



**What is character?**

What do we actually mean when we talk about character? We can't find the word *character* in the Bible, but there are a lot of other expressions used in its place. In lesson 7 of module 1 (Knowing God) we learned that the Bible uses the word *glory* to describe God's *character*. Moses asked God, "Please, show me Your glory." God's response was, "I will make *all My goodness* pass before you." Then, after God gave Moses the two tablets of stone containing the law, He proclaimed, "... merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth..." There is a very important truth within these statements. God's glory is His character, which is revealed in His law.

The Bible uses the word *heart* in many places to describe the human character. Therefore, when the Bible says that God wants to write His law on our hearts (e.g. Hebrews 8:10), it means that He wants to form His character in us.

How can we then define character? Our character describes who and what we are. Our character is our identity. Our character consists of our:

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Attitudes and convictions
- Values
- Moral beliefs
- Priorities
- Behavior patterns

The first item in our list is thoughts because the rest are a result of our thoughts. Ellen White explains very succinctly what character is:

**Quote #4**

"If the thoughts are wrong the feelings will be wrong, and the thoughts and feelings combined make up the moral character." (*Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 310*)

Thus the short formula for our character is:

Character = \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_

**How does Character Develop?**

Each person has their own unique character. But why are we the way we are? When a person is born he is like a blank page. Over time, the page (i.e., our character) is molded by the following:

- Upbringing
- Things that occupy our time
- Role models
- Media
- Education
- Friends
- Experiences

All these things shape our thoughts and our feelings, which in turn shape our behavior. Through this constant process, our habits are formed and finally our character. The principle is quite simple.

When you sow a thought, you reap a deed. When you sow a deed, you reap a habit. When you sow a habit, you reap a character. When you sow a character, you reap

your destiny.

Remember: **Our character is not a coincidence. It is the result of external influences, which for the most part we have control over. In short, our character is our responsibility.**

Write this sentence again in the first person and what it means practically to you!

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**Quote #5** “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.” (*Education, p. 57*)

**Quote #6** “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*)

**Quote #7** “Every act of life, however unimportant, has its influence in forming the character. A good character is more precious than worldly possessions, and the work of forming it is the noblest in which men can engage.” (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 545*)

**Quote #8** “The mind is the garden; the character is the fruit. God has given us our faculties to cultivate and develop. Our own course determines our character. In training these powers so that they shall harmonize and form a valuable character, we have a work which no one but ourselves can do.” *Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 545*)

**Quote #9** “It is not through one act that the character is formed, but by a repetition of acts that habits are established and character confirmed.” (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 552*)

**Quote #10** “The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 57*)



Under our own power, we can acquire new habits, which leave a good impression on others and display acceptable behaviors. But we can't change our hearts. However, we have hope because God promised through the Holy Spirit to give us everything necessary to change our characters. So, what is our role in this process? We know that character change doesn't happen under our own strength. But it also doesn't happen without our strength. Therefore, character change is a balance between "His divine power giv[ing] us all things" and our "giving all diligence." (see 2 Peter 1:3,5)

Let's be honest, this change doesn't happen overnight. Character building is a lifelong work. God changes us step by step, at a pace we can endure. He also promised to give us everything we need in order to change. This is really good news! We don't have to carry around all our character defects, which rob us of the joy in live, till the end of our lives. We can change! Praise God!

Don't forget, the lessons on justification, sanctification, and assurance of salvation that we studied in module 1 (lessons 13-15) are the basis for the topic of character building. Let's not be fooled by the lie that we have to overcome every character defect before we are saved. Character change is a *fruit* and not a *prerequisite* of our salvation. It is essential to understand that we begin to change when we are secure in Christ as redeemed children of God. Otherwise, we will become discouraged when we are confronted with our character defects. When we become aware of a character defect it is proof that God is working in us and wants to improve us. In fact, without the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't even be bothered by character defects.

**Quote #11**

"Christ has given us no assurance that to attain perfection of character is an easy matter. A noble, all-around character is not inherited. It does not come to us by accident. A noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. God gives the talents, the powers of the mind; we form the character. It is formed by hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies. We shall have to criticize ourselves closely and allow not one unfavorable trait to remain uncorrected." (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 546*)

**The best Role Model**

God doesn't just tell us what we should be like; He has also given us many role models in the Bible. Think about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Paul, and others, who were trustworthy, humble, loyal, steadfast, loving, and unselfish. They were people who followed God with their whole hearts and were changed by God's grace. They can be a great encouragement to us. It is good to have such role models, because role models have a great influence on our character. But the best role model is Jesus Christ himself. He exemplified the beautiful character of God.



Think about different situations in Jesus' life! What character traits can you discover?

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I am ...	true	false
trustworthy	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
responsible	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
honest	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
respectful	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
diligent	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
polite	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
patient	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
considerate	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
unselfish	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
friendly	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
courageous	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
generous	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
humble	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
ambitious	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
neat	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
self controlled	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
helpful	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
positive	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
peaceloving	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
loyal	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
conscientious	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
contented	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
thankful	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
gentle	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
fair	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
constructive	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
enthusiastic	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
just	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
joyful	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
cheerful	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
balanced	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
kind	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
loving	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
determined	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
consistent	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
thorough	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
optimistic	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	
people oriented	0-----0-----0-----0-----0	

**The next Lesson**

Perhaps you're wondering, "How can I practically experience a change of character?" In the next lesson we will address this question.

