



LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY CHARACTER

Some of the greatest leaders in the world have had one single thing to blame for their downfall – a lack of Godly character. As a result, they became selfish and weak. What does Godly character look like, and how can it be developed? These are important questions for every Christian – especially those in leadership. Read on to find out more!

“For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

1 Timothy 4:8

Solomon was poised to be as great a ruler as his father David had been, bringing peace, prosperity and glory to his Kingdom. However, he lacked one thing – Solomon’s heart did not belong fully to God. He knew right from wrong, and good from evil – but he did not choose the good path.

Solomon was a young man when his father, King David, beckoned him to his bedside as he lay dying. David told his son, “Be strong, show yourself a man, and keep the ways of the Lord your God”.

When he became king, Solomon saw a vision in which God offered him anything he desired. What would you have asked for? Long life? Riches? A powerful kingdom? All of those are tempting – but Solomon asked for wisdom. He told God, “You have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child... Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:7-9).

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall rise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (1 Kings 3:10-14).

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God desires that ordinary people like us carry out his amazing plans on earth – but in order to truly serve God, our heart must be right before Him. This is the essence of Godly character. Our character is evident when our attitudes, our thoughts, our intentions and our desires are Christ-like. It is more than simply knowing right from wrong, as Solomon did – it is choosing good even when it is inconvenient. Character is what is built in us when we are conformed more to the image of Jesus Christ and have become less like the world.

In Solomon’s heart, he may have known good from evil, but it did not protect him from being led astray from a love and devotion to the law of God. He married foreign women who convinced him to worship false gods and idols, he succumbed to the weaknesses of covetousness and pride. In the end, 700 wives and 300 concubines were a more powerful force in his life than God, and his kingdom fell to ruin.

This is the reason Christ-like character matters. It is easy to fake virtuous living, but God always knows our heart. When struggles of life and difficulties come, it is the person who has practised making right choices and putting God and others before themselves, who will act with good

character. This is because character is built over a lifetime of choices that honour God. At a hundred different moments in the day we can either put God and his desires first in our life, or we can elevate ourselves. We can do something kind for others or we can act to satisfy our own comforts. A selfish attitude is the root of many vices and character flaws which have destroyed leaders. When we are selfish or proud, it reveals disobedience and idolatry.

It is true that we become what we habitually do. We prove to be truthful by repeatedly offering up honest words. We prove to be joyful, not when we are happy on a sunny day, but when we can endure hardship with an attitude of thankfulness to God. In the case of Solomon, his wisdom wasn't enough to satisfy him or make his reign prosper. He was a good king, but he will not ever have the same reputation as his father David, who was a man after God's own heart.

David, despite falling into sin on many occasions, repented and turned to God for forgiveness again and again. Solomon, on the other hand, worshipped false gods, ignoring the great and awesome God who had given him the wisdom to rule. It may have been his intention to follow the will of God, but somewhere along the line he became distracted and pulled away from wholehearted obedience to Him. He had a problem with his heart.

God cares about our character because it has eternal value. This is why He makes a way for each of us to grow our character. None of us is born virtuous, but we can learn. God gives us opportunities to choose virtuous behaviour and a Christ-like attitude.

God permits the struggles and challenges of life to hone our character. If life was without adversity we would not find our character challenged! God often uses other people to challenge us in our commitment. It is easy to think of how patient and compassionate a person we are until we meet someone who is in need at an inconvenient time!

Think about this the next time you lose your temper or think you can get away with something that is questionable without being seen. Character is a commitment to the heart of Jesus Christ. It is a commitment to putting God's ways and the best interests of others before your own. This is the only hope of living a life truly pleasing to God. Making the best choice now is an investment in our character – one of the most precious possessions we have!

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IN REVIEW

- In order to fully serve God, we must not just obey him with our outward actions, but have a heart that desires God's will.
- Christian character is the desire to do God's will above our own, to think about others before ourselves, and to deliberately choose right from wrong.
- Christian virtues are any behaviour or action that is praiseworthy in the Bible, including the fruit of the Spirit.
- Character can be developed by making daily choices to do the right thing, and to honour God and others above ourselves.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- What are some life circumstances that bring out the best in you? What circumstances seems to bring out your worst traits? Which of these sets of traits is really 'you'?

- What happens when we try to serve God but have a lack of self-control and integrity? What daily choices would help us to build the virtue of self-control?

- Think about an area of weakness in your life and pray about it. Ask God to help you, through life circumstances, challenges and choices, to improve in that area of your life. Commit to pursuing Christ-like character in the weeks ahead.

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