THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF CHARACTER

INTRODUCTION

Hi everyone. Welcome again as we continue to reflect and pray together about this journey toward character and Christlikeness. So far we've seen the preventive power of character and the transformative power of character. Today I want to highlight **the Performative Power of Character.** By "performative" power I mean the power to make things happen, particularly divine acts of God, or miracles.

COMMENTARY: THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF CHARACTER

How do miracles happen? Certainly miracles and supernatural events are up to God. Right? A miracle by definition is "**a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency."** So says Oxford Reference online site of the Oxford University Press. Most other dictionaries say something similar. So it's a God-act. Not a human act.

But not so fast. It is true that only God can perform the actual supernatural work, but whether or not He does so is almost always dependent on some human agent helping to create the moment. Check it out.

Think of any miracle you can in the Bible and in most cases you will find some human being who made a choice to perform some act that, had it not been performed, the miracle would not have happened.

Think about the astounding Israelite victory at Jericho. Walls tumbled down without battering rams, because the people had the nerve to march around the city precisely as the Lord instructed. And remember the time Jesus fed a multitude of thousands with just five loaves and two fish that the hungry disciples made available to Jesus, even though it seemed to them to be woefully inadequate. What about the woman hemorrhaging blood for 12 long years whom Jesus instantly healed as she touched the hem of His garment? Would that have happened without her extreme determination and nerve to press through the crowd to try one more idea despite her many deep disappointments that would have made most people just give up?

We could go on and on only to find that nearly every miraculous event happened at the intersection of human choice prompted by character and divine power prompted by grace. This is why character has performative power; it participates in the performance of the supernatural not by making the miracle but by meeting the moment with a decision that required good strong character.

What if the woman had not had the nerve to risk the scorn of the crowd, or the disciples had not had the generosity to give up their own food when they were hungry themselves, or the Israelites had lacked the courage to march unarmed around an impenetrable fortress with only trumpets and glass jars? No miracle would have taken place.

REFLECTION:

So with that in mind let's reflect on your own life and this amazing fact of **the Performative Power of Character** and what it makes possible.

- **Think of miracles you might have missed in your life, because you missed the moment due to some weakness of character, such as lack of courage, or diligence, or generosity, or honesty, or perseverance, or vigor?**

I'm not even asking you to think of something specific. Just think about it hypothetically. If any of us is honest, we have to admit that we probably have missed many, many opportunities to see the

mighty works of God, because we didn't rise to the occasion and meet the moment. Consider the following reasons that might happen in relation to a few of the traits. Do any of these reasons ring a bell?

I might have missed a moment the Lord could have done something special because of a lack of…

- **Vigor -** *I couldn't muster the energy to engage in some situation with my full attention to care for someone (i.e. too tired to stay up late, or put out extra effort).*
- **Courage -** *I was too worried about receiving criticism, facing disappointment, or taking a risk.*
- **Humility -** *I wasn't willing to admit need or ask for prayer when the Lord might have done an important work in my life.*
- **Honesty -** *I let myself rationalize my inaction or excuse my doubt.*
- **Generosity -** *I let my bad attitude toward or impatience with another person keep me from praying for or serving him/her in a way that the Lord could have brought a significant blessing.*

These are very real scenarios that most people face. Do you see how our lack of strong character in these kinds of situations really can close the door on a potential divine act of mercy and grace? Join me in the first of two prayers as we close.

Dear Jesus, this time of reflection has convicted me, because I see how there have been times my lack of character on occasion might have shut down the workings of your Spirit in and through me. I'm sorry. But now that I see that, deliver me from getting trapped in remorse over what I failed to do. Instead, deepen my resolve to strengthen my character for the days ahead when You will give me new chances to meet the moment when you want to make a miracle happen. Amen.

Now just before we wrap up for today here's one more item to reflect on and pray about. Over the next many days you will dig into 12 character traits that are at the heart of all discipleship which is to live, love and serve like Jesus. Review this list one more time. This is your third prayer session. It is likely that two or three traits are rising to the head of the list as ones you might need to specifically focus on.

Courage, Diligence, Generosity,
Gratitude, Honesty, Humility,
Industry, Integrity, Perseverance,
Resourcefulness, Respect, Vigor

Listen to this scripture passage and let it inspire you to say a strong "yes" to this journey we're on. Will you make every effort to pursue character for its preventive power, its transformative power and its performative power that you might become more Christlike in every way? If your answer is yes, say these words along with me and then pray the closing prayer that follows.

I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, I want to be like You, which means to live, love and serve like You. I see now, like never before that this requires my passionately pursuing—"pressing on"—even "straining toward" becoming a person of very strong character. Show me where, when and how this needs to happen. Help me take advantage of this season of prayer and beyond to put away all other pursuits in favor of this one goal: developing character for Christlikeness, so I can resist temptation, imitate Your moral qualities and meet the moments when You want to use me in Your miraculous works of grace. Amen.