



CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

"Make Me Like Joe"

January 8, 2022

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Matthew 5:17 (NIV) • "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

John 5:36-40 (NIV) • "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

Matthew 7:12 (NIV) • "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22:39, 40 (NIV) • "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Romans 13:9, 10 (NIV) • "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You

shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

James 2:8-11 (NIV) • "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' also said, 'You shall not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker."

Galatians 5:22, 23 (NIV) • "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."

Galatians 5:13-15 (NIV) • "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

Acts 4:13 (NIV) • "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished

and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

“An upright character is of greater worth than the gold of Ophir. Without it none can rise to an honorable eminence. But character is not inherited. It cannot be bought. Moral excellence and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident. The most precious gifts are of no value unless they are improved. The formation of a noble character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 223).

(See additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “CHRISTIAN CHARACTER”

Some say that constructing a life of Christian character is about making good choices. Good choices will ultimately fall short until we realize that beyond **precept** (rules and laws) and **principle** (guiding truths for all times, places, and people) is the **person** (character qualities) of God. By our choice to obey His precepts we begin to be restored to His likeness, the way He created us. It is not uncommon in the early stages of life to teach children “Obey and don’t ask why,” but as children grow they need to understand that there is usually a principle behind “Because I said so!” It is also true with God’s laws. “Because God said so!” may be all we need, but God has given us the principles behind His laws to help us see who He is and to help us live better and happier lives. In **Deuteronomy 6:1-9** God equips Israel with a way to keep each generation engaged fully in loving service to God. But still, God promised that our children would ask, “Why?” (**Deuteronomy 6:20, 21**). The answer to the question is a personal testimony about a deep relationship with a personal God. There is a God whose qualities inspire timeless truths (and precepts) to live by. This lesson is focused on helping the students to see the importance of developing

godly characters based on the person of God as we find Him portrayed in the Bible and through the life of Christ.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “CHRISTIAN CHARACTER”

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Discover the meaning of the concept of character.
2. Consider the trends of character development through the principles in the Bible.
3. Look at character development as not only “obeying the rules” but as letting God transform them into His image (personhood).

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) large jar, bowl, or bucket, large rocks, pebbles, and dirt; (Activity B) food coloring or dirt, juice, glass, pitcher of water, baking pan or shallow tub large enough to hold the pitcher of water and yet shallow enough to see a glass inside, towel.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons, paper, pens/pencils.

Applying • Paper, pens/pencils, whiteboard or chalkboard.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE’VE BEEN

Allow 10 minutes at the beginning of class for students to:

1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for Adventist *Mission* for youth and adults at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • You need a large jar, bowl, or bucket, large rocks, pebbles, and dirt. You will be teaching the students the concept of “first things first” through a demonstration of trying to fit everything into the container.

Get set • You will need to practice this beforehand to make sure you have the proper amounts. While practicing, start with the rocks, then the pebbles, then the dirt.

Go • Say: I’m going to try to fit these items into the jar. The dirt, pebbles, and rocks all represent something. After pouring all of the dirt into the jar, filling the jar about one-third full, put the pebbles in. The pebbles should fill the jar to two-thirds full. **Say:** Now we will add the rocks. Obviously, the rocks will not fit.

Ask the students for suggestions on a better way to do it. There are two ways: 1. Start with the rocks, then add the pebbles, then add the dirt slowly, allowing the dirt to work its way throughout the crevices made by the larger items (shaking is allowed). 2. Start with a rock, then a pebble, then some dirt, and continue the pattern until it is filled.

Say: The rocks represent the person of God—the eternal qualities that make Him who He is. The pebbles represent the principles—timeless truths that apply in all situations over time. The dirt represents the precepts—the rules, laws, and regulations that convey specific directions on what to do.

If you start with the rules first, you sometimes never see beyond them to God’s character or person. It becomes very difficult to see the face of a personal God. Some people give up without even realizing that He wants to transform them into His image. This is why we begin with God, His person, His personality, His character.

