

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 6: WISDOM AND SELF-CONTROL

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.

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CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 6: WISDOM AND SELF-CONTROL

PURPOSE

This lesson explores the Christian character traits of wisdom and self-control, how Jesus and others in the Bible exhibited them, and how we can develop them in our own lives.

LEADER'S NOTE

When we follow Jesus, we walk on a narrow path. This path is safe ground between two different fields which may look pleasant and attractive, but can lead us into snares and eventual ruin. If we rely on our own sense of what is right and wrong, we may be deceived. However, if we possess wisdom, we will turn to God and His Word, and the discernment given to us by the Holy Spirit will enable us to make wise choices. Every virtue requires self-control, which means we put God and other people before ourselves. You could begin this lesson by bringing a news article about a politician, athlete or celebrity who acted foolishly and without self-control. Prepare to discuss as a group how this person could have acted differently, and what impact their bad behaviour had on their career.

INTRODUCTION

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

- ❖ Do you know anyone who, in your opinion, is a very wise person? How did they become wise? In what ways is their wisdom demonstrated?
- ❖ What are some areas in which people have difficulty practising self-control? Do the temptations differ for men and women, for old and young people, for your community compared with another?
- ❖ If someone truly wanted to gain wisdom and discernment, is attending school enough? Can people have multiple degrees and still not be 'wise'? Why are some people wise and others not?
- ❖ Discuss a recent event which most people will be familiar with, where a celebrity, politician, athlete or other well-known individual committed an act that displayed lack of wisdom and self-control. What choice did he or she make? What was the result? How could they have acted differently?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **The Virtues of Wisdom and Self Control:** The virtues of making wise decisions and controlling one's own actions and thoughts are often attributed to the elderly. After a lifetime of experiences, they possess the knowledge and hindsight necessary. But these traits are not limited to the mature and elderly. Jesus displayed great wisdom and self-control in all of His actions and attitudes. God tells us that He will give us wisdom if we ask Him for it, so none of us is without excuse! When we believe God's truth (found in His Word) and act on it, we will have both wisdom and self-control. Without these, our lives will be in danger of foolish, painful errors that can lead to our ruin and shame.
- ❖ **Wisdom:** Someone who is wise knows what to do and say when others are not sure. They have a sense about what is right, and are able to discern the will of God. It sounds impossible, doesn't it? But wisdom is available to each one of us when we ask God for it.
 - **Wisdom is not Ignorance:** Attaining wisdom requires seeking out the truth of God – the source of wisdom. It takes time and effort. The person who chooses not to read the Bible (or who reads it quickly without study and meditation) remains in ignorance. They refuse to acknowledge God as the supreme source of truth. We are ignorant if we think that we can be wise apart from God.
 - **Wisdom is not foolishness:** Some people have heard the wisdom and truth of God but choose not to heed it. When we know the truth but ignore or deny it, we are fools. God offers His wisdom to us through His Word, the community of believers, and the Holy Spirit within us. When we base our decisions on false premises or our own emotional state, we act foolishly. We might even deny that there is such a thing as truth, or equate what is wise with what we desire in the moment.
 - **Wisdom is Holding True Beliefs:** The wise person pursues the knowledge of God's Word and its proper application for life. They demonstrate wisdom through attitude and action. They consider advice from others, listen patiently, and gather pertinent information before making a decision. They put God's will and the well-being of others before their own personal comfort or emotions. Read what God's Word tells us about wisdom:
 - o [James 1:5](#)
 - o [Ephesians 5:15-17](#)
 - o [Proverbs 10:23](#)
 - o [Proverbs 12:15](#)
 - o [Proverbs 14:16](#)
 - o [Ephesians 1:16-19](#)



ASK:

How do we gain wisdom?

Does wisdom mean having been educated? Do you know someone who is wise who does not have much education? Do you know anyone with advanced degrees who is not wise? What is the difference?

How can you display wisdom without being condescending or using your wisdom to make you look better than others? Why is it important to express wisdom with love?

