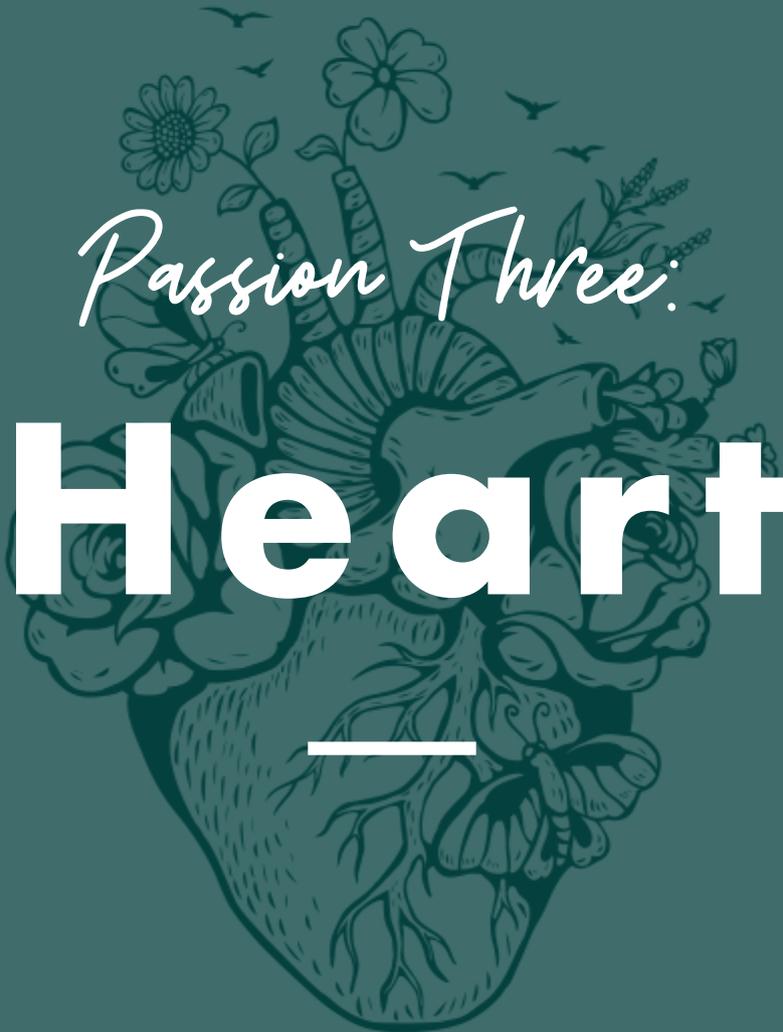




CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP FOUNDATIONS



from grace to sway

THE SEVEN PASSIONS OF BIBLICAL LEADERS



study 1

Introduction to HEART for Christian influencers

When I was a young adult, I was involved in leadership roles at interdenominational camps and beach missions. As a university student and then young school teacher, I would use school holidays each year to share the gospel and equip young people through camping ministries. As well as serving others, it was a God-given opportunity to develop my leadership gifts and learn more about Christian influence.

Keith was 10 years older than me and he headed up most of the camps and missions I attended. In fact, it was probably his involvement that was initially the main attraction for me. I loved and respected the guy. I was not alone. There were hundreds of us who were forged by Keith's influence in those years.

What made Keith's influence so powerful and wide-spread? He was a good organiser, but that wasn't it. He was warm up-front, but that wasn't it. He had a strong knowledge of the Bible, but that wasn't it. There was something about Keith's heart that attracted us so strongly. That's what I want to explore in this chapter: the place of HEART in Christian influence.

Heart for God

Samuel the prophet, under God's direction, had reluctantly anointed Saul as the first king of Israel. Saul started well but as time progressed, his leadership did not go well. He had character problems. He became selfish and self-dependent, so God decided that it was time for a new dynasty. He told Samuel to go and anoint the new king he had chosen (a rather dangerous activity seeing Saul was still in power). Samuel ended up at Jesse's house where God said he would find this new king.

**Your heart is the seat of
all your motivations and
directions and decisions.**

When Samuel laid eyes on Jesse's eldest son, Eliab, he knew that he had the potential king he was

looking for. In those days, the king's main role was to lead the army in battle and Samuel saw that Eliab was ideal. He was big and strong and good looking; just what Israel needed in their leader. You couldn't get much better than this. Samuel thought, "Surely Eliab is the guy." But God's response to Samuel was telling:

Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7)

God is not all that interested in our gifts and abilities. He doesn't really care about our height or our physique. He is not impressed by our achievements. He is not enthralled by our knowledge or intellectual ability. As we noted in GRACE, all these good things really come to us as a gift from God anyway. Clearly from God's words to Samuel, what really matters to God is our heart. But what is our "heart"?

In the West, we tend to think of our heart as the centre of our emotions. A lover might declare to the one they love, "I love you with all my heart." They mean that all their feelings are wrapped up in this person. But the Hebrew meaning of heart was much broader and deeper than this. In Hebraic thinking, your heart is not just the centre of your passions and sensations, but it is also the centre of your thinking and decision-making. In fact, it is the core of your whole being. Your heart is the seat of all your motivations and directions and decisions. It is who you are and what you think and feel and experience at your very foundation. So according to Hebrew thinking, your heart is what drives you.

