

Lesson
#4

Growing in Character

Purpose

To encourage participants to consider the ways their daily choices affect whether they reach their dreams

Key Concepts

Character is developed over time as we make difficult decisions.

In time our true character becomes apparent.

The Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

Choosing friends of good character and talking with adults of good character when you have difficult decisions to make will help you make the right choices.

Character Connection

Perseverance: Continuing on a course of action in the face of difficulties and obstacles

Overview

Participants will:

- ◆ Identify which of the four character traits are most important for the development of good character.
- ◆ Make comparisons between growing healthy plants and growing character.
- ◆ Listen to a story about a merchant and a builder illustrating the importance of character.
- ◆ Interview the characters in the story through an activity called "The Hot Seat Interview."
- ◆ Use events in the story to draw conclusions about the importance of character.

Road Map

- ◆ Opening (3 minutes)
- ◆ Group Activity: Snack Time (10 minutes)
- ◆ Discussion Topic: Character and Behavior—The Flower Pot Illustration (20 minutes)
- ◆ Story: The Merchant and the Builder (5 minutes)
- ◆ Group Activity: Hot Seat Interview (20 minutes)
- ◆ Summary and Closing (2 minutes)

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Materials

Exercise book or Life Connections Worksheet #4; pens or pencils

Snack Time: A variety of seeds of common food items (such as apple seeds or beans); small bags or envelopes (one per participant) to hold a few seeds; one basket or other container large enough to hold all the individual bags; chalkboard and chalk or flip chart paper and marker

Flower Pot: Flowering plant; watering can (tin can, glass); fertilizer; artificial flower; string

Hot Seat Interview: Chair for the "hot seat"

Preparation

Snack Time: Fill each small bag with a few seeds or beans (one type per bag) and label bags with the name or a picture of the item inside. Place all the small bags in the basket.

Flower Pot: Display the plant, watering can, and fertilizer so they are visible to the class. If a potted plant is not available, find a real one growing outside near the meeting place and plan to take the class outside for the illustration.

Helpful Hints

There are many different points that can be drawn from the activities in this lesson. We suggest spending only a few minutes on the Snack Time Activity and more time on the other two. You may want to refer back to these activities at a later time to draw out or emphasize additional points.

"What is hanging up cannot be reached sitting down."
-Ethiopian proverb

The Lesson

Opening (3 minutes)

Ask the group to look at the list of character traits and choose which trait is the most important for developing good character. Give them a few minutes to debate their answers and then offer perseverance as the answer. Because it is difficult and takes time to develop character, one must persevere toward that goal.

Remind the class of the definition of **perseverance** - *continuing on a course of action in the face of difficulties and obstacles*. There are many examples of the need for perseverance in order to succeed. An athlete who has had an injury and needs to rebuild strength and function in that area will need to persevere through daily physical therapy exercises; a

poor communicator will need to persevere in their efforts to improve communication skills in order to improve his or her relationships; and a student must persevere by consistently studying if they are to get a chance to go to the university. Developing character or achieving one's dreams will require perseverance—a commitment to work hard in the face of any challenges that come.

"T

herfore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Colossians 3:12

Group Activity: Snack Time (10 minutes)

This activity will help participants understand that everyone has the potential to develop good character.

1. Inform participants that you've brought a snack for them to eat, then pass the basket around and have each person take one of the "snack" bags (or hold up a few sample packets instead of passing the basket around).
2. Ask the class if they would like to eat what they have chosen. When they answer "No," ask them, "Why not?"
3. Talk about what would be necessary to turn each item into something edible. Ask participants to name the steps and materials necessary for the growth of a plant (good soil, water, sunlight, time, weeding). Record this list on the chalkboard.
4. Explain that the various food items contribute to our overall physical health by supplying nutrients that the body needs to be healthy.

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5. Ask participants to think of each type of seed as a positive character trait in their lives (such as respect or honesty). Each trait is one element of a healthy life, and true health requires a balance of character traits. Point out that each participant has the capacity to develop positive character, but those traits must be nurtured.

Discussion Topic: Character and Behavior—The Flower Pot Illustration (20 minutes)

Begin by reviewing some of the concepts from the previous lessons. Review the poster listing the 15 character traits and explain what it means to be a person of character. Remind the class that we are not born with character—character must be developed over time. Our character is our true self, and it is revealed by what we do when no one is looking.

Use the following illustration to lead your class in a discussion about character and behavior.



