

When we talk about holiness, or being set apart, we are talking about being in close proximity to God. Holiness denotes more than an ethical state, it denotes a relationship with God where we are useful to Him in bringing about his desired ends for creation. In doing this, it is important to understand that the tool takes on the character of the craftsman, and becomes great because of the greatness of the one using it. Babe Ruth was not great because he had a great bat, the bat became great because Babe Ruth was using it.

Day 1

Reflecting God's Character

For us to serve in the presence of God, we must come to resemble Him. We often make the mistake of believing we can achieve results that are a blessing to those around us as well as ourselves without taking on the character of God. We, in short, tend to believe that a tree can produce fruit that is not in keeping with its nature. We pray for patience, believing God can give us patient actions without a corresponding transformation of our character. We want wisdom, but we don't want to make the mistakes and do the hard learning from those mistakes that will lead us to be wise. We want skill, but we don't want to do the practice that would make us skillful. In short, we human beings tend to believe that blessing is something that comes from outside of us, instead of a work that God does inside of us. We cannot, in the long run, act outside of our character. Because this is true, we must take on a character that reflects God's character. We must be transformed from the inside out, if our service is to have any hope of being fruitful. In what ways is God trying to form his character in you? In what ways are you aware of character flaws that do not resemble Him, and what can you do to work with Him to rectify these things? What is it worth to resemble God? How much time are you willing to put into it? What would the reward be?

Verses: John 17:20-26, Matthew 7:15-20, John 15:1-11

Prayer Topics: Similarity, Spirit, Refining

Day 2

Humility

Humility is one of the cornerstone virtues that allow us to pursue the character of God. While pride will lead to a rejection of God and an elevation of self, humility is the willingness to give honor where it is due, to worship that which is worthy of our awe, the eagerness to make sacrifices that will yield fruit, and the ability to enjoy something other than self. Humility will lead us to serve one another joyfully because it allows us to appreciate and rejoice in the character and nature of God, to let go of whatever is not like him, and to put our best efforts into cultivating characteristics of God in others. Not only does God desire humility in those that follow Him, He also despises arrogance and haughtiness in all people. Some may think this is because, as Oscar Wilde noted, we hate seeing our faults reflected in others, but in fact God himself is humble. How could this be? It seems that it would be a contradiction of God to be humble, but scripture tells us that Jesus humbled himself and took on the nature of a servant. This does not mean that Jesus pretended to be a servant, but that he revealed the true nature of a servant. Jesus did not hold on to his majesty and glory, but served others so that they may also participate in the glory of God. In Jesus, humility was fundamental to service. It will be in us as well.

Verses: Philippians 2:1-11, Colossians 3:12-17, Proverbs 22:4

Prayer Topics: Meekness, Lowliness, Helper

## Day 3

### Self-Control

Self-control may seem an odd virtue on a list that enumerates those qualities that help us with service, but I think it is much more important than we often imagine. In order to really serve others, there is an enormous amount of self-control that is necessary in order to be fruitful. Many of us have a certain amount of impatience in dealing with people who seem to be the source of their own misery. Frustration can build, and we can find ourselves despairing of change in their lives, or worse, getting angry and having harsh words for their mistakes. On the other hand, many people have very loving and nurturing natures, and never hold anyone responsible or have no expectations that people will change. Either one of these attitudes will make our service unfruitful, and even counter-productive. Whatever your natural disposition and inclination, you will have to keep it under control as you serve, for while it may have strengths at times, it also has weaknesses. We cannot allow our natural inclinations to be our authority while serving, but instead we must let God and his character and nature be our guide. We must put aside our own nature, and that requires self-control, as we take on the character of God. Without self-control, our efforts, even if they come from noble intentions, will fail to bring fruit. We will find ourselves burning every bridge we come across, or spending our whole lives trying to help someone who refuses to be helped. Self-control is invaluable in serving others.

Verses: 2 Peter 1:1-11, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Proverbs 25:28, Proverbs 16:32

Prayer Topics: Restraint, Limits, Boundaries

## Day 4

### Thankfulness

You will find that many people with needs will come across your path, and you will find yourself spending a lot of time and energy serving them. This can be seen as a huge burden, or as a great opportunity. I was watching an interview with a farmer recently who was trying to turn a high desert area in Colorado into a lush and fruitful land. He had been quite successful, but obviously it took a great amount of effort. He would have put in much less effort if he had chosen to farm an area that was already lush and fruitful, but he would not have learned what he did from choosing the greater challenge. For some reason he wanted to grow chestnut trees on his farm, but was told by many people that they would not grow in Colorado. He tried many things, but eventually figured out how to get them to grow. He merely had to plant about a thousand saplings a year, and eventually a couple would take root. Then he would cross pollinate the survivors, and in 20 years or so he would have a breed of trees that would thrive in his landscape. The challenge allowed him to figure out a way to not only grow chestnut trees, but many other kinds of plants as well. He was blessed through the challenge, and was thankful for it. It takes a special kind of person to be thankful in the midst of difficult challenges, but there is great blessing in being that kind of person, and God wants to bless us in exactly that way. So be thankful.

Verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Colossians 3:15, Hebrews 12:28-29

Prayer Topics: Attitude, Challenge, Cultivating

## Day 5

### Goodness

Ultimately, if we are to serve faithfully and effectively, we must reflect God's goodness in our character. Goodness is the activity that is designed to advance the blessing of others. God is good, meaning he acts

in reality in such a way that all of those activities are designed to bring us blessing. This goodness is powered by his love for us, the strength of his will, his inclination and intention to bring us blessing, and it is informed by his wisdom, his understanding of what needs to happen to bring goodness into our lives and the lives of others. Our goodness, like God's own goodness, needs to be powered by love and guided by wisdom. We must come to understand what steps need to be taken to bring the greatest possibility of blessing into the lives of those around us. This requires balance, as we cannot advance the blessing of someone while increasing the misery of someone else. It requires patience, as it is often a long and difficult process to bring blessing into someone's life. It requires discernment, as sometimes we are wasting the precious time God has given us by trying to serve people in ways that are unproductive. It requires diligence, as we must put our best efforts in over time. All these virtues are required to coalesce into something called goodness, and this requires the activity of God himself, for no one else could do such a miraculous work in our lives. Pray this morning for the goodness of God to reproduce itself in you, so that your service may be a blessing to others.

Verses: Mark 10:18, Psalm 145:9, Nahum 1:7

Prayer Topics: Trust, Wisdom, Abundance