God is most concerned about what drives our actions and decisions.

This way of understanding heart means that God is most concerned about what goes on at the centre of our being; what drives our actions and decisions; what compels our feelings. For Christians, God of course is in our hearts. But there are usually many other forces driving us as well. We are often also influenced by our past pain, our family curses, our habits, our

insecurities, our perceived needs, our pride, our idols, etc. Our hearts can be rather crowded places producing lots of mixed motives for our behaviours.

If this is the case, it looks like no-one could really have a heart for God. But this is not true. When the leaders of Israel were driven by selfishness and pride and therefore were abusing and preying on the people they were supposed to be leading, God made this promise to his people through the prophet Jeremiah:

"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15).

Ultimately, Jeremiah was referring to the ideal shepherd (Jesus), but the promise is plural. He was assuring them that in the future there would be many shepherd leaders with God's heart.

What does a Christian of influence with God's heart look like? We have a clear example of a person with God's heart in the Old Testament. Samuel ended up anointing David as the new king. God looked at David's heart and said that this is the sort of heart I want; this is a heart I can use. God had already told Saul that he would replace him with a king with God's own heart:

“But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people” (1 Sam. 13:14).

David was this man with God's heart.

But we know that David was far from perfect. David was both an adulterer and a murderer, and he made many poor and damaging choices. So having God's heart or at least having a heart like God's doesn't mean that we never fail, that we always do what God wants. What a heart after God's means is that at the depth of our being there is a genuine desire to love God, please God and do what he says. A heart for God is a heart that is soft to God and his passions and desires. God, through Ezekiel, described it like this:

I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezek. 36:26-27)

After a major failure, David recognised that his heart had been polluted and damaged. So his psalm of contrition included this prayer:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

He genuinely wanted purity and godliness at the very centre of his being.

In one sense, every Christian has God's heart. We can relate to God and follow God at our very core. This is God's gift to us. But being filled with the Spirit and allowing God to be in charge so that we are driven by his will in the middle of many competing desires is a choice that we constantly have to make. This is really important to God. Some Christians reflect God's heart more than others.

No Christian of influence has perfectly pure motivations. We are all broken people who have been damaged by our own sin and the sin of others. But there is still a difference between Christian influencers who basically try to meet their own needs or the needs of an organisation, and those who seek to serve God. At the very heart of godly influence is this passion:

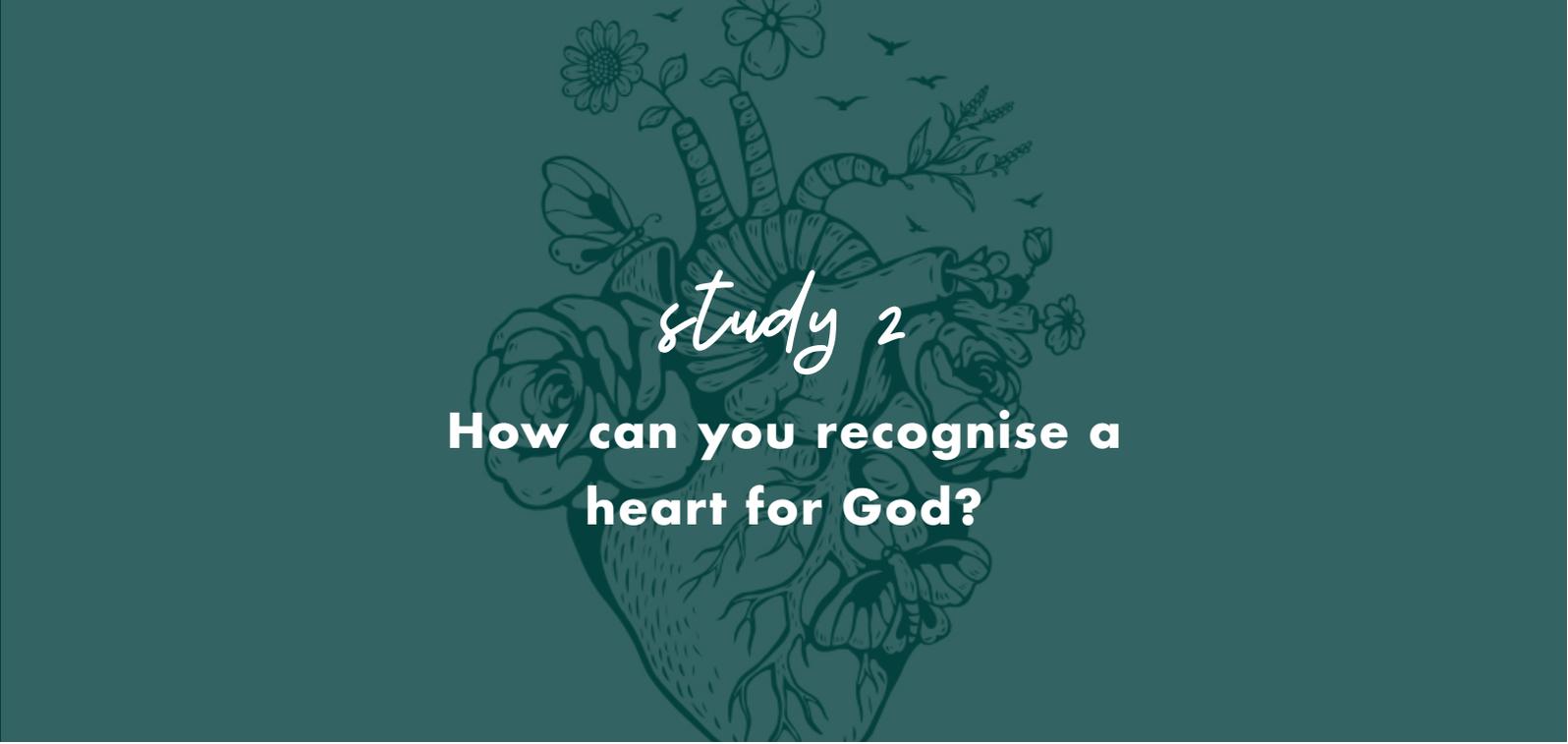
“God, I really want to be open to you and I will do what you want whatever the cost; I'm yours.”

