

## When a Nation Forgets God

*Lessons we must learn from Nazi Germany*

A Bible Study utilizing the book by  
*Erwin Lutzer*

Lesson Six – *Ordinary Heroes can make a Difference*

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## Review of Lessons One through Five

- God is Sovereign over individuals, homes, churches *and* civil government – *if man sovereign; we lose liberty*
- Individuality (choice) marks a Biblical economy. *When the free market recedes, economic crises can be exploited*
- Self-government is maintained when God internally governs. *Otherwise, anarchy often results in tyranny*
- Stewardship of ideas is primarily an individual responsibility, *for distortions multiply when little discernment is in people*
- Sowing and Reaping is clearly illustrated by how well *parents take responsibility for the education of their children*

2

## The Biblical Principle of Character

- Genesis 2:15 – *And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it...*
  - God made men and women “in his image” – Genesis 1:26
  - He told him to “dress” the garden – “*labor, work, serve, worship*”
    - We work because God works - a positive attitude toward work
    - Work is a calling, given before the fall
- This Biblical principle, introduced in Genesis, highlights:
  - God forms our character – “*to scrape, cut, engrave, a mark made by cutting or engraving*” – our attitude and response to pressure
  - God’s character development in us progressively reveals His image  
*The seed of transformation is our conscience (attitude)*

3

- Genesis 1:27 – *So God created man in His own image...*
- Acts 24:16 – *I myself always strive to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men.*
- Webster’s 1828 – conscience - *the principle within us which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections and instantly approves or condemns them*
- J Madison - *Conscience is the most sacred of all property... the exercise of that being a natural and unalienable right*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:18 - *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord*

4

## The Practice of Christian Character

### Internal Faith (conscience)

- Resting in God - confidence
- Belief in God
- Image of God
- Pressure of God

### External Works (conduct)

- Laboring in God - perseverance
- Working as He works
- Character of godliness
- Pressure of circumstances

*You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works... Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? – James 2:18,21-22*

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## The Deception of Vanity and Drudgery in sinful work

*“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”  
James 2:17*

*“Let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works” – Hebrews 6:1*

Vanity – faith without works  
*“empty, worthless, having no substance”*

- Spiritual, but not practical
- Proclamation without practice
- Mystical, beyond correction

Drudgery – works without faith  
*“one who labors hard in servile employments, a slave”*

- Practical, but not spiritual
- Performance only out of duty
- Proving one’s worth by works

6

## God uses Ordinary People with Character

- Heb. 11:4 – *by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*
- v. 5 – *by faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death*
- v. 7 – *by faith Noah, being divinely warned... prepared an ark*
- v. 8 – *by faith Abraham obeyed... not knowing where he was going*
- v. 11 – *by faith Sarah... bore a child... she judged Him faithful*
- v. 13 – *these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off... embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*
- v. 23 – *by faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter... forsook Egypt...*

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- Hebrews 11:32ff – *And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jeptha; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in flight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection (of whom the world is not worthy)...*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5:2-3 – *Syrians... brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife... 'if only my master were with the prophet... he would heal him of his leprosy'*

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## Regardless of one's circumstances, *God desires to transform our character into His image*

- Hebrews 12:5 – *my son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives... for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*
- Hebrews 12:11 – *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful, nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it...*

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## Noah Webster's definition of Character (1828)

- *The peculiar qualities, impressed by nature or habit on a person, which distinguish him from others; these constitute real character, and the qualities which he is supposed to possess, constitute his estimated character, or reputation. Hence we say, a character is not formed, when the person has not acquired stable and distinctive qualities.*
- Samuel Adams wrote - *...dissolution of the principles and manners will more surely overthrow the liberties of America than the whole force of the common enemy. While the people are virtuous they cannot be subdued; but once they lose their virtue, they will be ready to surrender their liberties... "*

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## Ordinary People defeated Hitler

Lutzer - *'When God calls a man, he bids him come and die,'* wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer during the dark days when the Church in Germany was being Nazified. And at the age of 39, he practiced what he preached; he was hanged on the gallows and died.

*"Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices..."*

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## Bonhoeffer led the Confessing Church

- *In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin... Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*
- *Lutzer – with these words and a life to back them up, Dietrich Bonhoeffer became a powerful spokesman for a form of vibrant Christianity that was independent of state interference... but thousands of lesser-known people were inspired by his example and became a credit to... Christ...*

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## Bonhoeffer wrestles with hearing God's Will

- He ponders a call to America – *Union Theological Seminary*
- Yet he experienced the back-slidden American church - *The whole thing was a respectable, self-indulgent, self-satisfied religious celebration. This sort of idolatrous religion stirs up the flesh which is accustomed to being kept in check by the Word of God. Such sermons make for libertinism, egotism, indifference. Do people not know that one can get on as well, even better without, 'religion'?*
- Should he return to Germany? Or stand for truth in America?
  - He was strongly advised against returning – certain death or worse
  - *Yet where was he needed most? Where did he find the peace of God?*

13

## How far can Civil Disobedience go?

- *Bonhoeffer introduced us in 1935 to the problem of what we today call political resistance. The levels of confession and of resistance could no longer be kept neatly apart. The escalating persecution of the Jews generated an increasingly intolerable situation, especially for Bonhoeffer himself. We now realized that mere confession, no matter how courageous, inescapably meant complicity with the murderers, even though there would always be new acts of refusing to be co-opted and even though we preach "Christ alone" Sunday after Sunday....*
- *And so it became clear where the problem lay for the Confessing Church; we were resisting by way of confession, but we were not confessing by way of resistance.*

