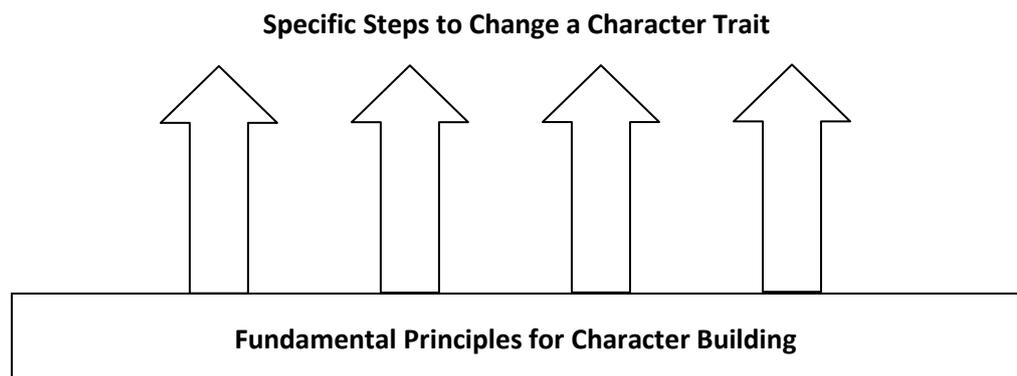


Lesson 12: Becoming what God meant me to be

Introduction In the last lesson we discovered that character building is the greatest work that God has given us. Jesus loves us so much that He not only forgives us our trespasses, but also wants to change the innermost part of our being so that we can become more like Him and one day can see Him face to face.

Every person changes constantly from the different influences in his life. Not changing isn't even an option. Even if you decide against a change you have decided for a change in a different direction. So the question is not *if* our character changes. The question is *how* it changes. The good news in the Bible is that with God's help we can control which direction our character changes. But how does it work? What does character change mean in practice? We aren't looking for any fast tricks, but rather solid principles, which we can apply to our own situation.

First of all we want to look at fundamental **principles**, which are related to our character development. Then we will think about **steps** that we can take to conquer specific character defects and to develop specific positive traits. The specific steps will only function when we take them according to the principles.



In a manner of speaking the fundamental principles create the atmosphere in which character change can take place. Let's take a look at these 7 principles!

1st Principle **Take Responsibility for your Character.**

Freedom to Change

Without Jesus we wouldn't have a chance to change even the small things in our life, much less our characters. But since Jesus gives us the power to change, we have the responsibility to choose whether we will use this power in our life or not. Through Jesus we have the freedom to change! This freedom is a great privilege! We can change, shape our lives, and decide which direction our life will go!

Freedom is Responsibility

This freedom is not only a privilege it's a responsibility. We need to remember that the decisions we made in the past have made us into what we are today. And the decisions that we make today will make us into what we are tomorrow! Our decisions affect every area of our lives, but especially our characters. Taking responsibility for our characters is the prerequisite for change.

Character isn't an accident!

In the last lesson we emphasized the fact that our characters aren't an accident. They are the result of formative influences, which we can shape. Besides being raised by our parents and teachers they are:

- The things that occupy our time,
- Role models,
- Media,
- School,
- Friends,
- Experiences

Of course, we can't change our upbringing. But all the other points have something in common. We can influence them! We can decide which influences we expose ourselves to. Our character is like a garden. Just as a garden has to be diligently cultivated and not just left to itself in order to yield something besides weeds, we have to carefully develop our characters and not just leave it to chance.

Quote #1

"Let no one say, I cannot remedy my defects of character. If you come to this decision, you will certainly fail of obtaining everlasting life. The impossibility lies in your own will. If you will not, then you can not overcome. The real difficulty arises from the corruption of an unsanctified heart and an unwillingness to submit to the control of God." (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 549*)

2nd Principle Recognize that you can't change by yourself.

We were all born with a sinful nature that makes it impossible for us to radically change our being. Whoever doesn't understand this and tries to change his character in his own power is trying something impossible.



**Jeremiah
13:23**

How does Jeremiah describe this impossibility?

Jesus expressed the same thought when He said: "...for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Character development starts when we surrender to Jesus. It is our connection with Him that causes us to bear fruit. We can't change ourselves in our own strength, but we can surrender ourselves to Christ, who will give us the power.

Quote #2

"It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them.... Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness." (*Steps to Christ, p. 18*)

Fill your thoughts with good things!