Early on in our growth as Christians of influence, God checks out our heart.

Will we be faithful in small issues? Will we stay true to God when no one is looking? Will we commit to minor tasks when they don't get any attention? Will we speak for God when it is uncomfortable? God really wants our growth of influence to be driven by his heart.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 3.1

What evidence can you see that, like David, you have a heart for God?



study 2

How can you recognise a heart for God?

We have seen that God is not interested in what we do on the surface but looks at our heart. Unfortunately, we humans don't have that same ability. It's difficult for us to tell what drives people to do the things they do. Is the worship leader driven by a passion for God or a desire to show off their skills? Is the community carer looking for approval from God or appreciation from those they serve? Is the Christian business person motivated by a heart to serve God in the workforce or the desire to make money and grow power? While heart makes all the difference when it comes to Christian influence, it's hard for us to discern a person's heart. Like Samuel with Eliab, we only get to see the external and so it's easy for us to get it wrong, particularly when people are very gifted.

It's our fruit that reveals our true heart.

"Matt" was the most gifted guy in our year at theological college. He had a great personality and everyone loved him. He was a bit of a talker, but he was so warm, capable and impressive. Churches were clamouring to have him as their pastor. He took on a small church and, not surprisingly, it boomed. I was really impressed by Matt. But after a few years of pastoring, he took off with one of the women in the church, leaving his lovely wife

and young family. He never came back. He clearly didn't have a heart for God. But how can we know?

Fortunately, Jesus has shown us a way to detect a person's heart for God. In helping his followers uncover false prophets who were incredibly dangerous but externally looked very much like the real thing ("wolves in sheep's clothing"), Jesus gives this advice:

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus by their fruit you will recognise them. (Matt. 7:16-20)

It's our fruit that reveals our heart. But what sort of fruit is Jesus talking about? In the New Testament, the term "fruit" is used figuratively in at least five different ways. Fruit is used to describe:

1. Christian character (Gal. 5:22-23)
2. Obedience to God and living God's way (Col. 1:10)
3. Those who become Christians through our witness (Rom. 1:13)
4. Giving praise to God (Heb. 13:15)
5. The product of generous giving (Phil. 4:17)

So fruit is the result of God moving in and through our lives. It is the outward evidence of the inward reality of the Holy Spirit working in us. Fruit shows in godly character and actions.

Fruit particularly relates to character. If you want to know if someone has a heart for God, you look at their character and see whether it reflects the fruit that the Spirit produces through a godly heart. Paul gives us a start by outlining some of the character evidence that we are looking for:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Peter comes up with a slightly different list:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-8)

While we can't see a person's heart like God can, we have a fair idea of what is happening in a person's heart by looking at the fruit of their life, particularly their character.

The importance of character

The centrality of godly character in a Christian of influence is made remarkably clear in the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul lays out the qualities the church should look for in its leaders. Here are the instructions he gives Timothy:

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy

Don't mistake fervour, gifting or success for character. Godly character is consistently displaying the character of God, regardless of being seen or not.

of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (1 Tim. 3:2-7)

Surprise, surprise, the qualities necessary for church leadership are all about character. There is mention of teaching ability and parenting expertise, but the rest of the list focuses completely on character, not gifting or ability or personality or achievements. God sees character as more foundational than competence or accomplishment in his leaders. That's because good character reflects a godly heart. It shows a genuine desire for God and a heart to please him.

The Bible has much to say about godly character in every Christian, but it is particularly fussy about the character of those who significantly influence others. Basically, godly character has to do with consistently displaying the character of God whether we are being observed or not, whether we are under pressure or not.

Don't mistake fervour for character. Some influencers can have a fire in their belly that looks like it comes from a godly heart, but such passion can also be driven by personality or personal ambition or circumstances. Enthusiasm or hunger may have nothing to do with a heart for God.

Don't mistake gifting for character. Some influencers are incredibly gifted. They may be great communicators, brilliant organisers, powerful evangelists, terrific networkers, extraordinary visionaries, or marvellous motivators. These are wonderful gifts that God can use, but none of them necessarily has anything to do with character. They don't automatically reflect a godly heart.