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*Metaxas – A major theme for Bonhoeffer was that every Christian must be “fully human” by bringing God into his whole life, not merely into some ‘spiritual’ realm.*

*To be an ethereal figure who merely talked about God, but somehow refused to get his hands dirty in the real world in which God had placed him, was bad theology. Through Christ, God had shown that he meant us to be in this world and to obey him with our actions in this world. So Bonhoeffer would get his hands dirty, not because he had grown impatient, but because God was speaking to him about further steps of obedience.*

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## **What were the “greater steps of obedience”?**

- From Confession to Conspiracy against Hitler
  - Thou shalt not bear false witness but – *one can deceive the enemy*
  - Imprecatory prayers of the Psalms – *God judge His enemies!*
  - Could resistance include working to *assassinate a dictator?*
- He joins the Abwehr – a rival to the Gestapo
  - Atrocities of Hitler turned his own generals to conspiring...
  - *Yes, Bonhoeffer was willing to work for the death of Hitler*
- *Does not the early death of young Christians always appear to us as if God were plundering his own best instruments in a time which they are most needed?*

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## Are there Parallels to America today?

- The *trends* of greater and greater government control
- The *struggle* for believers to know their place in getting their hands dirty *without being unclean before God*
- Clear distinctions that are not the same at this time:
  - *We are not facing total dictatorship with no appeal process in place*
  - *We are not facing the level of atrocities practiced by Hitler, though we face abortion, pedophilia, sex trafficking not yet fully exposed*
- Let us remember that *God allows pressure from within (struggles) as well as without for the purpose of forming our character or His image that we might manifest the Kingdom!*

17

## Who are your heroes of the Faith?

- John Robinson – *pastor of the Pilgrim Church*
- Jonathan Edwards – *theologian of Great Awakening, missionary*
- Corrie Ten Boom – *the Hiding Place*
- Elizabeth Elliot – *through Gates of Splendor*
- David Wilkerson – *founder of Teen Challenge*
- Lutzer – *there are tens of thousands of heroes whose names are unknown., but who serve the Lord with courage and distinction... only through such an army of committed followers of Christ can we hope to stem the relentless flow...*

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## April; 1945 – Bonhoeffer's last days

- Hugh Falconer letter about Bonhoeffer in prison:

*(Bonhoeffer) was very happy during the whole time I knew him, and did a great deal to keep some of the weaker brethren from depression and anxiety. He spent a good deal of time with Wasily Wasiliew Kokorin, Molotov's nephew, who was a delightful young man although an atheist. I think your brother-in-law divided his time with him between instilling the foundations of Christianity and learning Russian.*

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## Sunday, April 8, 1945

- The Catholics and Atheist insisted Bonhoeffer hold a service
- He explained Isaiah 53:5 *“with his stripes we are healed”* and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3 *“blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By our great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”*
- Payne Best wrote *“(Bonhoeffer) spoke to us in a manner which reached the hearts of all, finding just the right words to express the spirit of our imprisonment and the thoughts and resolutions which it had brought.”*
- *“He had hardly finished his last prayer when the door opened and two evil-looking men in civilian clothes came in”*

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## Monday, April 9, 1945 – Bonhoeffer's last day

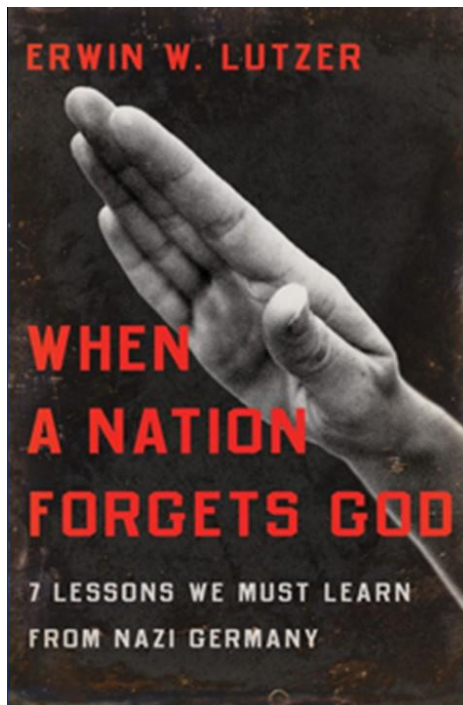
- The camp doctor at Flossenburg – H. Fischer-Hullstrung:
- *Through the half-open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer; before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer.*
- *At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.*

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## So what should we do to prepare our character?

- *What makes a strong Christian? (prayer, fasting, Scripture, hymns, count it all joy in suffering as part of our calling)*
- *The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians... joyless, self-righteous*
- *It is not necessary for us to win our battles in order to be faithful to our calling*
- *God allows pressure from within (struggles) as well as without for the purpose of forming our character or His image that we might manifest the Kingdom!*

22



## Suggested Reading from Lesson Six

- Read Chapter Six (pgs. 117-130)
  - *The greatest purpose God has for pressure is to train our conscience and form our character (fragrance of Him)*
- Make a list of your own “heroes of the faith” that have gone before you
- *What part of their character do you truly admire? Why?*
- What legacy of your own character would you like to leave to others?