1. Show the class your potted plant.
2. Begin the discussion of character by asking some of these Real Flower Questions:

Real Flower Questions

- ◆ **What kind of plant is this? How do you know?** (By its shape, color, texture, fragrance, etc.)
- ◆ **What are the characteristics of this plant?** (Where it can be found, what it smells like, the care it requires, how often it flowers, etc.)
- ◆ **How would you define character?** (Consistently choosing to do what is right.)
- ◆ **What part of this plant represents character, and why?** (The roots. Out of the roots grow the stem, branches, leaves, and flowers. The roots are the unseen support of the plant; they ground it, holding it firmly in the soil. From the roots the plant obtains nutrients and moisture from the soil that enable it to grow and blossom.)
- ◆ **What is the relationship of character to behavior?** (Our character determines our behavior.)
- ◆ **What part of this plant represents behavior, and why?** (The flowers. The roots determine the health of the plant and how well it flowers.)
- ◆ **What is the relationship of roots to the flower of this plant?** (The roots provide the nutrients and moisture so the flower can blossom.)
- ◆ **How do you cultivate the growth of this healthy plant?** (Care for the soil. Feed it nutrients. Water it. Provide it with sunlight. Prune it.)

- ◆ **How do you cultivate the growth of a healthy character?** (Become friends with people who encourage you to become a person of good character. Spend time with adults you admire and learn how they live. Be accountable to others for the decisions you make. Set aside regular time to reflect on the direction your life is taking.)

3. Attach the artificial flower to the plant with the twist tie or string. Ask some of the Artificial Flower Questions.

Artificial Flower Questions

- ◆ **Even though I tied this flower onto the plant, can you tell it is artificial? How?** (Yes. It does not appear to be genuine or match the other blossoms. The texture is different and it does not have a fragrance.)
 - ◆ **How does tying this artificial flower onto a real plant illustrate the way we behave?** (We may try to appear like someone we are not or may show behavior that does not reflect our true character.)
 - ◆ **What typically results?** (Trying to be something we're not does not impress people. They soon discover what is false and not genuine. In time our true character becomes apparent.)
4. Ask the group what kinds of things could destroy the plant? (Lack of water, not enough soil, too long in the hot sun, etc.)
 5. Ask what types of things destroy people's dreams? (Unwise choices, lack of integrity, etc.)

Ask the class to take a moment to consider the types of things they need in order to grow in good character. Instruct them to write their thoughts in their exercise book or on their worksheet, then begin the following story.

Helpful Hint

Don't say too much about the story before reading it so you don't give away the point: It is best to follow the Golden Rule even when no one is looking.

The Merchant and the Builder (5 minutes)

There was once a wealthy and generous merchant whose lifelong friend was a builder. One day the rich man went to the builder's home and said, "I would like to build a house where I could live with my family and entertain my friends for the rest of my days. You are not only a builder of good reputation but also a long-standing friend whom I trust. I'll be traveling for six months and will need the project completed by my return. Would you build the house for me?" "Certainly!" the builder replied, and immediately they began to make plans. With every decision the merchant followed the advice of the builder. The rich man gave his friend a large sum of money for the project and left to prepare for his journey.

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One afternoon as the builder was working beneath the hot sun, three of his friends stopped by and called out to him. The first friend asked, "Why are you using such expensive materials? These are far too costly." The second friend said, "No one would notice if you used cheaper materials and made more money. Take some shortcuts and finish this house much sooner!" The third friend added, "I wouldn't work so hard and long if I were you—the merchant is enjoying himself traveling afar!" With an uncomfortable smile and a wave of his hand, the builder dismissed his friends and continued to work. They went on their way laughing loudly.



As the builder worked late into the night, he began to think about his friends' words. What harm would it do to buy cheaper materials? Maybe he didn't need to make every inch perfect anyway. The rich man probably couldn't tell the difference. He could continue to use all the money to purchase the best building materials available or he could buy cheap materials and keep the rest of the money as additional profit. He finally decided that he would go the cheaper route, except for the paint. He would make the outside look beautiful and impress his friend.

The next weekend he and his family went to the shore. They stayed in a very expensive hotel and played on the beach all day. His wife and children were so happy! As he sat in his chair by the shore, he thought to himself, "I made the right decision; I've given my best to the merchant for several years. It's my turn to enjoy myself."

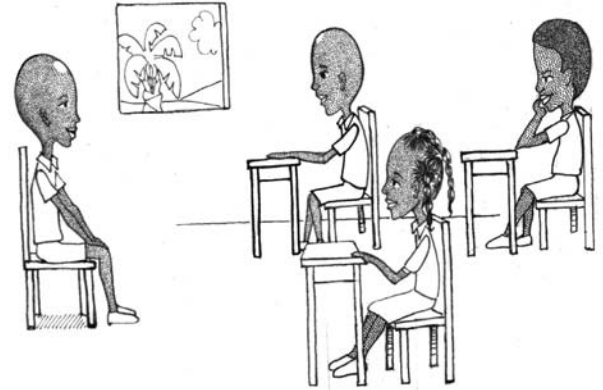
After six months, the rich man returned. Arriving at the new house together, the merchant said, "Oh, how I have looked forward to this day! I could hardly wait to see you and this house! You have done a wonderful job, just as I knew you would!" As the two stood admiring its beauty, the merchant handed the builder a silk purse full of money. "Thank you!" he said. "Here is the wage we agreed upon!"