Don't mistake success for character. While success may indicate God's blessing on a person with his heart, it can also come through other factors. Sometimes success comes because we are in the right place at the right time. Sometimes it comes because we are offering what people want (not necessarily what God wants). Sometimes it comes because we are incredibly talented. Sometimes it comes because we are able to effectively manage (or manipulate) people. None of these drivers of success have anything to do with godly character, and some show a lack of character.

It is godly character that indicates a heart for God. This is the fruit that is so important. If a Christian of influence is not evidencing growth in godly character, then it shows that they have a

heart problem because over the long term you can tell godly hearts by their fruit.

Some character issues for influencers

It is impossible to deal with every character issue here. If you want a place to start in checking your character, the passages from Gal. 5:22-23, 2 Pet. 1:5-8 and 1 Tim. 3:2-7 (cited above) are most helpful.

But to give you some idea of the breadth of what God is looking for in Christians of influence, here is a list of character issues raised in the New Testament. Check it out. Look for areas in which you have grown and issues that may need some further work.

- » Spiritual growth (Phil. 3:12, 1 Tim. 3:6, 1 Tim. 6:11)
- » Integrity (1 Tim. 3:2), purity (1 Tim. 4:12)
- » Knowing God and his Word (Tit. 1:9)
- » Wisdom (Eph. 5:15-17, Prov. 1:1-7; Jas. 3:17)
- » Gentleness (1 Tim. 3:3, 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:24-25, Tit. 1:7)
- » Good reputation, consistency (1 Tim. 3:7)
- » Faithfulness (Gal. 5:22)
- » Commitment (1 Cor. 9:24-27)
- » Humility (1 Tim. 3:6, 1 Pet. 5:5-6)
- » Repentance (1 John 1:9-10)
- » Submission to authority (Heb. 13:7, 1 Thess. 5:12-13, 1 Pet. 2:13)
- » Right motives (1 Tim. 3:3, 1 Pet. 5:1-3)
- » Contentment (1 Tim. 6:6), generosity (1 Tim. 6:18)
- » A teachable spirit (Heb. 13:7)
- » Self-discipline (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:8, 1 Pet. 5:8)
- » Coping with hardship (2 Tim. 2:3)
- » Endurance/perseverance (1 Tim. 6:11)
- » Godly example (Phil. 3:17, 1 Tim. 4:12, 1 Pet. 5:3)

This list is a taste of what God does in our lives as our hearts seek him and are ruled by him. I'm sure you recognise many of these characteristics in those who have influenced you.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 3.2

1. Choose one of the character issues listed above that is characteristic of your life.
How can you tell?
2. Choose one of the character issues listed above that needs to develop further in you.
How is this likely to happen?



By now you may be feeling disheartened about your heart for God and the resultant character that is displayed in you. And if you don't feel bad, then maybe you lack humility as well.

For example, let's take a character issue that is mentioned by both Paul and Peter: self-control. As our hearts pursue God and he works in us, then inevitably we will gain greater control over how we act and react. We no longer do whatever we want and go with however we feel, but with the Spirit's help, we control our emotions and actions so that they can be aligned with what Jesus wants.

This is both obvious and impossible. A lack of self-control clearly points to a heart problem. It shows that we do not ultimately desire to please God. Yet who has complete self-control? No-one that I know. Does that mean that we are all excluded from godly influence because of our problem with self-control? Certainly not.

When it comes to godly character, we all start at different places. Our basic character is forged by many issues including family genetics, culture, personality, life experiences, reactions to pain and pleasure, and God. For example, some of us are naturally patient and easy-going and others are very determined and headstrong. This may have nothing to do with our heart for God, but comes from the way our character has been forged. Some people really do have a godly character head start.

When it comes to godly character, we all start at different places.

The key issue then is not how godly our character is at the moment, but whether it is becoming more godly. A heart after God will necessarily produce growth in our character through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the depth of our lives. If your character is naturally patient, the Holy Spirit may not have a lot of work to do in that area, but he may need to forge a deep courage in you, so that you are able to deal well with conflict and criticism. There will always

be a need for growth in some areas. Character growth is the best sign of a soft, godly heart that is being moulded by the Spirit.

However, the Bible does call for a minimum standard when it comes to those with significant influence over others (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:2-7). A very angry person (maybe as a result of personality and past circumstances) will become less angry as God works in their life. But to lead others, they need to have a significant release from their anger or they will end up doing damage to those they influence.

So growth is the key issue when it comes to heart. Your growth in godly character is a true indication a passion for HEART. If you are growing, be encouraged. But if you still have some deep flaws in your character, they will need to be addressed before you have wider influence. If they are not attended to, you will eventually harm those you are influencing.

Growing godly character

As we have seen, godly character comes from the work of the Spirit within us. It is his role to produce fruit in our lives – the fruit comes from him (Gal. 5:22-23).

In Eph. 3:16-17, Paul prays, **“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”** Paul is asking for the Spirit to work in the Ephesians’ hearts/inner being to let Christ dwell there. But wait a minute. Surely Christ is already dwelling in their hearts.

The verb “dwell” used here means to settle down there, to be completely at home there. In other words, the Spirit works so that Jesus may really be in charge at the core of our lives. As the Spirit works and as Jesus rules in our hearts, our character inevitably changes to reflect more of the character of Jesus. In one way, growing godly character is really letting God’s Spirit and Jesus doing their work in our hearts. Ultimately, it’s God’s job to change our character. It’s not something that we can do ourselves. As I have made clear, character is actually a reflection of what is happening in our heart.

