloods" who held the pure truth. Their prejudice was so deep that they would travel miles out of their way, crossing the Jordan River twice, just to avoid walking through Samaritan territory.

When the Samaritan woman at the well realized Jesus was a Jew, she was shocked that He even spoke to her. "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," she noted. The Jewish leaders believed that associating with these people would spiritually defile them. They built walls of separation, falsely believing that isolation equaled holiness.

This same Pharisaical spirit can easily creep into the church today. We can become so focused on our pure doctrines that we refuse to have "dealings" with Christians of other denominations, or with people in the secular world. We think that if we separate ourselves completely, we will remain undefiled.

But spiritual pride is a far greater defilement than associating with sinners. When we look at people of other faiths as enemies rather than lost sheep, we lose the character of God. Truth was never meant to be a wall that keeps people out; it was meant to be a light that draws people in. Let us tear down the artificial walls of prejudice we have built in our own minds.

PRAYER

Lord, root out any Pharisaical pride in my heart. Forgive me for the times I have avoided people because they believe or live differently than I do. Teach me how to hold the truth firmly while loving people deeply. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Luke 18:9–14
- John 4:7–26
- Acts 10:34–35
- James 3:9–12
- Matthew 6:24

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can a sense of spiritual purity become prejudice toward others?

2. Read Luke 18:9–14. What connection do you see between this passage and today's Scripture?

3. What would it look like for you to show respectful kindness to someone you might usually avoid?

Christ’s Method of Mingling

SCRIPTURE

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman... So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days." John 4:39-40 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

While the religious leaders of His day avoided the Samaritans like the plague, Jesus walked right into the heart of their territory. He didn't just pass through; He sat at their well. He asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. And when the villagers came out to see Him, He didn't preach a sermon condemning their mixed religion. Instead, He accepted their invitation to stay in their homes, eating at their tables and sleeping under their roofs for two whole days.

Jesus was not afraid of being defiled. He knew that light cannot be contaminated by darkness; light dispels darkness. He mingled freely with the very people His disciples wanted to call fire down upon.

If we are going to reach the "Samaritans" of our day—those who may be caught in false doctrines or worldly lifestyles—we must adopt Christ's method. We cannot reach them from a distance. We cannot save people we refuse to sit with. Jesus didn't compromise a single truth, but He built a bridge of sympathy and love that allowed the truth to be heard.

Are there people in your life, your workplace, or your neighborhood that you have been avoiding because they are "different"? Jesus is calling you to walk into Samaria. Sit at the well with them. Listen to their stories. Show them the character of God through your kindness, and they will be drawn to the Truth you carry.

PRAYER

Master, give me Your courage to step out of my comfort zone. Help me to mingle freely with those who need Your love. Let me be a bridge, not a wall, so that others may come to know You as the Savior of the world. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Luke 15:1–7
- Matthew 9:10–13
- John 4:39–42
- Luke 18:9–14
- John 4:7–26

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Christ's way of mingling reveal about the purpose of ministry?

2. What encouragement or instruction does Luke 15:1–7 offer in light of today's devotional?

3. What would it look like for you to initiate a caring conversation without compromising your convictions?

Seeing the Pain Behind the Surface

SCRIPTURE

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Philippians 2:4 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

Our thoughts and feelings often dictate how we interpret the actions of others.

One time I stepped in line to pay for my groceries and the lady behind me accused me of cutting right in front of her. I apologized and told her that I didn't see her. The tension was quite palpable when she exclaimed with bitterness "You saw me! You know what you did". Instead of defending myself even further I felt the Spirit of God tell me to pay for her items. Immediately there was a change in her tone and she insisted I didn't have to do that. I did anyway and as we walked outside she broke down in tears and said, "I'm sorry, I've really been on edge lately. My son is dying of cancer". I have her a big hug, offered her words of encouragement and prayed with her. At first I dismissed her and thought she was just crazy and angry but what was really happening is that she was hurting.

The behavior I judged as rudeness was actually the heavy burden of unimaginable grief.

Jesus is able to read the soul. He looks past the surface behavior and sees the broken, hurting heart underneath. He sees a soul crying out for the Water of Life.

The ultimate test of our character is whether we view others through the lens of our own convenience, or through the lens of Christ's compassion. There are people all around you today who are carrying heavy, invisible burdens. They might snap at you, ignore you, or disagree with your religion. Don't let their outward behavior blind you from their inner struggle. Find a way to their heart and the real issues they are dealing with.

PRAYER

Father, give me Your eyes today. Forgive me for being so quick to judge people who inconvenience me. Help me to see the hidden pain in the hearts of those around me, and give me the grace to minister to them. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Matthew 9:35–38
- Luke 10:30–37
- Romans 12:15
- Luke 15:1–7
- Matthew 9:10–13

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does seeing someone's pain change our interpretation of their behavior?

2. How does Matthew 9:35–38 support or expand the lesson we have considered today?

3. What would it look like for you to listen to the story behind another person's difficult behavior?

Sabbath Summary & Reflection

SCRIPTURE

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." 1 John 4:7 (KJV)

SABBATH REFLECTION

This week, we have examined the story of the Samaritans. We learned that true religion is not just about keeping the rules; it is about possessing the "Character of God" in our thoughts and feelings. We contrasted the vengeful spirit of the disciples with the saving spirit of Jesus. We confronted the ugly reality of spiritual pride—the Pharisaical idea that we should have "no dealings" with those who hold mixed beliefs. And we saw the beauty of Christ's method, who mingled freely with the broken to bring them healing.

On this Sabbath, as we rest in God's finished work, let us reflect on our own spiritual condition.

Reflect: Have you been harboring the spirit of the Pharisees toward anyone this week? Have you felt spiritually superior to people of other faiths or lifestyles?

Evaluate: When you encounter people who are difficult or who hold to error, do your thoughts immediately turn to condemnation, or to compassion?

The Invitation: As you enter a new week, the call is to "Love the Samaritans." The true test of whether we have the truth is not how well we can argue our doctrines, but how well we love those who disagree with us.

Practical Application: Next week, look for an opportunity to show intentional kindness to someone outside of your immediate "spiritual circle." It could be a coworker of a different faith, a neighbor who lives a worldly lifestyle, or a stranger in a checkout line. Do not preach to them; simply serve them. Let the love of Christ be the most undeniable doctrine you ever share.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming to this dark world for a sinner like me. Thank You for not avoiding me in my sin and error. Fill my heart so completely with Your Holy Spirit that my thoughts, feelings, and actions become a perfect reflection of Your boundless love. Amen

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Philippians 2:3–8
- James 3:17
- Colossians 3:12–14
- Matthew 9:35–38
- Luke 10:30–37

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of this week's lessons most challenges your treatment of people?

2. How does Philippians 2:3–8 bring together the spiritual lessons of this week?

3. What would it look like for you to practice a specific expression of Christlike compassion this Sabbath?