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When No One Is Looking

Why character can't be ignored.

Daniel 1:8

Read *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way (Dan. 1:8).*

Comprehend God makes a worker, then he uses that worker to make a work. No matter what kind of ministry God gives to us, we can never give to others what we do not have ourselves. To ignore character is to abandon the foundation of ministry.

This explains why God spends so much time with his servants. He took thirteen years to prepare Joseph to become second-in-command in Egypt. He invested eighty years in his preparation of Moses. Even the learned Saul of Tarsus had to spend three years in post-graduate work in Arabia before God thrust him out as Paul the Apostle. The biographies and autobiographies of great Christian men and women reveal that God first builds Christian character in his servants, and then through them builds a ministry.

Apart from character, ministry is only religious activity or, even worse, religious business. The Pharisees called what they did ministry, but Jesus called it hypocrisy. He knew that the Pharisees were more concerned about reputation than character, that the praises of men interested them more than the approval of God.

Someone asked financier J. P. Morgan what the best collateral was a customer could give him. Morgan replied, "Character."

That reminds me of another Morgan: G. Campbell Morgan was riding with D. L. Moody at Northfield when suddenly Moody asked, "What is character, anyway?"

Morgan knew that the evangelist wanted to answer his own question, so he waited. "Character," said Moody, "is what a person is in the dark."

When the famous English preacher Charles Spurgeon was told that someone wanted to write a book about his life, he replied, "You may write my life in the skies—I have nothing to hide!"

Perhaps the key word is integrity. Jesus warned us that we cannot serve two masters, and James agreed when he wrote, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (1:8). The opposite of integrity is duplicity. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22b). No one can minister and masquerade successfully at the same time—at least not for very long. No amount of reputation can substitute for character.

—WARREN WIERSBE