

Character of the Heart

You know, people are a lot like icebergs! There is so much more to them than meets the eye! The media and entertainment industry would have us believe that character really doesn't matter...its **results** and worldly success that are important. They say that if we just "try" hard enough and the outside looks good, we will be successful. But I challenge you today, to look **below** the surface, to where 90% of the iceberg lies. You've probably heard the story of the Titanic, that magnificent ship that set sail in April of 1912. Did you realize that the ship thought to be "unsinkable" received 6 iceberg warnings before it went down? After the 6th, the annoyed operator wired back, "Shut up! I'm busy!" It wasn't what was above the surface that posed the danger, rather below it! Its power to destroy was easy to ignore because it wasn't exposed and obvious. Our character can be compared to an iceberg as well. 90% of character lies below the surface, while only 10% is exposed for the world to see! Ignoring the danger of an iceberg resulted in hundreds of lives lost aboard the Titanic. Ignoring the danger of weak character is destroying and rendering ineffective millions of lives today!



Fellowship

1. Can you think of a time when your first impression of someone was wrong?



Discipleship

Jesus exposes the Pharisees as human icebergs in our text for today: Matthew 23:25-28.
It says:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Looks were so important. They didn't value a high-paying job, a better car than their fellow Pharisee, the size of their house, or how well their kids did on the soccer team to give them a false sense of self-worth. Their pride was even more sinister because it came from an appearance of holiness, but made God sick! What lay below the surface was rotting and they were in immediate danger of a spiritual shipwreck.

Mark 7:15 and 20 say that nothing from *outside* of a man can make him unclean...rather, it's what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. In other words, a good test of the 90% that lies below the surface is the 10% above it! Our true character is shown in times of adversity, and how we react when the pressure is on. It's easy to live a "holy" life when we have no stress, feel great, and are not surrounded by those who bother us! But if you really want to see what you should work on, carefully note what comes to the surface when circumstances are at their worse. If you're hurrying to a career-making appointment, have a flat tire, spill coffee on your suit and get behind a slow driver...what is your first reaction? How easy is it to turn control over to God? When you desperately need some quiet time and your neighbor who loves to talk about nothing but *her* needs comes to the door, how do you feel? If your kids are complaining and refusing to obey, how righteous is your discipline of them? Does it stem from anger or love and concern? When you are watching a movie you've waited so long to see, yet they are taking the Lord's name in vain, how easy is it to turn it off? God wants to work in you to develop your character, so that the 90% below the surface will provide a strong support for the 10% that others see!

We aren't alone in our generation in our famine for character. One young boy named Schicklgruber grew up in Europe over 100 years ago. At one time he wanted to become a priest, and later an artist, but found both ideas ridiculed by his father. He didn't come from a strong family, wasn't raised knowing right from wrong...so as he grew he created his own belief system and moral code. After hearing his parents argue about moving away, he grew convinced they were going to do it without him. So, wanting to shut himself away from the pain of abandonment, left home himself, and vowed never to allow anyone to ever get close enough to hurt him. Well, as all boys do, this one grew up to be a man, and the man was Adolf Hitler. History testifies that Hitler was indeed a "powerful" leader, but he wasn't a good one! Skill and charisma were there...but character was not.

It's interesting to note *Jesus'* preparation compared to ministry time! He spent 90% of his time on earth preparing His inward life, for the 10% that made up His career! We, on the other hand, love to see results NOW, and have a drive-through character mentality: "One order of patience and love, no trials, please." But take heart: God, the expert and patient Craftsman, delights in building your character.

2. How do we try to "clean the outside of our dishes" today?
3. How can we go about fulfilling the command of Matthew 23:26?
4. How do you think character influences the effectiveness of a life?

5. Read Romans 5:3-5. How do these characteristics build on each other? What is the final result?

6. Why do you think Matthew 7:22 been described as the “scariest” verse in the Bible?



Ministry

7. Luke 6:45(a) says, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good.” Take a few moments to share the positive attributes of your fellow group members...and encourage them in the ways you *already* sense godly character.

8. Think of 2 things you really don't enjoy, and commit to doing them twice this week. This character-building exercise may include exercising, if that discipline is your area of weakness. Maybe it will be driving behind a slow person and refusing to pass, or spending 10 minutes listening intently to someone you don't naturally enjoy. Ask a fellow group member to hold you accountable.



Evangelism

9. As you go throughout your week, remember that 90% of each person you meet is “below the surface.” Ask God for his help to love the unlovable and the wisdom to see them through his eyes.



Worship

10. Rejoice quietly with David that there is Someone Who knows the real us, the parts hidden and exposed...and loves us anyways! “Lord, you have searched me and have known me, you know when I sit and when I rise. You understand my thoughts from afar.” Read the rest of Psalm 139, then thank God that He will continue molding your character to become like His.