"There is one more thing, my friend," said the merchant. Turning to look into the eyes of the builder, the merchant put his hand on his shoulder and said, "I asked for your advice on the design, material, and plans for this house not only because I trust you. I asked because I have long wanted to give you a gift to enjoy with your family. Here, my friend," he said as he handed the builder the deed to the house. "I asked you to build this house for yourself. It is now yours."

Group Activity: Hot Seat Interview (20 minutes)

This activity will help participants better understand the characters, as well as recognize and discuss the importance of the character traits demonstrated in the story.

1. Place a chair in the front or middle of the room and explain that it is the “hot seat.” The person sitting in this chair will answer questions asked by the class.
2. Ask for three volunteers to represent the characters in the story—one for the builder, one for the merchant, and one to represent the friends.
3. Instruct the class to think of questions to ask the volunteers about their roles in the story—their situation, motives, thoughts, and feelings—and to write these questions in their exercise books or on their worksheets.
4. Have the volunteers sit in the hot seat one at a time. Introduce each person by his particular role in the story; for example, “This is the merchant and he will gladly answer your questions. Who has questions for the merchant?”



Sample questions for the merchant:

- a. How did you feel when your friend, the builder, showed you your new house?
- b. Did you know that the builder had deceived you in the quality of the house?
- c. What was the expression on his face when you gave him the keys?

Sample questions for the builder:

- a. How did you feel when your friend, the merchant, handed you the keys to the house?
- b. If you had known the house was going to be yours, would you have built it differently? Why or why not?
- c. Do you think you should give the merchant some or all of his money back? Why or why not?
- d. Did the gift of the house make you happy?
- e. Do you consider yourself to be a person of good character? Why or why not?

Sample questions for the friends:

- a. What would you say if the builder told you the merchant had given him the house?
- b. Why did you make fun of the builder when he was working hard to be honest and have integrity?

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- c. Do you think it is fair for us to question your character? Why or why not?
 - d. Should we hire you to do a job for us? Why or why not?
5. Ask the class to identify the character traits of each of the characters who were interviewed in the story.
 6. Discuss how hearing the characters' viewpoints helped participants better understand the situation in the story.
 7. Ask participants to respond to the following discussion questions:
 - ◆ Why did the builder choose to use cheaper materials and take shortcuts on his plans to build the house? What was the result? In what character traits did he demonstrate weakness?
 - ◆ Who was truly the builder's friend: the friends on the way to the village or the merchant? To whom should he have listened?
 - ◆ Whom did the builder betray? What was the result? What could the builder have done to keep from making such a foolish mistake?
 8. Summarize the story with this statement:

Oh, how shocked and sad the builder must have felt! If only he had known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. So it is with us. We build our lives, a day at a time, often putting less than our best into the building. Then we are shocked to realize that we have to live in the house we have built. You are the carpenter of your life. Each day you choose your building supplies. Your attitudes and the choices you make today build the "house" you live in tomorrow.

This story teaches us valuable lessons about the development of character. Write down in your exercise books or worksheets what you have learned about character through the story of the merchant and the builder and the hot seat activity.

Summary and Closing (2 minutes)

Explain to youth that, as we strive toward being people of good character, we will all make mistakes and poor decisions on occasion. But character can be destroyed, just like it can be built. In time our true character becomes apparent.

Share the following information with the class: Many people unknowingly trade their character for something they want, like money, power and fame. Later in life many of these people regret their choices—they realize they invested in selfish things and they lack respect for themselves. Many wish they had spent their life differently, focusing on more meaningful and fulfilling things. Our behavior reflects what is important to us—if character is important we will see a pattern of behavior that mirrors the Golden Rule and the 15 character traits we have studied. Perseverance in particular will help you achieve your life's dreams, as

IT TAKES COURAGE!

will the friends you choose. To help you make the right choices, choose friends of good character and be sure to talk with adults and trusted peers of good character when you have difficult decisions to make. Praying and learning from the example of Jesus will also give you strength to do what is right. It is not easy—in fact, it is very difficult—but character is something that no one can build for you and no one can take from you. You are free to choose who you want to be.

It Takes Courage!
to cultivate good character

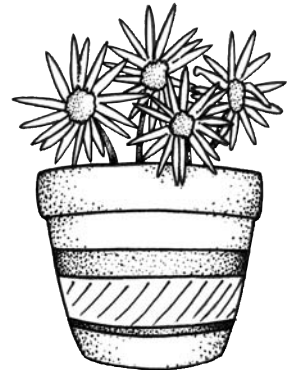
Growing in Character

I need

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____



to grow my character.

Hot Seat Questions

to ask the Merchant

to ask the Builder

to ask the Friends

I learned three important lessons about character from the story of the merchant and the builder.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

It Takes Courage!
to cultivate good character