

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Leader's Guide

## CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

### LESSON 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY CHARACTER

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Character Development. When Christians fail and ministries fall apart, it is often due to a lack of character development in the leader. A Christian leader must take character development seriously, because discipleship requires that we grow in Christ-like character. This module examines a number of Christian character traits that are necessary for developing servant leadership. We will look at what the Bible teaches about these traits, and examples of Jesus and others displaying them. Godly character should be evident in the life of every follower of Christ, especially those who are leading others.

#### INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

## LESSON 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY CHARACTER

### PURPOSE

This lesson outlines the importance, nature, and development of Godly character, and how a lack of it can lead to failure in serving God effectively.

### LEADER'S NOTE

Character is what we do in secret, when we think no one is watching. It defines who we are; it is our true self. Having a good character means we are becoming more like Jesus Christ – but we're not there yet. In fact, character building will last our entire lifetime. We will leave our ministry and our family behind when we die, but our character will be remembered. As you instruct your participants, be aware that Christian character is not learned in a classroom. It is a process that takes time as we learn to think, speak and act in ways that will honour God. Your job is to help participants understand the necessity of character development, and how to attain it. Rely on God to help you facilitate and lead them well, and be open to what He is teaching you too!

## INTRODUCTION

*Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.*

- ❖ What does the word 'character' mean to you?
- ❖ If you were to describe someone's character, what words would you use? (You could select a famous personality, your pastor, or someone you know in the class).
- ❖ What character trait do you like most about yourself? What do you like least?
- ❖ How is character developed in a person? Are you born with the character you have, or is it learned?
- ❖ What character traits have you picked up from your parents? Was there ever a time in your life when you looked up to someone (perhaps a parent, sibling or teacher) and tried to imitate them? What was the result?



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH:

- ❖ **Having a Heart for God:** God wants to use people like us to carry out his amazing plan on earth: reconciling people to Himself who were once His enemies! But in order to be useful servants in the kingdom of God, we must obey Him and have the right heart attitude. Christians must work to develop Godly character; it is an important aspect of personal discipleship.
  - **What is Godly Character?** This is what we are talking about when we use the phrase 'Godly character':
    - Godly Character is evident when our attitudes, our thoughts, our actions, our intentions and our desires are Christ-like.
    - Godly Character is more than knowing right from wrong and having a sense of ethics or morality. It is choosing good over evil even when it is inconvenient.
    - Godly character puts God first, others second, and ourselves third.
    - Godly character embodies the praiseworthy traits mentioned in the Bible, including the fruit of the Spirit, which displays the nature of Jesus Christ to the unbelieving world.
    - Godly character is what God desires for each of us!
  - **Being Conformed to the Image of Christ:** As we undergo the process of sanctification, we are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. This should excite and delight us! Jesus was not excluded from life's trials, and neither will we as we follow His example. Consider these verses:
    - Romans 8:29
    - 2 Corinthians 3:18
    - Romans 12:2
    - Colossians 3:9-10
    - Romans 13:14
  - **Abiding in Christ, Bearing Good Fruit:** God wants all of us to abide in Him – to stay close to Him in our thoughts, words, deeds and attitudes. Awareness of His presence with us should impact the way we think and the things we do. The Holy Spirit will enable us to produce spiritual fruit when we abide in Him.
    - John 15:4-5

**TASK:**

- Either as one large group or small groups, have the participants consider character traits that they would ascribe to Jesus while He was on earth. How would you describe Him? What was He like?
- Read the following verses. As a group, discuss the character traits mentioned and list them on chart paper or a board.
  - o [Colossians 3:12-15](#)
  - o [1 John 4:8](#)
  - o [Galatians 5:22-23](#)
  - o [1 Corinthians 13:4-13](#)

**TEACH:**

- ❖ **Why Godly Character Matters:** It may not matter to most people what our true motives and intentions are as long as we are law-abiding and keep to ourselves. If we don't do anything 'too bad', we are acceptable in the world's sight. However, God wants us to become more like Christ. Why is this?
  - **Godly Character has Eternal Value:** Just as we work hard at learning a new language, acquiring a new skill, or training our body for a specific task, we must work at building our character. Our character has eternal value! We were made to serve God forever as 'royal priests'.
    - o [1 Peter 2:4-12](#)
    - o [Revelation 5:10](#)
  - **Godly Character Qualifies us for Godly Works:** When God wants someone to serve Him in a specific way, He calls the person whose heart is close to His (or a person "after God's own heart", like David in the Old Testament). Good character ensures the work will continue, that it will not be undone by sin or selfish decisions. Our character reveals whether we are willing to live our lives God's way or our own.
    - o [1 Samuel 16:7](#)
    - o [Acts 13:22](#)
  - **Godly Character Can't be Faked before God:** God holds each of us accountable not only for our actions, but for our inner life as well. We may easily fool people, but not God. Because our heart is laid bare before Him, nothing is hidden from His sight. Jesus frequently rebuked people who posed as holy, but whose hearts were far from God. Jesus pronounced woe on them; they expected a blessing!
    - o [Luke 12:2](#)
    - o [Matthew 23:25-26](#)
  - **Our Character Determines our Future Choices:** We become what we habitually do. We prove to be truthful by always being honest. We prove to be joyful not only when



times are good, but when we endure hardships with an attitude of thankfulness to God. Character reveals what we are likely to do in the future. Decisions, choices, thoughts and words flow from our heart. To be used by God, it is important that our character is like that of Christ.

