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LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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Tempting Your Character



“Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour....If at my convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?”

Strengthened Through Trials



The verb temper may be defined as “to make stronger and more resilient through hardship.” The process of tempering swords may be compared to a process that is essential to the building of our character—this is the process of being tempted.

Strengthened Through Trials



You may be thinking, What? Isn't being tempted something to avoid? We must realize that being tempted is not the same as succumbing to temptation.

The process of temptation reveals what is genuine in our character and what is false, similar to the process of refining gold in fire, in which everything that isn't pure gold is burned away.

Strengthened Through Trials



Believe me, friend: Every day of your life, your character will be tested! These tests are not for the purpose of defeating us but rather for strengthening us.

Strengthened Through Trials



You probably already know many of your strengths, but are you aware of all your weaknesses? Each of us has weak areas in our character. And testing, or tempering, has much more to do with checking for our weaknesses than for our strengths.

Strengthened Through Trials



The Roman blacksmiths would start out with weak, pieces of metal when crafting their swords. That condition of the metal describes the inner state of human beings, who contend with the effects of fallen humanity.

To be tempted is to be assessed for moral weaknesses —“spots”—in our character, so they can be removed, and so we can become leaders of principle. And as our character is strengthened, we will prove our trustworthiness to lead others.

Strengthened Through Trials



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Paul of Tarsus wrote the following to his first-century audience in Rome about the process of character building: “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us....**” Isn’t that powerful?

Strengthened Through Trials



The Greek word for character in this passage indicates “the process or result of trial, proving, approval.”

What a process! I consider it the secret to character development.

Strengthened Through Trials



The word “**sufferings**” here can be equated to tests and challenges. Paul was saying that when we go through trials, we will build perseverance. To persevere means to **bear up under pressure**, so that we remain **consistent and stable**. We should view each temptation as an opportunity to strengthen the weak areas of our lives.

Strengthened Through Trials



Resisting temptation and enduring in the midst of trials can seem like daunting tasks. However, as one biblical writer emphasized, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” We never know how strong or stable we are until we’re under real pressure.



We need to determine the appropriate ethical principle to apply and then align ourselves with it through personal discipline. We must allow the tempering process to train us. As we do, we will recommit ourselves to our convictions, values, and moral standards, strengthening our character.

Intentional Personal Development



Character is manifested when our values, principles, morals, and standards are tested. And life will give us plenty of tests. However, the challenges and trials that come to us from external forces will not address all of our weaknesses. Therefore, just as the blacksmith sought out the weak areas of the metal, character building involves self-evaluation.



We should be intentional about assessing ourselves according to the established moral principles to which we have committed. Wherever we find a “spot,” we should work to eliminate it. When we have addressed a character flaw for a period of time, we should search for another. **This can be hard work, but it is worth it!**



- As we have seen, our character cannot be developed unless we make a personal commitment to our convictions and moral standards. We also need to specifically state these convictions and standards—first to ourselves, and then to our families, our colleagues, our constituents, our communities, and so forth.



- This is when we make declarations such as, “I will/will not do such and such.”
- When you state your values, standards, and code of ethics to yourself, you reinforce your convictions and encourage personal discipline in relation to them.



However, you must be aware that when you make a commitment to a moral standard and declare that you will uphold it, you give “life” the right to remind you of it in the tests and challenges it hands you. It’s as if life says, “You told me that you believe this—now prove it. I’m going to test you.”



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and code of ethics to yourself, you
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personal discipline.**



- Peter, one of Jesus of Nazareth's disciples—His leaders-in-training—said to Him, “I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

In other words, “I will never compromise my values; I will never violate Your trust. In fact, I am willing to sacrifice my life for You.”



- Jesus knew His disciple's weaknesses. He explained to Peter that not only was he not yet committed to sacrifice for his beliefs by going to prison and to death, but he would even deny Him three times. **That is why He previously told Peter, in effect, "The adversary (Satan) will try to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, so that you will retain your faith."**



- (In other words, I have prayed that your convictions will not collapse in the midst of your tests.) “Then, when you come through this, and your own character is strengthened, use this experience to help others strengthen their character.” When we fail life’s tests, we must learn from them. We must not give up our core beliefs and convictions but recommit to act in accordance with them.



There can be no “secret” or private moral codes in a leader’s life. There may be times when individuals need to strengthen their personal character for a season before announcing their convictions to the world, so that they won’t fail publicly if they have a number of character issues to work on.