Debriefing • Ask: What could this illustration teach? (There is a right way and wrong way to do this! Some things must go first if it is going to work!) **Say:** It’s the same with rules for developing character. They begin with a person (God). Since God is true, honesty becomes a way of life for me. If I apply that to any area of my life, the rules for character development aren’t restrictive, but simply tangible reminders of someone I want to be like.

Ask: When have you experienced the frustration of trying to make everything fit? What character qualities would you say are the biggest, most important traits to possess? How did Jesus deal with the problem of seeing “just the rules” for developing a good character? How do the following passages describe the relationship between the precepts, principles, and person of God? Have students find and read Matthew 7:12; Matthew 22:39, 40; Romans 13:9, 10.

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • You will need food coloring or dirt, a juice glass, a pitcher of water, a baking pan or shallow tub large enough to hold the pitcher of water and yet shallow enough to see a glass inside, and a towel (just in case). The object is

to demonstrate the nature of character development. It is not the extraction of the “bad things” but the inflow of good things. The only way to develop a godly character is to increase the inflow of God in your mind through Bible study and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Get set • Fill a small clear glass three-quarters full of water from a full pitcher. Add a drop of red food coloring or a handful of dirt and stir it up. The object is to make the water as clear as possible without emptying the glass.

Go • Say: How can you get the color out of the water without emptying the cup? (You can’t spoon it out. You can’t tip it over. They might say “Boil it” or “Put iodine tablets in it,” but none of us have a stove or iodine tablets with us, and even boiling it would not get rid of the color.)

Say: The only way I know how to purify the water in the glass is to pour more good water into it. Pour gradually at first so the glass overflows and some of the color is removed.

Did that help a little? Continue to pour more water into the glass, causing the glass to flood over more, and then stop and look at the color. Continue to pour the pitcher of water in a way that flushes the colored water out of the glass, replacing it with clear water. While all the red (dirt) may not be removed, the water should be clear enough to notice the difference.

Debriefing • Ask: What are some lessons about people you can draw from this experiment? How is the water and color (dirt) compared to the human struggle to grow to be like God? How does the amount of water being poured in affect the outcome? What would you say the water, the glass, the dirt, the pitcher, and the pouring represent?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

In 1985 product developers at Matsushita Electric Company were trying to develop a home

bread-making machine. “But they were having trouble getting the machine to knead dough correctly. Despite their efforts, the crust of the bread came out overcooked while the inside was hardly done at all. Employees exhaustively analyzed the problem. They even compared X-rays of dough kneaded by the machine and dough kneaded by professional bakers. But they were unable to obtain any meaningful data.

“Finally, software developer Ikuko Tanaka proposed a creative solution. The Osaka International Hotel had a reputation for making the best bread in Osaka. Why not use it as a model? Tanaka trained with the hotel’s head baker to study his kneading technique. She observed that the baker had a distinctive way of stretching the dough. To imitate that, the engineers added special ribs inside the machine and developed a unique ‘twist dough’ method. In its first year on the market, their bread-making machine set a record for sales of a new kitchen appliance.”

Some things can’t be learned in a lab or with an X-ray machine. Some things one can only learn by spending time with another human being.—From: Ikujiro Nonaka, “The Knowledge-Creating Company,” in *Harvard Business Review on Knowledge Management* (Harvard Business Review Press, 1998), pp. 26, 27.

Say: In this story it was only by observing the one who really knew how to make bread that others could come near to duplicating it with their machines. We don’t really create Christian character unless we spend time with the real “baker.”

Ask: What are some characteristics that make up the “secret” of a true kingdom citizen, an authentic one of God’s children? (Kindness, fairness, joy, honesty, courage)

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Say: In life, the qualities we exhibit are

marks of one kingdom or another. Ancient tribes could be distinguished immediately by unique markings on the face and body. In the same way, citizens of God's kingdom have marks or qualities which show in their "character." As we seek to develop character qualities, we need to look at the source of those qualities. Not just the rules of the kingdom, but the King Himself.