So, if we can’t actually grow our own character, does this let us off the hook? Well yes and no. We certainly can’t grow godly character by self-discipline alone. In Romans 7:14-20, Paul describes the struggle he has to do what God wants:

As the Spirit works and as Jesus rules in our hearts, our character inevitably changes to reflect more of the character of Jesus.

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I

myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

There is a debate over whether Paul is writing here as a non-Christian (“I am unspiritual sold as a slave to sin”) or as a Christian (“I have a desire to do what is good”). My understanding is that Paul is not describing the normative life of either a Christian or a non-Christian, but the frustration of trying to live God’s way through his own effort (in the “flesh”). He uses personal pronouns over 25 times in these seven verses. If we try to grow godly character on our own, we end up in the guilt, self-recrimination and frustration that Paul describes here. We can’t and don’t have to grow godly character. This is what the Spirit does, as Paul goes on to say in Romans 8.

But while we can’t grow godly character ourselves, we do have a part to play. We can cooperate with God’s Spirit or we can resist him. We can let him have all our heart for his work or we can keep parts of our heart off-limits to his power. We can “live by the Spirit” or “gratify our own sinful desires” (Gal. 5:16).

While I’m reticent to give too much advice on how to cooperate with the Spirit in case it becomes another list of legalisms for you to feel guilty about, here are a few things that have helped me:

1. Be honest about your character flaws. It’s almost impossible to allow God’s Spirit to work on character flaws that you don’t acknowledge. For example, if you tend to twist the truth, admit that. You don’t necessarily have to tell everyone, but you must recognise that it is an issue for you. If you really are unaware of your character flaws, ask people that you trust.

2. Repent and receive forgiveness. Tell God that your character flaws are wrong and that you are sorry for the way you act. The trouble with character issues is that they often continue for a long time, so we get tired of confessing them. Don’t stop. Receive God’s forgiveness again and again and again (1 John 1:9).

3. Ask God’s Spirit to work in you. If you believe that character change really is the Spirit’s work, then you need to keep asking him to do his work and not take all the responsibility on yourself.

4. Look for accountability and support. We were never meant to do Christian life alone. It’s so much easier when we deal with character issues together. Accountability could be provided by a good friend, a small support group, or a mentor. But get help from those you trust because they love you.

5. Deal well with your failures. A lot of Spirit-empowered character growth comes through major failures and problems. Dealing with failure may mean publicly acknowledging your failure, apologising to those you have hurt, making amends, and/or putting new safeguards in place. But don't waste your failures. They can really produce significant personal character change and growth.

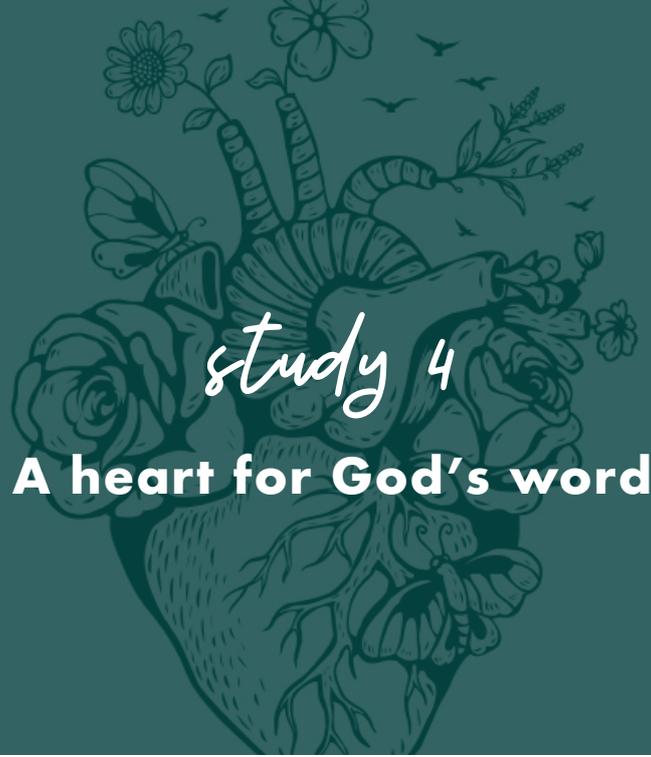
6. Thank God for the personal character change you (or others) see. One problem with growing godly character is that we feel that we can never get there. No matter how much we grow, we're still so far short of where we would like to be. This easily produces disillusionment. But the fact is, if your heart is open to God, the Spirit really is changing you. Watch for what he is doing and celebrate it. Sometimes the evidence of change comes through comments from others. When you receive an encouragement concerning your character, stop and thank God.

Character growth is especially important in the early years of growing Christian influence. God will test your HEART (through character checks) to ensure that it reaches the standard needed to entrust you with influence over the lives of others. Don't seek to grow your sphere of influence if your character is not up to it. But don't be too hard on yourself. If you are unsure, check with a trusted mentor.