- o [Matthew 12:35](#)
- o [Proverbs 4:23](#)

➤ **Our Character Reveals Who we Love:** We can either put God and His desires first in our life, or we can elevate ourselves. Selfishness is the root of many vices and character flaws. It reveals that we love ourselves more than God; this is disobedience and idolatry.

- o [Proverbs 11:20](#)
- o [John 14:15](#)

❖ **Virtues, Morality, and Character:** Worldviews disagree about the nature of humanity – whether it is mostly good with the capacity for evil, or truly evil with the capacity for good. Worldviews and religions even differ on the nature of virtue and morality, which is why it is important to know what we mean by those words, and where our standard for expression comes from.

- **Virtues** are expressions of individual good character traits, rightly carried out. They are neither deficient nor extreme, but precisely what we strive for in aligning our character with Christ's.
- o This is an historical idea traced back to ancient Greece. The virtue of courage, for instance, is not the opposite of fear. Rather it is in the center between cowardice on the deficient side and brashness on the extreme. Generosity is a virtue that is in between greed on one side and extravagance on the other. We will explore this further in future lessons.
- **Morality** is the system of beliefs we have about good and evil, right and wrong. For those of other worldviews there are differing ideas.
- o Some will say we simply must do no harm. Others will say that as long as what we do is consistent with our own values then we are okay. For the Christian we must understand that our standard for good and evil (or right and wrong) is not found within ourselves, but is found in the Bible. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ, who is the perfect expression of God's law, defines clearly what is right and what is wrong. Rather than justifying our own actions by standards we ourselves have developed, we must look to God for the truth (as revealed in His Word, the Bible).
- **Character** is a developed response to do what is right even at the expense of our own desires or comfort. It requires intentional action, deliberate choices, and discipline. When we are evaluating our actions, we must ask ourselves if what we are doing is *right* and *good*. We may use questions to evaluate our own motivations such as:



- o Is it done out of love for God first?
  - o Is it done out of love for others second?
  - o Is it done with self-control, or rooted in selfishness?
- ❖ **How Character is Built:** None of us is virtuous (or of perfect character) by nature. But we can become virtuous by making right choices. Think about learning a second language, using it exclusively until your mind thinks in that new language, and then preferring it over your native tongue. God is concerned with building good Christ-like character in each of us, and helps us in the process. We can work with God and accept His training as He builds our character in many ways:
- **Choices:** We make a hundred small decisions every day – how to respond to someone who is aggravating us, how we behave in traffic or at the market, how we think and how we speak. God gives us many opportunities to choose virtuous behaviour and an attitude in keeping with His character. This may take a period of time before we have any level of comfort in doing so. We learn to be virtuous by our choices.
    - o [Luke 16:10](#)
    - o [Joshua 24:15](#)
    - o [Proverbs 16:9](#)
  - **Challenges:** It is through our struggles and challenges that God hones our character. If we never faced adversity, our character would never be challenged! It is easier to be generous out of abundance than when our possessions are scarce. It is easier to be truthful and courageous when we are not threatened, than when we are in danger! But practising virtue in difficult circumstances is how our good character is proven.
    - o [James 1:2-4](#)
    - o [1 Corinthians 10:13](#)
    - o [Jeremiah 12:5](#)
  - **Community:** God uses other people to continually help us become more like Christ. Our friends can improve our character or hinder it – depending on the company we keep! While we must always look to Jesus alone as our perfect example, we can learn much from Christian men and women who have been following Jesus longer than we have. In addition, our character is often developed through people who test and try us, more than through our circumstances. 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!
    - o [1 John 4:19-21](#)
    - o [Philippians 2:3-4](#)
    - o [James 2:14-17](#)
- ❖ **Examples of Character Downfalls:** God's Word is more than a series of moral stories or cautionary tales. Every word in the Bible is also useful for training in godliness, including those stories that we might wonder why they are there ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)). The following Biblical



accounts demonstrate the outcome of poor character. It can be the downfall of a leader, and turn a life headed for greatness to despair.

- **Samson:** God called Samson to defeat the enemies of His chosen people, and Samson was given supernatural power in order to do the job. Samson was able to perform amazing feats for God, but he did not surrender his entire life to God as he was supposed to.
  - Samson was persuaded to reveal his secret by a woman who seduced him into breaking the Nazarite vow (Judges 13:7, Numbers 6:6). Women were a weakness for him, and because of this he did not reach his full potential.
  - Samson's weakness was his inability to put God's will before his own desires. Samson had plenty of courage, but lacked integrity. Samson was proud and did not recognize God's authority in his life.
  - God's angel revealed that Samson would 'begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines' (Judges 13:5), but during his lifetime they were not delivered. If Samson had not been weak of character, he may have been able to do much more for God!
  - In the end, Samson regretted his choices and eagerly desired to serve God with all his heart. For this, God gave him one last portion of strength (Judges 16:28-31). It seems this intention in his heart qualified him to be remembered as a man of faith (Hebrews 11:17, James 2:21).
  