Ask: When people witnessed the disciples' behavior after the Resurrection, what did they say about them? Let's find and read the answer in Acts 4:13. (The people could tell the disciples had been with Jesus.) Jesus taught that the law was an outgrowth of what greater truth? We'll find the answer in these verses: Matthew 7:12; Matthew 22:39, 40; Romans 13:9, 10; 1 John 4:7-9. (Jesus taught that the law is an outgrowth of a greater truth, called "love." And ultimately "God is love.")

Say: One Christian evangelist delineated this approach to truth as seeing the *precept*, *principle*, and *person*. Most of us can see the *precepts*—the rules, such as "Don't lie." **Ask:** What is the principle behind this precept? (The principle has to do with honesty, which is a guide for any place, time, or person.) **Where does the notion of honesty come from?** (Honesty is a quality that comes from the very person of God.) **Why should I be honest?** (Because God is truth, and through His Spirit He is transforming me into His image, renewing my mind [Romans 12:2].)

Ask: What are some rules (*precepts*) that seem clear in Scripture? (Ten Commandments. Don't kill. Don't lie. Our body is the temple of God, so we are commanded to take care of it.) Can you name the *principle* that each rule is based on? ("Don't lie" is based on the principle of truth or honesty, etc.) **How do you see this in the very person of God?** (God is truth. He doesn't deceive or lie.)

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to tell or read the story from the Sabbath section of the lesson.

Ask: Why do you think we can learn from the lives of others? (We can identify with people. We can see consequences.) **Who is a good example of this in your life? Whose life has made having a good character meaningful and positive for you by their example?** If you have not already discussed the concepts of **precept**, **principle**, and **person** outlined above, do so now.

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Distribute the student lessons, paper, and pens or pencils. **Ask:** If you could hardwire into a person three character qualities that would impact the world for the better, what qualities would you implant? Why? Use the references in the Monday and Wednesday sections of your lesson as a starting point.

Say: On the piece of paper, make a list of the character qualities that grow out of Scripture that you think the world needs right now. Beside each quality, write the name of a Bible character who eventually portrayed that quality. Have students share their lists with the rest of the class.

Ask: What do you think is one of the most difficult character qualities to develop? Why? Consider the negative character traits through which the enemy causes the most damage.

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY, Part 1

Get ready • First, discuss with your students the differences between character, personality,

and reputation. Use some examples from among them to distinguish the differences; *character*—the qualities that distinguish and mark your nature; *personality*—the style or way you act and interact to life and other people; *reputation*—what people perceive or think about you. Distribute paper and pens or pencils.

Get set • Everyone needs to know a little about everyone else. So if there are people who are new, or visitors, you might have them introduce themselves to the group and share a little about who they are, what they like to do, what they don't like to do, and so on. This activity can be done in pairs or in groups. However, if it seems as if grouping or pairs might be too threatening for your class, bring in an adult guest the class knows and use the same questions. Write the three questions on a whiteboard or chalkboard.

Go • Have students write positive descriptions of the character, personality, and reputation of their partner, the person to their right in their group, or the adult guest, whichever applies.

1. What are some *character* qualities that you see in this person?
2. How would you describe their *personality*? What words would you use?
3. What are some positive things you think others would say (*reputation*) about this person and the way they live?

Debriefing • Ask: Of the three, which does a person have the most control over? In other words, which can you develop and what can you change? (*Character* is who you really are, something that you and the Holy Spirit can work on and develop. *Personality* [the visible aspect of your character and how it impresses others] is more or less who you are. Obviously it will change some over time as your character changes. You can do things to have a good *reputation* or a bad one, but it is mostly dependent on what other people see and think, and you have only a certain amount of control over that.)

B. APPLICATION ACTIVITY, Part 2

Say: Now let's pretend that God is in this chair, and let's ask the same questions about Him. Refer to the questions on the board. Again in pairs, groups, or all together, have students answer them. Challenge them to be honest with the reputation section—What do others really say about God? What kind of reputation does He have among various groups of people? They can refer to the Monday and Wednesday sections of their student lessons as well as any other passages they might think of. Share the results with the class.