But, at some point, a leader's convictions must become public knowledge. All great leaders face opposition to their convictions. They don't experience this opposition by keeping their ethical values a secret. It happens because they commit to their values and express them openly, and because their words are reinforced by their actions.



Our character, then, is forged in the public declaration of our values and moral standards. Suppose Gandhi had never spoken publicly of his convictions about the dignity and equality of all human beings. He might have earned a good living and had a fairly happy—and safe—life as a lawyer.

However, he never would have achieved greatness by helping the people of his country to achieve self-rule.



As you've progressed, you should become aware of your own ethical weaknesses? If so, that's a good thing. Again, only when we see our ethical "spots" can we remove them.

For example, you may be saying, "I have been compromising in my personal life. No more! I'm not going to date that person anymore. He is not encouraging me to hold to moral standards." You shouldn't be surprised if your new commitment is tested immediately. **So, prepare yourself.**



Years ago, a young woman came to me and said, “Dr. Munroe, I heard one of your teachings, and you were talking about how to set disciplines and standards for your life.

I decided I was going to live that way, because I want to be an upright person.” Then she said that, the day after she made that commitment, an old boyfriend she hadn’t seen for twenty years just happened to get on the elevator she was riding. She told me, “And he was looking good! I’m forty-two years old and still single, and he made me a tempting offer.”



This offer was not in keeping with moral standards, so I asked, “What did you do?” And she said, “I ran to you—help me!” I told her that, ultimately, no one else can assist us to keep our character. They can encourage us and challenge us, but we have to take responsibility for our actions and apply personal discipline.

Allowing life to expose our ethical flaws, and intentionally rooting out our weaknesses, are ongoing processes that make us more and more ethically resilient.



This means that we're always in one stage or another of development—we are either hot, cold, or getting hammered at! When will our individual spots be fully pounded out? When we have proven to be trustworthy in the corresponding areas.



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The Distinguishing Mark of Character



- The distinguishing mark of a leader is character.
- The distinguishing mark of character is trustworthiness.
- Trustworthiness is a product of stability established through tests over time.



A leader becomes trustworthy by staying consistent in character as he undergoes tests and trials over the course of time. Your trustworthiness is established when you have been tested over a long period—with such difficulties as changing circumstances, vocational challenges, personal crises, and temptations—and have either passed the tests or learned from them so you can pass them in the future.



Remember that a principled leader is fixed, predictable, and stable.

Because a leader's character is developed as he stays steady and strong through tests and trials, people trust him on the basis of the tests he has come through, not merely by what he says. If you lose the trust of your followers, you've lost your followers—period.

That is why the ultimate pursuit of a leader should be character, not skill, power, influence, or anything else.



Whether we are fully aware of it or not, life tests us to see if we have developed such qualities as responsibility, competence, loyalty, honesty, fairness, and goodwill. We don't know what our true character is until it has been tested. We don't know who we really are until we have been tempted to compromise.



Here are some of the areas in which our character will be tested:

- 1. Our commitment, or standards, in relation to something or someone.**
- 2. Our loyalty to our convictions when we are under pressure.**
- 3. Our dedication to the values we promised we would never violate.**
- 4. Our faithfulness to what is right and just.**
- 5. Our honesty and integrity.**



Our character cannot mature unless we are tested and tempted. We must accept the fact that the tempering process is necessary if we want to cultivate moral force. When we go through trials, we often wonder, **“Why is this happening to me?”** It’s part of **our leadership training in character.**



Jesus of Nazareth experienced many tests and trials, and one of the most demanding was at the beginning of His public ministry, when He was thirty years old. Let us look at an account of what transpired, written by one of Jesus' disciples. It begins,



“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted....” The word “Spirit” in this passage has a capital “S.” That means that God Himself led Jesus into the desert to be tempted, or “tempered.” He tested His own Son for the purpose of trying His character.

Let us continue the account:



After fasting forty days and forty nights [in the desert], [Jesus] was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down.



For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”



God's enemy, Satan, is the enemy of humanity, as well. In the Bible, he is referred to variously as "the tempter," "the devil," and "the accuser," and he, too, tests us for weakness. He did this with the first human beings when he told them the Creator was acting in an unjust way toward them and tempted them to violate a vital principle. As we discussed, the first man and woman failed this test.