Character growth is especially important in the early years of growing Christian influence.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 3.3

Give an example of the growth you have seen in a character area of your life. Thank Jesus for this growth. What was your contribution? What did you do to help?



study 4

A heart for God's word

We have seen that a heart for God will be evidenced by the growth of godly character. But there is another aspect of HEART that is also important. That is a heart for God's word. It involves a deep desire to know what God thinks and says, and a passion to understand his will and his ways.

While knowing God well will inevitably involve an understanding of Scripture, **I'm not equating a heart for God's word with a knowledge of the Bible. These are two different things.** People who strive to understand Scripture can be driven by all sorts of motives. Some want to prove that they are right, some want to justify what they are doing, and some want to flaunt their knowledge. They use Scripture for their own purposes. They have no true heart for God's word. The Jewish religious leaders in Jesus' day studied and debated Scripture incessantly, but they clearly had no desire to really know God's truth when it was revealed in Jesus. Biblical knowledge is important in Christian influence, but it doesn't equate with a HEART for God's word.

Some signs that Christians have a real heart for God's word/truth are:

- » They come to Scripture with a humble attitude in order to learn and grow. They readily submit to the authority of Scripture.
- » They are constantly learning and rethinking their understanding of God and his ways in order to align their thinking more closely with God's revelation.
- » They seek to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit who reveals God's truth.
- » They consistently reflect on life in order to discern how God is moving and what God is saying.
- » Their praying involves listening to God as well as talking to God.
- » They intentionally seek out and learn from others who have a heart for God's word.
- » They are growing in their knowledge of God but they are humble about it, knowing that God's truth is far greater than their minds will ever comprehend.

Christians of influence with a HEART for God's word will develop godly wisdom. This wisdom has nothing to do with being smart. Paul makes it clear that God's wisdom is not at all like natural wisdom, especially when it comes to the gospel.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:18-24)

The wisdom that flows from a heart for God's truth is attractive. James describes it like this: **"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"** (Jam 3:17).

This type of wisdom is really important in Christians of influence. The more we understand God and know what he wants, the more we will be able to influence people towards God's purposes and directions, and the more we will be able to help them live God's way. As the book of Proverbs says: **"Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding"** (Prov. 4:7).

Growing wisdom

Godly wisdom has a lot in common with godly character. Like character, it flows from a godly heart. Like character, it is accompanied by peace and humility and sincerity. As with character, some people have a head start. Like character, it takes a lifetime to develop.

The best place to start in growing wisdom is to ask that God's Spirit will help you become wise.

The best place to start in growing wisdom is to ask that God's Spirit will help you become wise. In Ephesians, Paul describes how he does that for the Ephesians. He tells them:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph. 1:17).

Jesus promised: **"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth"** (John 16:12).

The Holy Spirit shows us God's perspective and reveals to us God's will. Christians of influence work on listening to God's Spirit. This takes time, attention, a quiet heart, and spiritual sensitivity.

Once we are asking and listening to the Spirit, there are a few things that need special attention in the development of wisdom.

The first is the importance of reading Scripture. The best place to learn about God and his wisdom is in Scripture. There is no substitute for studying the Bible. We are so privileged to have truth from God in written form. As I said above, biblical knowledge does not equate with godly wisdom, but It is difficult to be wise without a good understanding of the Bible. We need to study and submit to the truth of Scripture consistently and thoroughly.

Once we are studying the Bible, it is important to reflect on how what the Bible says impacts our everyday life. This is called “theological reflection.” **Wisdom grows as we allow God’s word in Scripture to impact the way we think and live.**

What about formal study of the Bible? Evangelicals have not traditionally been big on academics. There are aspects of human learning that we need to be cautious about. It can grow pride in us and harden our hearts to God’s wisdom. We certainly don’t need a theological degree to serve God or influence others. God expects and empowers every believer to be a person of influence. Formal study is not necessary.

But the study of the Bible in depth often helps in the growth of godly wisdom. The most practical way to do this is through some type of formal theological study. Of course, not every Christian of influence will have the privilege to study Scripture at a formal level, but if you get the opportunity, take it. A heart for knowing God’s word will inevitably produce a love for Scripture. All Christian influencers need a growing understanding of God’s ways as revealed in the Bible.

Our world needs Christians of influence who are immersed in God’s truth.

Another way wisdom develops is through reflecting on our actions and their outcomes, especially if we can gain some insight from those who are wiser than us through a mentoring relationship. Wisdom seldom develops fully in isolation. It’s vital that Christian of influence seek out mentors who can guide them in the development of wisdom. It will certainly speed up the process of becoming wise.

Jesus poured three years into teaching, ministering and reflecting with his disciples. He invested in them (although often they were slow learners) so that they could lead the early church with wisdom. The Apostle Paul was a gifted and passionate leader, but his growth in wisdom was assisted by the mentoring of Barnabas. Being mentored by those with wisdom who have a heart for God’s word will produce wisdom in you.

Our world needs Christians of influence who are immersed in God’s truth. People who listen to the Spirit, know the Bible and learn from wise mentors. These influencers understand their contexts and histories, think theologically, and interpret the times from God’s perspective. If we don’t have godly wisdom, we’ll either depend on tradition or be swept away by cultural trends and values. And there’s plenty of evidence that this is happening to some wings of the church. **We desperately need wisdom.**

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 3.4

How do you read Scripture thoroughly and regularly? What method do you use?



study 5

HEART and influencing others

We have seen that a heart for God and his word allows God's Spirit to produce both godly character and godly wisdom in us. But what difference does this make to our influence of others? Let's explore how HEART impacts on those we influence.