- **Solomon:** Solomon was a man gifted by God with unsurpassed wisdom, but he lacked good character. Unlike his father, King David, who left a glorious legacy, Solomon's reputation was shameful. He was the second child of David and Bathsheba, and was loved by God from his youth. He married the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh as a political alliance, but could not control his desire for the love of many women. Solomon acquired 700 wives and 300 concubines, including foreigners whom God had forbidden Israelites to marry. These women lured Solomon from a devotion to his God into worship of false gods and idols.
  - Solomon was not faithful, self-controlled, or humble. He put his own desires before God and his followers. He was not acting in virtue, but rather indulged in excess. However, he did accomplish some good things during his reign, including building the temple, securing peace with neighbouring kingdoms, and writing the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and some of the Proverbs and Psalms (1 Kings 3:7-9, 1 Kings 11:1-6, Nehemiah 13:26).
  - In the end, he did not repent and return to God, but turned to the world and selfish pursuits. Solomon had wisdom, but not strong character in other ways.
  
- **Ananias and Sapphira:** Most of the accounts in the book of Acts describe the early Church getting along well with one another, and living changed lives because of their encounters with Jesus Christ. The Church shared what they had with one another, put the needs of their calling first, and honoured God with their choices and their actions. One notable exception is the case of the husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira.



- o In Acts 4:32-37 we see Barnabas donate money from the sale of land to the church. Ananias and Sapphira were part of this group of believers and wanted to be seen as giving all they had to the poor. But they tried to deceive the Church by giving a portion of their proceeds with the pretence that it was the whole amount. As punishment, both were struck dead in order to demonstrate the Apostles' authority and God's intolerance of lying, and to discourage hypocrisy and lack of integrity.
  - o Ananias and Sapphira did not love God and others before themselves, but rather put their own selfish desires first. They were not people of integrity, courage, compassion, faithfulness or humility, but rather made a choice to act selfishly (Acts 5:1-15). They were a part of a glorious time in the life of the Church, but g in the end could not even preserve their own life.
- **Commitment to the Heart of Christ:** Having good character is mandatory for every Christian – especially leaders. Developing Godly character is a commitment to the heart of Jesus Christ. It is putting God's ways and the best interests of others before our own..

## HOMEWORK

*You may wish to assign the attached homework to your participants. They will need to read the Bible and discover 25 different Godly character qualities. Any praiseworthy attitude or action in the Bible could be considered a Godly character trait. This will prepare them for thinking about their own character and the importance of virtue in our lives.*

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ When has a particular character flaw in your life prevented you from serving God? Do you know of someone who failed in ministry because they lacked Godly character? What were the circumstances? Did they learn from their fall?
- ❖ Some people think that we should just 'be ourselves', and if we try to be otherwise, we are dishonest. Do you agree? If we are not naturally virtuous, is it wrong to work at being virtuous until it becomes second nature?
- ❖ What are some life circumstances that can bring out the worst in people? How can we avoid this happening by the daily choices we make?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would pursue Godly character which is produced through endurance. Pray that they would love God with their whole hearts (not partially). Pray that they*



would put God first and be leaders full of virtue, useful in the hands of God to do great things among His people.

## GODLY CHARACTER TRAITS IN THE BIBLE

Any characteristic that is praised in the Bible could be considered a Godly character trait. Read the following verses and describe in your own words the character trait it displays. Some verses may list more than one trait – choose one you have not described before.

|    | Verses                  | Trait | Description |
|----|-------------------------|-------|-------------|
| 1  | Ephesians 4:2           |       |             |
| 2  | 1 Corinthians 9:25      |       |             |
| 3  | Romans 16:19            |       |             |
| 4  | 2 Corinthians 1:12      |       |             |
| 5  | Proverbs 12:22          |       |             |
| 6  | James 1:5               |       |             |
| 7  | Hebrews 10:36           |       |             |
| 8  | Mark 4:40               |       |             |
| 9  | Colossians 3:13         |       |             |
| 10 | Proverbs 14:21          |       |             |
| 11 | Galatians 5:23          |       |             |
| 12 | Hebrews 12:28           |       |             |
| 13 | Philippians 2:3         |       |             |
| 14 | Hebrews 13:5            |       |             |
| 15 | 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 |       |             |
| 16 | Ephesians 4:32          |       |             |
| 17 | Colossians 3:23         |       |             |
| 18 | Joshua 1:9              |       |             |
| 19 | Proverbs 10:9           |       |             |
| 20 | Proverbs 21:15          |       |             |
| 21 | Galatians 6:5           |       |             |
| 22 | John 13:34              |       |             |
| 23 | Proverbs 21:21          |       |             |
| 24 | 1 Peter 2: 17           |       |             |
| 25 | Matthew 5:9             |       |             |



Can you think of other Godly character traits that were not listed above?