God allows the tempter to test us as part of the tempering process, which is meant to show us our vulnerable areas so that we might seek to be strengthened and established in character. As the first-century writer James expressed, “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”



As the tempering process builds our character, we become more and more trustworthy. For instance, being criticized by other people is a test we all experience. Yet our critics can be among our greatest assets, because criticism always puts our character on trial for its authenticity and shows us the true state of our thoughts and attitudes.



Satan will not tempt us in the areas of our lives in which he knows we are strong. Rather, he tests us in the areas in which we are unstable or about which we are uncertain.

And, every time we resist temptation in an area of weakness, we fortify that area with character.

Suppose you are trying to break a bad habit. If, every time the habit attempts to assert itself, you “hammer” it, your character in that area will be strengthened.

Eventually, you will overcome the habit and no longer be tempted in that area. But stay alert—the tempting will begin in a different area!



**Our critics can be among our greatest assets,
because criticism always puts our character on
trial for its authenticity and shows us the true
state of our thoughts and attitudes.**



A leader's position and title do not exempt him from being honest. We don't have the right to violate principles just because an opportunity to cut corners or make money illegally presents itself.



Let me emphasize that there is no one in the world for whom you should give up your integrity. In many instances, if you compromise your convictions to please someone else, you'll be amazed at how little that person cares.



They will use you, and then dismiss you. Or, they will leave you to picking up the pieces. Then, you will have to live with the fact that you compromise your moral standards.

Leaders fail when they sacrifice their character on the altar of compromise.



Jesus passed each one of the tempter's tests without compromising His integrity. That doesn't mean it wasn't painful for Him to experience those tests. But His commitment was steadfast—He remained true to His values and principles, citing them in response to each argument of temptation made by Satan.



Note that in the process of trying to get Jesus to violate His principles, Satan endeavored to make Jesus doubt His position. The tempter also distorted the meaning of one of the principles God had established.

The principle he twisted would have been valid in context, but he used it out of context. Yet, because Jesus had a thorough knowledge of the Creator's principles, He was able to see through the tempter's deception and effectively refute him.



We must be aware that the same experience could happen to us. Other people—or the tempter himself—may try to make us doubt our position in God or twist the meaning of first laws in order to get us to compromise our beliefs and values.

For example, someone may say, “The Bible says, ‘Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.’ You’re supposed to prosper in all things, so what’s wrong with taking a little money under the table? Everyone does it!” To which you should reply, “The Bible also says, ‘You shall not steal.’”

The Trust Exchange



We should never take our leadership role lightly, because people are observing us as we go through various tests and trials in the tempering process. They are watching our lives, our marriages, our attitudes, and our manner of conducting ourselves when we work. And if we become ethically shaky, or shadowy, in these areas, we will lose the most important gift a leader has—the trust of his followers.

The Currency of True Leadership Is Trust



In any economy, transactions between producers and consumers cannot occur without the exchange of some form of legitimate currency—money, goods, the promise of a percentage of profits, and so forth.

Likewise, leaders must have the indispensable currency of trust in order to enter into corporate agreement with their followers and/or the members of their group.

Trust is like an account that people take deposits into on our behalf, based on our character. Without the currency of trust, we cannot function as leaders. In fact, without trust, we have no leadership.

Trust Is the Product of Character



You cannot lead people who don't trust you. As a leader, you must accept that fact right now, if you haven't already done so. If people don't trust you, they will ignore you, resist you, even sabotage your leadership. The account of trust that a leader has established between himself, and his followers should be considered sacred.

Accordingly, your personal decisions should be such that they protect the confidence your followers have placed in you. Otherwise, you could lose all the currency of trust you have accumulated to this point.



Your trust as a leader is earned and maintained by the consistency you exhibit as you go through various tests over time, such as we have been discussing in this chapter—tests of faithfulness, reliability, consistency, and so forth.

People will observe how you go through various challenges and trials, in order to determine what your true character is. **When they see that you stay steady, they will make a deposit of trust into your leadership account.**



When they see that you remain faithful, they will make another deposit. When you prove your reliability, they will place additional currency into your account.

However, if you were to violate the people's faith in you, you couldn't buy their trust. Your account would probably have to be closed, because the deposits would stop immediately. You could no longer transact leadership business with your (former) followers.



Your trust as a leader is earned and maintained by the consistency you exhibit as you go through various tests over time.



Character is moral force that convinces people you are someone who has earned the right to be heard and followed. In this way, great leadership is not attained by pursuing greatness but by persevering through great tests. Your character will be defined by the tests you have endured.

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