As we develop godly character (HEART for God), we live differently and treat people differently. We are more reliable and trustworthy. We keep our promises. We are more patient and gentle. We are less selfish and more willing to listen to others. We are less plagued by sin. We have more integrity. In other words, we establish a reputation for goodness and godliness, and are seen to reflect (at least in some ways) the character of God.

This has a significant impact on others. Followers are more likely to be influenced well by someone they can trust, someone who treats them well, someone who acts consistently, someone who is reliable, someone who is humble, someone who is patient, someone who practises what they preach. Godly character helps trust develop so that others can follow with confidence. They know that you will not damage or disappoint them through your character flaws.

So not only does godly character please God, it also engenders peace and confidence in others around you and will inevitably grow your influence.

As we develop wisdom (HEART for God's word), we speak more confidently on God's behalf. We never get it perfectly right of course, but we know what God wants and what is best in many of the situations we face and the decisions we make. Our observations prove to be true. Our insights are accurate. Our comments are helpful. Our input is biblical. We may be slower to speak, but in the end, we prove to be discerning and we make good decisions.

When we speak and live wisely, many will listen.

Oh, we still need to seek God and to listen carefully to what others are saying. It's not that we become gurus or experts. But people see us as wise and want to listen to what we have to say because we often have godly insights.

This does not mean that everyone will hang on our words. There are many people who don't want to hear wise words because they have their own agendas. We can see this is the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus' words. They accused him of being from Satan (Mark 3:22) and said that he spoke blasphemy (Luke 5:21). There was no recognition of his wisdom and authority.

But when we are seen to speak and live wisely, many will want to listen. They are keen to know what God thinks and says. They appreciate our knowledge and perceptions. They are influenced by what we say.

Spiritual authority

A HEART for God and his word that results in godly character and godly wisdom generates real spiritual authority. Bobby Clinton defines spiritual authority as "a term in leadership development theory referring to a source of credibility from God that permits leaders to influence followers." (Clinton 1988, Making of a Leader, 255.)

When our influence comes reinforced by a consistent, godly character and a deep understanding of God and his ways, it resounds with the authority of God. Those who are spiritual can recognise God's presence and voice and will want to follow.

Not many young Christians of influence will have strong spiritual authority. Usually, character and wisdom take time to develop. But this is the direction we should be heading. We need to foster a HEART for God and his word that reflects in godly character and wisdom and develops spiritual authority.

How HEART serves followers: confidence and character

We have already briefly examined some of the benefits of HEART for those we are influencing. But I want to focus here on two significant blessings for followers.

1. Confidence

The Bible emphasises that we should be able to have confidence in those who shepherd us because they represent God and are accountable to God. Hebrews 13:17 says: **"Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give account."** As confidence in leaders grows, followers become more eager to listen and follow.

Those who influence without godly character and/or wisdom often damage those who are following them and destroy future confidence and trust in leaders. It's painful for those who follow an influencer who has poor character and/or is unwise. It's hard to fully invest in them and their ideas because you can't be confident that they will do or say what is right.

HEART for God in an influencer (resulting in growing godly character and growing wisdom) breeds confidence in followers to respond with loyalty and faith. They can fully invest and not hold back for fear of being hurt or misled. They can be confident that following this Christian of influence will move them safely towards God's heart and direction.

Heart for God in an influencer breeds confidence in followers to respond with loyalty and faith.

2. Character

Another good thing about HEART for God is that it often rubs off on those we influence. That's why Scripture implores us to associate with and follow the example of those who have godly hearts. Here are a few verses that emphasise the importance of example:

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. (Phil. 3:17)

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Heb. 13:7)

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Tim. 4:12)

As we Christians of influence passionately pursue HEART for God, those who are influenced will tend to grow a similar HEART leading to godly character and wisdom in them. As they find their character growing to be more like Jesus, they will appreciate our contribution and will want to be around us and to learn from us. And our influence will continue to grow.

My personal reflection

I started this chapter with the example of Keith, influencer extraordinaire of young leaders. What gave him such a powerful impact on a whole generation of young Christian leaders?

He certainly led with GRACE and LOVE. But I think it was his HEART that stood out most of all. He had a pure heart that loved God deeply and loved the truth of God's word. This resulted in godly character and godly wisdom and therefore huge spiritual authority. We had complete confidence

When our influence comes reinforced by a consistent, godly character and a deep understanding of God and his ways, it resounds with the authority of God.

in him because we knew that he lived close to Jesus, practised what he preached, and spoke wise words that resonated with God's truth. And as young leaders, we longed for his heart and character to rub off on us.

Here is part of what I said at Keith's funeral when he passed away in his early seventies: "Keith's life and actions were always a tremendous example. That ranged from loving God with all his heart, to caring deeply for his followers, to patiently teaching us, to practically serving wherever needed. This godly example drew many people to Keith. One of my fondest memories of Keith is sitting with him on the piano stool at one of our numerous camps/beach missions in the old days, and singing with him late one night as he played, "Oh the wonder of it all, to think that God loves me." I knew he meant every word of it. There was no pretence about Keith. He lived what he preached and all those he influenced knew this. They respected and loved him for it."

