

# SESSION 2:

## MODELLING GODLY CHARACTER

*'I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation – the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ – for this will bring much glory and praise to God.'*

Philippians 1:9-11, NLT

<b>Key Question:</b>	How might I model godly character on my frontline?
<b>Aims of the Session:</b>	To see that our frontlines are an important place where godly character can be both developed and displayed in us.
<b>Core Text:</b>	Galatians 5:13-26
<b>Materials Required:</b>	Bibles, post-it notes and pens

### Thinking Back (5 mins)

Before we look at Modelling Godly Character in detail, it would be good to take a moment to reflect more broadly on what has been happening on our frontlines since the last session.

- Were there moments of fruitfulness on your frontline this week, or a new awareness of the potential for fruitfulness?

### Pre-Film Discussion (10 mins)

- When you think of godly character, who is the first person that you think of? Can you think of a time when they responded to a situation in a particularly godly way?





**PLAY FILM to end - approx. 8 mins**

### **Questions to discuss after the film (15 mins)**

- In the story of the ogre-like boss, Louise wasn't aware that she was being fruitful. She felt like a total failure, but in fact she had modelled outstanding godly character. How does her story make you feel about the way you might be modelling godly character on your frontline?
- Louise was in an uncomfortable place, yet she was able to be remarkably fruitful. Can you think of an instance when you grew in godly character during an 'uncomfortable' time on your frontline?
- Louise recognised her fruitfulness because her former colleagues pointed it out to her. Why can we sometimes find it hard to encourage one another when we see God at work in each other's lives?

### **Bible Reflection - Galatians 5:13-26 (20 mins)**

In this well-known passage Paul lists nine characteristics of a life lived in the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These qualities of new life in Christ stand in direct contrast to the 'sinful acts of the flesh' associated with the old way of life. Rather than being a list of qualities that we must strive to attain, the fruit of the Spirit are outworkings of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and spring from our identity in Christ.

- Look at the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Are there particular situations on your frontline where the rubber hits the road and these characteristics are tested?
- The fruit of the Spirit are characterised by inner assurance and selfless love. What can stop us from being others-orientated on our frontlines?
- Paul tells us that these fruit come from a life 'led by the Spirit' (v.18) and so are not a 'to-do' list, but rather characteristics of walking with God. What might it mean for us to 'keep in step with the Spirit' (v.25) on our frontlines?



## Praying Forwards (10 mins - in pairs)

- Having reflected on some of the good things about our weeks at the beginning of this session, thank God for these things and ask him to show more of his love for others through you in the week ahead.
- Maybe you feel regretful about a time when you failed to model godly character? Ask for God's forgiveness for these times and thank him that he promises to continue to be at work in us.
- Pray that God would shape your character on your frontline this coming week. You may like to ask for prayer for a particular situation coming up this week where you might find it more difficult to respond in a godly way.

## Takeaway Action

Read through Galatians 5:13-26 again a few times this week and use it as a launch pad for praying for your frontline.

**May the Lord shine through you this week.**



*"The Christianly virtuous person is not thinking about his or her own moral performance. He or she is thinking of Jesus Christ, and of how best to love the person next door."*

Tom Wright in *Virtue Reborn*





# FRUITFULNESS ON THE FRONTLINE.

## SESSION TRANSCRIPTS



# SESSION 2: MODELLING GODLY CHARACTER

Occasionally I go to coffee shops. There's something about the warm hubbub of a good coffee shop that makes for great conversations.

As for the coffee itself, well, the coffee is pretty good every time, but my experience of being served, well that varies enormously.

Some baristas make you feel like you're part of a production line: just another gullet to fill and another wallet to empty.

Other baristas make you feel like they are actually pleased to see you, "Welcome." And they are always like that even though sometimes they too must have had a really bad night's sleep, or had to stand waiting for the bus in the rain for half an hour, or be worried about their mum or maybe just have had a couple of really cranky customers complaining about the chocolate on their cappuccinos. No, they're really always pleased to see you. They don't just want to wish you a nice day, they want to make your day nicer.