Debriefing • Ask: Why do you think it is good to consider the particulars of our character? (Sometimes we just go through life and don't notice if we are getting off track or not.) What passage in today's lesson speaks to your life the most right now? Why? If you were to develop one character quality this week, which one would you strive for? Why? How does knowing the Person behind the precept (rule) help you make better choices about life? (Sometimes the right choice gets fuzzy, and just a rule you memorize doesn't necessarily answer the "Why?" question. Knowing the Person gives you an idea of what the right choice looks like in person.)

C. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the most difficult part of developing a Godlike character?
2. Agree or disagree and tell why:
"Developing a Christlike character is more difficult today than in other generations before you."
3. In which of the ten commandments can you clearly see the **precept, principle,** and **person** of God? Which commandments are more difficult? Can you see the face of God in the rules you live with? Why or why not?
4. What passages from the Bible really

5. How does the process of being “filled” (like the water exercise) relate to the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22, 23**?
6. Where does an inner sense of “justice” come from when you witness an innocent person being mistreated? Is this just a “human thing” that exists in society naturally?
7. What are some obvious character qualities that most cultures (Christian or non-Christian) would agree on? What are some unique qualities you think Christians should have? Why?
8. Is it more difficult to be who you are when no one is looking or someone you are not when everyone is looking? (Think of Ananias and Sapphira, and Peter with the Gentiles.)
9. The whole idea of “what goes in will come out” is often repeated to young people. To what degree do you think this principle is true? Can you give an example? Are there any exceptions? Explain.
10. A doctor once said, “Ninety percent of all depressions are caused by holding significant grudges toward God, self, and/or others.” What character quality

would release “90 percent” of people from their depression?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

It seems to be a common belief that “rules change, times change, people change.” But consider the human heroes of history who have made the biggest impact in our world. What character qualities did they possess? Honesty, grace, justice, compassion, courage, and purity are all timeless principles based upon the person of God. Trace every good law back as far as you can, and you will discover that rules such as “Be nice” or “Thou shalt not murder” find their source in the person of God, who has made human life sacred. Why? God is the very source of life. It is no wonder that when people would question Jesus about the rules of “being good,” He would draw their attention to timeless portraits of His Father in heaven.



STUDENT LESSON

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

"Make Me Like Joe"

January 8, 2022

Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22, 23, NKJV).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 22, Christian Behavior:** "We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty."
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 91-93

"MAKE ME LIKE JOE"

Story 1. Prior to his conversion, Joe had gained the reputation of being a dirty wino for whom there was no hope, only a miserable existence in the ghetto. But following his conversion to a new life with God, everything changed. Joe became the most caring person those at the mission had ever known. Joe spent his days and nights hanging out at the mission doing whatever needed to be done. There was never any task that was too lowly for Joe to take on. There

was never anything that he was asked to do that he considered beneath him. Whether it was cleaning up the vomit left by some violently sick alcoholic or scrubbing the toilets after careless men left the bathroom filthy, Joe did what was asked with a smile on his face and with a seeming gratitude for the chance to help.

One evening when the director of the mission was delivering his evening evangelistic message to the usual crowd, there was one man who looked up, came down the aisle to the altar, and knelt to pray, crying out for God to help him to change. The repentant drunk kept shouting, "O God, make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!"

The director of the mission leaned over and said to the man, "Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like Jesus!'"

The man looked up to the director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, "Is He like Joe?"—Wayne Rice, *More Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 114, 115.

Story 2. At a national spelling contest in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., an incident occurred that made me wonder. In the fourth round of the contest Rosalie Elliot, then an 11-year-old from South Carolina, was asked to spell *avowal*. In her soft Southern accent she spelled it. But did the seventh grader use an *a* or an *e* as the next-to-the-last letter? The judges couldn't decide. For several minutes they listened to tape recording playbacks, but the critical letter was accent-blurred. Chief judge John Lloyd

finally put the question to the only person who knew the answer, “Was the letter an *a* or was it an *e*?” he asked Rosalie. Surrounded by whispering young spellers, she knew by now the correct spelling of the word. Without hesitating, she replied that she had misspelled it. She walked from the stage.