When we use wisdom that comes from God to honour Him and help others, what will be the results? Will Godly wisdom be accepted by those who live by the foolishness of the world?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Wisdom in the Life of Jesus:** Jesus was known not just for the miracles He performed, but also for His teachings. He taught people how to understand the Scriptures, and He clarified their meaning. His life was characterised by speaking and living the truth. The person who displays this wisdom has a servant's heart, a healthy fear of God, and wants to help build God's Kingdom.
 - **Jesus Displayed Wisdom in His Teachings:** Even from His youth, Jesus displayed a deep understanding of God's truth. He knew the Scriptures, because He had studied and learned them when he was young. Jesus taught correct understanding of the Law of God, which required wisdom from God Himself. Jesus taught that hearing His truth and acting upon it is like building one's house upon the rock. They will be safe and secure when tough times come (Luke 2:46-50, Matthew 5:21-22, Matthew 7:24).
 - **Jesus Displayed Wisdom in His Temptations:** Before Jesus' ministry began, He was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. Satan used the very Words of God to tempt Him – but because Jesus had wisdom from God, He discerned that Satan was twisting the truth. Jesus was not so weak as to be fooled by trickery of words, or wrong application of Scripture. Jesus corrected falsehoods with the truth, and in so doing, demonstrated that He was ready to teach with authority and to lead others in the path of wisdom (Matthew 4:1-11).
 - **Jesus Displayed Wisdom in His Relationships:** Jesus displayed wisdom in His understanding of people and their true motives. He was able to discern between their lies and the truth – something which the Holy Spirit is able to help us with also. Jesus told His disciples that He is the Truth. He used His wisdom to serve others (John 2:24, Luke 10:38-42, John 14:6, John 4:29).
- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Wisdom:** Many individuals in the Bible heard the truth of God. Sometimes this came through the law, the prophets, or the teachings of Jesus. When they acted on God's truth, they grew in wisdom. Wisdom for these men and women required studying the Word and carefully applying it to their situation.
 - **Solomon, Man of Wisdom:** One can hardly discuss wisdom in the Bible without mentioning King Solomon. He asked that God would give him a wise and discerning



mind, and that he would be able to distinguish good from evil. God granted him his request and said that no one wiser ever came before him, nor would come after him. Solomon was able to do great things for his people because of his wisdom. Sadly, while Solomon knew what was good and wise, he did not always act upon it. His heart was divided, and he did not seek the righteousness of God. It might puzzle us as to how he could fall so far from God! Solomon became 'foolish' – that is, he knew the truth but did not act on it. God commanded him to not take any foreign wives nor worship any false gods, but Solomon disobeyed anyway. One of Solomon's own proverbs warns against failing to heed instruction! Wisdom ignored is foolishness, and can lead to our downfall (1 Kings 3:9-12, 1 Kings 3:28, 1 Kings 10:1-5, 23-25, 1 Kings 11:1-10, Proverbs 19:27).

- **Magi, Men of Wisdom:** There are a group of men in the Bible referred to solely by the characteristic of their wisdom – the wise men who appeared at Jesus' nativity. These men lived in the 'east', and some Bible scholars believe they were Jews left over from the Babylonian captivity. Their great wisdom was evident in their interactions with people as well as their knowledge of God's Word. They had also studied the stars to look for signs of the coming of the Messiah. With all this wisdom, they discerned when Jesus was to be born and travelled to find him. The wise men were not fooled by Herod, and heeded God's warning to not return and tell him where the young Jesus was. They placed a high importance on understanding and obeying God's Word (Matthew 2:1-12).
- ❖ **Self-Control:** This virtue is necessary for the application of many other virtues. When we are self-controlled, we act in ways consistent with our values and beliefs, rather than our emotions and physical desires. Self-control helps us do what we know is right. It is the action that is related to wisdom. Self-control doesn't only keep us from destructive vices, but also helps us to moderate things like food and drink, sex, emotional impulses, and angry words. It motivates us to pursue righteousness and the things that build us up, not the things that destroy us.
 - **Self-Control is Not Indecisiveness:** Even 'inaction' is a choice, and it may be an unwise one. While self-restraint and personal disciplines are good, we must not restrain ourselves when God demands a particular action. Not doing what we ought to is still sin, and unwise! Self-control helps us take correct action, not just avoid a wrong one.
 - **Self-Control is Not Impulsiveness:** When we act on impulse, we allow fleeing emotions and instinct to direct our course rather than careful reason and consideration. Self-Control is not impulsive. It may act quickly, but always purposefully. While emotions are good and healthy, they must be combined with reason to make right decisions.
 - **Self-Control is Not Legalism:** Simply following a set of man-made rules is not the same as having self-control. Laws may keep us from committing sins outwardly, but they cannot make our hearts right before God. We need God's Spirit to change us inside, not more laws which can only affect our outward behaviour.