Character shines through in everything we do.

Character does shine through in everything we do.

Still, when we think about modelling godly character on our frontlines it isn't just about being nice, it's not just about hovering through life with some serene beatific grin on our faces.

Jesus wasn't always nice and things were rarely easy.

Indeed, modelling godly character requires more than niceness just as real love is more than niceness – love requires courage, determination, discernment.

Modelling godly character is the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives; in tough times and in easy times.

It is Him working in us as we allow Him to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

That's a pretty daunting list isn't it? I wonder how would you mark yourself on a list like that at the end of an average day?

Let me tell you a true story.

Louise worked for an absolute ogre. She was PA to probably the most unreasonable boss in Buckinghamshire. He was bad-tempered, he was changeable, he was indifferent to other people. And she worked for him for three years. She prayed for strength, she prayed that he would change but he didn't, and she often felt like a failure. In the end, she just couldn't take it any longer and she left – feeling like she'd let God down.

Three weeks later the woman who replaced called her up and said, "He is impossible, I've been here three weeks and I'm already thinking about leaving. How did you do it? I talked to other people and they said you were fantastic, you were patient, you were gracious, you were always upbeat despite his



impossible ways. How did you do it?

How did she do it?

Well, of course the first thing is that Louise didn't really think she'd done anything at all. Often we don't, we don't think we've done anything at all but then someone tells us you were so patient, you were so calm, you were so thoughtful, when everybody around you was completely losing the plot. The truth is that when we became Christians, God changed us.... Paul says: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has gone behold the new has come."

You know, I take that at face value.

I was a caterpillar and when I was a caterpillar there were only two ways to fly – on a leaf's back or in a bird's beak. But now I am a butterfly and I thank the Lord for giving me wings. I can fly.

We are new creatures with new capacities.

And the Lord doesn't just give us new capacities He gives us new fuel; His gracious Holy Spirit working in us. His gracious Holy Spirit wanting to work in us more and more, wanting not only to point us to Jesus to but make us more like Jesus.

Of course we can't be complacent, we all have such a long way to go, but nor should we be ungrateful. God has made us new and has promised to be at work in us.

So as we seek to model godly character we don't do so in our own strength – we don't try to grit our teeth and summon up some smidgen of love, some atom of patience for that belligerent bad-tempered bully of a centre half in our football team. We go to God.

Now, another thing that Louise realised about her 'failure' on the frontline was that God had been working in and through her all that time, and that others had seen it and been amazed by it. Just because we're struggling, it doesn't mean that God isn't working.

I wonder: where does the rubber hit the road for you on your frontline?

Who are the people, what are the situations where you know you've needed God's spirit to help you? What are the situations where you wish you'd called on Him to help you? Where you wish you could have been just a wee bit different?

Of course, Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians is not meant to be exhaustive, there are other lists. But for now let me focus on two streams of thought. First selfless love: most of the fruit involve our attitude and behaviour towards other people – love for others, patience and gentleness with others, kindness, goodness, faithfulness to others and yes, self-control because when I am not self-controlled someone else usually gets hurt.

The second strand of thought is a kind of inner assurance, joy and peace. Now I don't think joy means that we have to be highly carbonated, constantly effervescent people. There are plenty of joyous Christian people who aren't extroverts but there is just something about them, isn't there, something luminous, that radiates out, something that makes you pleased to see them walk into a room.

In Galatians Paul summarises it all as freedom. Christ's grace and love frees us from the power of sin and frees us from the hamster wheel of legalism. His love graces us with that deep assurance of God's love which gives us joy and peace and enables us to be other-centred. As the apostle John puts it, "We

love because God first loved us...”

So godly character springs from our new identity in Christ – we are new creatures.

Godly character ripens from the power of His Spirit working in us, in His own quiet and determined way.

Actually, I suspect that most of us will one day be joyously surprised; probably astonished by the ways God has chosen to work through us.

May the Lord shine through you this week.