The entire audience stood and applauded, including half a hundred newspaper reporters, one of whom was heard to remark that Judge Lloyd had put quite a burden on an 11-year-old.

—James S. Hewitt, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), pp. 62, 63.

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read John 1:47.
- » While shopping in a store, you notice a young boy acting suspiciously. Standing in the toy section, he hides an item in his pocket, thinking no one has seen him. What would you do? You could do nothing and let the kid learn his lesson the hard way. You might say something to him. If so, what would you say?

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

- » Read Philippians 4:8; 1 John 2:6; Philippians 2:4.
- » Our purpose in life isn’t to satisfy our own desires. We should find fulfillment in helping others learn of Jesus. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like Him. And the more we become like Him, the more others will see Him in us.
- » In what ways do you reflect God and His love to those around you?

- » Use the word chart to write out the text that tells us how we should treat others. To find the first word, find the word in the chart that correlates to E7. The second word will correlate to A5. Each word will follow the same pattern. Not all words are used.

“E7 A5 D2 F4, C2, B1 E3 C7 D4 B3, B6 D2 D6 A2 F3 A3 F7 A6, F5, C3 F1 B3, D8 E5 A2 C8 A1. E1 B4 D1 D3 E6 F1 F6 B7, E2 D3 C4 D7 E3 C6 D4 A2 B2, B6 D2 B5 F8 E4 E5 B6 D5 E1 C3 E1 A4 A8 D4 B3” (C5 C1 A7, F2).

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	service	by	12:	not	and	to
2	your	mind	brethren	you	but	NKJV
3	a	God	acceptable	be	the	bodies
4	perfect	do	transformed	of	what	therefore
5	beseech	may	Romans	good	is	holy
6	sacrifice	that	renewing	present	conformed	this
7	1, 2	world	mercies	by	I	living
8	will	said	reasonable	which	love	prove

Tuesday REFLECTING

- » Read Ephesians 5:1, NKJV.
- » Young people are clearly heard by the Savior when they ask, “What’s the point of all this?” The Savior smiles and says, “I knew you were going to ask that! I made you in such a way that you would ask that question!” (Read **Deuteronomy 6:20**.) God’s goal has never been for us to mindlessly obey a bunch of rules. God wants us to know Him, and to be changed into His image by getting a look at Him *through* His rules. God has given us some windows into His living room to see what He is like. So the question “What’s the point?” should be “Who’s the

» In every culture there are values—written or unstated rules that people live by. Also in every culture there are heroes, people who are the very picture of what that culture believes to be good, right, and true. Christ is our greatest hero, who banishes the ridiculous claim that Christianity is all about rules. Christians are all about a Person. The marks of that Person (love, kindness, goodness, honesty, peace, courage, etc.) make the world a better place.

God wants to reveal Himself to you through His Word. He isn't interested in your seeing "just" the rules. Even knowing why we should be honest is not enough for God. He wants you to discover Him! He is not some mystical cloud or a ghostlike force. He is our loving Father. He knows we will be better off becoming more like Him. He doesn't want us to become like others who are only pre-occupied with their own pursuits. What an honor to be a child of God. What a joy it is to follow in His footsteps. What a day it will be to see Him face to face and recognize Him because He is everything you have chosen to become.

Friday APPLYING

- » Read Titus 2:11, 12.

- » Choose one character quality you feel God is calling you to work on. Who do you know today that demonstrates that quality? How? Who in the Bible demonstrates that quality? How? How do you see that quality in the person of God? Reflect on other rules you live by and trace them back to the person of God, or, start with what you love about God and work your way toward what He says to do.
- » Choose a kingdom citizen/person you know that you want to be like. In the first circle, write their name and what you love most about them (**person**). In the second circle, write a general principle of life they live by (**principle**). In the third circle, write out a law that you think they would write about that principle if they were asked to write a law (**precept**).