- **Self-Control is Resisting our Own Impulses to Choose an Unwise Direction:** Often our impulses spring from our carnal, sinful nature. We need wisdom to know right from wrong, and self-discipline to choose the right. Through God's Holy Spirit we have the power to control ourselves. Consider the following verses about self-control:
 - o Proverbs 25:28
 - o 2 Peter 1:5-7
 - o 1 Corinthians 9:27
 - o 2 Timothy 1:7
 - o Proverbs 16:32
 - o Titus 2:11-14

ASK:

Why do our faith, virtue and knowledge require us to use self-control?

What is the difference between having true self-control, and simply following laws and regulations? Will creating a list of personal rules help you be more self-controlled? What is the limitation of rules and regulations?

When are you most easily tempted (least in control of yourself)? For some people, it is when they are hungry, tired, thirsty, lonely, bored or afraid.

What is an area of your life where you find it difficult to have self-control? What is an area of your life where it is easier for you to be self-controlled? (Consider: spending money, sexual activity, eating, care of your body, managing anger, careful words, gossip, lying, dishonest gain, etc.)

- ❖ **Self-Control in the Life of Jesus:** We might think that Jesus didn't struggle with self-control because He is perfect, and therefore never tempted to sin. But the Bible actually teaches that Jesus was tempted in all the ways we are tempted, and that He always obeyed the will of God the Father, even when it was painful, difficult and humiliating.
 - **Jesus Was Tempted but did not Lose Control:** Though Jesus lived in a very different time and place than we do, He had similar temptations to ours. He may have had desires for a family that could not be realized because of the ministry He was given to carry out. God's Word tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way, but remained without sin! It is most difficult to continually be tempted and never give in, and also to be tempted to the point of shedding blood or dying (Hebrews 4:15).
 - **Jesus Restrained His Power when Necessary:** Jesus had all the power and authority in the world at His disposal. He stopped storms, brought the dead back to life, and healed the sick. Yet He did not lash out and destroy those who stood against Him, mocked Him or denied His Father. Imagine if you had all that power and ability and someone stood in your way! How much self-control would it take to restrain you? (Philippians 2:1-11, Matthew 28:18).
 - **Jesus Had the Ability to Obey:** Jesus didn't only refrain from sin and evil, He had the self-control to continually obey His Father. Even though He was busy and in demand, He always made time to pray and spend time alone with the Father and seek His will. He never wanted any glory for Himself, but always gave glory to His Father (Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 10:7).



- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Self-Control:** Many men and women in the Bible demonstrated remarkable self-control. They believed that their own impulses and emotions were not to be trusted. With self-control, they faced situations that are hard for us to imagine, and stood for what they believed was right and honouring to God.
 - **Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego:** These four young men showed great self-control in a variety of unusual and dangerous situations. When the people of God were exiled to Babylon, these four were taken into the palace to be formally educated and raised as Babylonians. They believed the food eaten at the king's table was unclean, and with great self-control chose to eat only vegetables. Later, for not worshipping the king's new idol, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a furnace. God miraculously saved them. Despite the laws of the land, Daniel continued to pray to His God, for which he was thrown into a lion's den as punishment. However, God miraculously rescued him and spared his life (Daniel 1:8-21, Daniel 2:46-49, Daniel 3:6-16, 25, Daniel 6:10, 16,22).
 - **Joseph:** As a young man, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was then taken to Egypt and sold to a man named Potiphar. Instead of sulking about his lot in life, he diligently served his new master and remained faithful to God. Potiphar saw his hard work and promoted him to steward over his household. Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph, and she tempted him to commit adultery. However, Joseph resisted her and fled from the temptation, but it cost him his job and landed him in prison. Self-control helped Joseph to remain true to God. Even though it led him on a difficult path, he had the assurance that God was always with him (Genesis 39:4-21).
- ❖ **Evaluate your own Wisdom and Self-Control:** When we are wise and self-controlled, temptation will not be able to overtake us. The Christian who possesses wisdom and self-control will live an exemplary life. Through the power of God's Word to change us, and the ability of the Spirit of God to sustain us, we can develop these virtues.
 - Consider the difficulties you might have in practising these virtues. Our actions are a direct result of our beliefs. Are your beliefs about what is true based on the Word of God? Consider these verses:
 - o Proverbs 3:13-18
 - o John 17:17
 - o John 8:32
 - o 1 Corinthians 13:4-6
 - Consider the following attitudes and behaviours that represent foolishness or impulsiveness. Are any of these evident in your life? Are you making choices based on the expectations of the world or your own emotions, instead of God's truth? Are you choosing to overlook what God wants from you because it is not convenient?
 - o Looking to other people to define your worth
 - o Overeating, drinking too much, overworking, excesses of any kind
 - o Spending money, acquiring possessions to feel better about yourself
 - o Engaging in immoral sexual activity, or viewing pornography



- o Making choices to please co-workers or family members rather than God
- o Making excuses that you are too busy to serve God
- o Allowing gossip, dirty talk, complaining or critical speech come from your mouth
- o Allowing unrepentant sin to remain in your life
- o Being indecisive in your actions so that you miss out on good opportunities
- o Relying on legalistic rules and regulations to keep you from sin rather than on the Holy Spirit within you, and the truth of God's Word
- o Frequently starting things without finishing them
- o Neglecting the study of God's Word

TASK:

Christian character is formed through our choices within the context of community. In order to practise making choices to be wise and self-controlled, divide your participants into small groups of 3-6. Have each group discuss each of the scenarios that follow this lesson. Discuss the questions provided.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ *Why must we be careful of making decisions based on our emotions?*
- ❖ *What difficulties will a person without self-control or wisdom face?*
- ❖ *How does a person exercise self-control in a world where temptations are so accessible? Can we ever be free of external temptations?*
- ❖ *What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?*
- ❖ *How does God help us have wisdom and self-control?*

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would seek wisdom from God's Word. Pray that they would love the truth and not accept any counterfeit substitute. Pray that the truth of God's Word would change their hearts and their minds until they become more self-controlled, steadfast, single-minded people. Pray that any foolish thoughts and actions will be revealed to them, and that they would fully surrender to God.



CHOOSING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

- WISDOM AND SELF CONTROL -

In small groups, consider the scenarios below. For each situation consider these questions:

- What would your natural response to this situation be?
- How would someone who is wise and self-controlled respond to this situation?
- What might the consequences be of demonstrating Christ-like character in this situation?

You are responsible to hire people at a church who work on maintenance and security. Some of your relatives are on the payroll, and do not always come to work. You believe that this is dishonest gain on their part; however, they are family and need the money so you do not wish to terminate their jobs.

There is an advertisement you pass by on your way to work of a woman in a suggestive pose, wearing little clothing. It causes impure thoughts in your mind and you struggle with lust due to this image, but to take a different route to work would be much longer.

You struggle to find enough time in the day to read the Bible and really study it. It has been a while since you have had quality time alone with God, even though you know that is something that He desires from you.

You have been advised by your doctor to avoid a certain food because it is causing many health problems for you. You know it is wise to heed the advice of your doctor, but you love this food and it will be hard to avoid the temptation.

You have a chore that you are not looking forward to doing. You have put it off a long time now, and every time you know you should get to it, something else more enjoyable comes to mind. This chore is important to members of your family, and you are the only one who can do it.