Over a lifetime of church ministry, I have seen many people damaged by Christian leaders. Most of these leaders were not bad people, but they had not developed sufficient character and wisdom, and therefore their influence was tainted with hypocrisy or stupidity or impatience or selfishness or insincerity or arrogance or confusion. Ultimately, their fruit revealed their heart. This was sad for these leaders, but it was particularly sad for their followers who were offered no godly model of character and wisdom to follow and whose confidence in leaders was damaged.

I know that I have significant flaws that constantly need God's grace and forgiveness. But I do have a passion for a godly HEART. Over 50 years of Christian leadership, this has led to many followers who trust me and appreciate my character and wisdom, and who have grown in HEART themselves. This is both a great privilege and a wonderful reward.

As we saw at the start of this week, thousands of years ago God promised his abused people that he would raise up new leaders with HEART (Jer. 3:15). We need these Christians of influence today. People who influence with God's character and wisdom.

I pray that as you get your Christian influence Operating System in place, you will be passionate about growing a deep HEART for God and his word. That you will influence with real spiritual authority.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 3.5

Checkpoint 3: HEART

TOTAL:

Please rate each statement on the following scale:

- 5 - Strongly Agree;
- 4 - Agree;
- 3 - Neither Agree nor Disagree;
- 2 - Disagree;
- 1 - Strongly Disagree

TOTAL the scores for each quality and put the total in the box. This gives a score out of 25. A score below 20 indicates significant room for growth.

1. **I have seen significant positive changes in my character in the last few years.**
2. **Generally, I am faithful, patient, humble, honest, gentle, and teachable.**
3. **I know the Bible well enough to find what God wants on an issue.**
4. **I have a trusted mentor who regularly guides me and holds me accountable.**
5. **I am respected and trusted by almost all the people I am influencing.**

Describe briefly what you have learned about HEART as an essential in Christian leadership. Reflect on your self-assessment (above) and discuss the steps you are taking (or will take) to develop HEART.



Discussion Questions: HEART

Choose the most appropriate questions.

- 1.** What issues have the readings and journaling raised for you? Share your answers, thoughts and questions.
- 2.** Share your response to Journal Activity 3.5.
- 3.** Describe a leader you know who you believe has or had spiritual authority. What were the characteristics of this leader that made you think this?
- 4.** What are you doing right when it comes to HEART? What could you develop or improve?
- 5.** Why is character so important in Christian leaders?
- 6.** Share a wisdom lesson that you are learning at the moment.
- 7.** What does it mean to have a heart for God's word? What does that look like in practice? Does it mean that you read the Bible a lot or know a lot about the Bible?
- 8.** Who knows your HEART best? What would they say about you?
- 9.** What are you planning to do about HEART in the next week?



Case Studies: HEART

Choose the most relevant case studies to discuss.

- 1.** Zac leads a small group and does a great job. It's one of the most popular small groups in the church. Zac's combination of warmth and biblical understanding make him an ideal small group leader. It's easy to see that the people in his group are growing spiritually and becoming more passionate about mission. But Zac has a problem. About once a month he finds himself trawling the internet for pornographic sites. He doesn't think this is okay, but while the habit is not getting worse, he can't break free. No-one knows about this. He doesn't feel that it affects his group leadership and generally his spiritual life is healthy. But he eventually decides to check with you (his friend) as to what he should do about his leadership of the group. In the light of this module, what would you suggest to him?
- 2.** Sarah is really outgoing and fun to be with and has a great heart for God. Everyone loves her and she is an excellent motivator. But she's all over the shop. She constantly double books in her desire to fit too much into her life and so regularly lets people down. She is late to most things because she's been doing something else. Oh she's always apologetic, but you just can't rely on her. Do you think that these character flaws will hinder her Christian influence? Why or why not? Are there some leadership roles that she could still handle well? If you were her mentor, how would you advise her?
- 3.** Paul has high standards and he expects high standards from those on his team. He has a goal of increasing the youth group from 40 young people to 100 by the end of the year. The trouble is that the actual attendance is only very slowly increasing. He's becoming frustrated with his team and making more and more demands on them. They are struggling and are not happy. Some are talking about pulling out. What personal character and wisdom issues could be the problem for Paul here? As a friend, how could you help Paul? (You know Paul's dad who is a high-achieving, somewhat ruthless, successful businessman.) Do you know any Bible verses that might help?
- 4.** Jodie loves studying the Bible. She has sharp mind, a degree in theology, and is knowledgeable about a wide range of issues. She is very insightful in discussions and you often ask her opinion on complicated matters. She has been very helpful. But unfortunately, most people don't really gel with her. She comes across as over-confident, condescending, maybe even arrogant. How can Jodie grow her character and wisdom? She already spends a lot of time studying the Bible.
- 5.** Jared loves people and does a fantastic job encouraging other guys. He talks often about God and is very popular and influential in the church. But at work he is a different person. He likes to be one of the crowd and doesn't say anything about his faith or his church. You see his

workplace is strongly anti-Christian and he feels he would lose his influence if he spoke up about his faith. Jared is being considered to lead the youth group. What would you advise? Does he lack character?