Fill your thoughts with good things. Some practical suggestions are:

- Make it your habit to regularly read good books. Especially powerful are biographies of people, who have or had exemplary characters.
- Choose good role models and learn from them.
- Carefully choose what media you spend your time with. Be aware that every film you watch leaves deep marks in your thoughts. Ask yourself, "Will this film help me become what Jesus wants me to be?" When the answer is "no", don't even bother dirtying your thoughts with the film. The same thing applies to the internet. Don't let yourself be drawn into dirty websites, and abstain from computer games.
- Only listen to music that corresponds with your values and that lift your thoughts to Jesus. It is a fact, the music you listen to shapes your character.
- Whenever possible don't think about the mistakes other people have made. Look for the good in them and think about that.

Quote #5 "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 #6 "Many thoughts make up the unwritten history of a single day, and these thoughts have much to do with the formation of character. Our thoughts are to be strictly guarded, for one impure thought makes a deep impression on the soul. An evil thought leaves an evil impress on the mind. If the thoughts are pure and holy, the man is better for having cherished them. By them the spiritual pulse is quickened and the power for doing good is increased." (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 655*)

Quote #7 "It is within the power of everyone to choose the topics that shall occupy the thoughts and shape the character." (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 655*)

5th Principle Form good habits.

We already discussed the principle that thoughts become deeds, deeds become habits, and habits become our character. Good habits help us to develop a good character.

Quote #8 "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 #9 "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*)

Quote #10 "If we would develop a character which God can accept, we must form correct habits in our religious life. Daily prayer is as essential to growth in grace, and even to spiritual life itself, as is temporal food to physical well-being. We should accustom ourselves to lift the thoughts often to God in prayer." (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 546*)

Quote #11 "By the thoughts and feelings cherished in early years, every youth is determining his own life history. Correct, virtuous, manly habits formed in youth will become a part of the character and will usually mark the course of the individual through life. The

youth may become vicious or virtuous, as they choose. They may as well be distinguished for true and noble deeds as for great crime and wickedness." (*Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 2, p. 551*)



Consider which good habits you already have and which good habits you would like to acquire!

I already have these habits:

I want to develop these habits:

6th Principle Choose your friends carefully!

Your friends have a lot of influence on you. Thus it is important that you choose friends that will have a positive influence on your life.



**Proverbs
13:20**

How does Solomon describe a friend's influence?

Quote #12 “It has been truly said, “Show me your company, and I will show you your character.” The youth fail to realize how sensibly both their character and their reputation are affected by their choice of associates. One seeks the company of those whose tastes and habits and practices are congenial. He who prefers the society of the ignorant and vicious to that of the wise and good shows that his own character is defective. His tastes and habits may at first be altogether dissimilar to the tastes and habits of those whose company he seeks; but as he mingles with this class, his thoughts and feelings change; he sacrifices right principles and insensibly yet unavoidably sinks to the level of his companions. As a stream always partakes of the property of the soil through which it runs, so the principles and habits of youth invariably become tinged with the character of the company in which they mingle.” (*Adventist Home 456.1*)

7th Principle **Become involved in evangelism!**

When we start helping other people something happens in us as well. When we give people practical help, when we are there for them, and endeavor to lead them to Christ, Christ doesn't only change them but us too. We can go so far as to say that we can't become more like Christ if we aren't serving others.

Quote #13 “God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.” (*The Desire of Ages 142.2*)

These are the seven basic principles for character development. They form the environment in which we can overcome specific character defects and develop good character traits. Now, we want to take the next step by asking how we can overcome a specific character defect and develop a good character trait in its place. Let's look at these steps individually!

1st Step **Identify your character defect.**

The first step is to identify character defects and take responsibility for them.

Jot down one character defect you want God to help you overcome.

2nd Step **Express the positive character trait.**

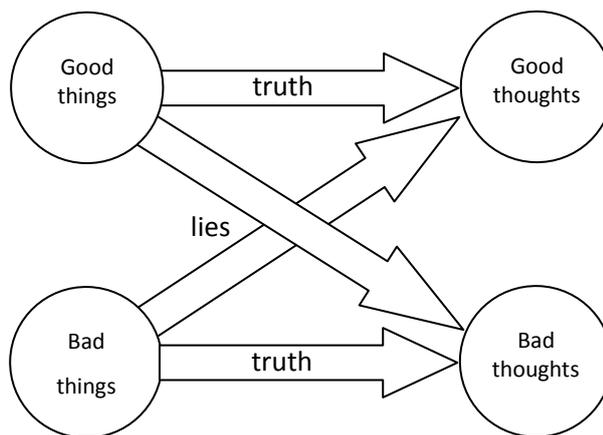
Every character defect has an opposite (e.g., lazy/hardworking, lying/honesty, etc.). The goal isn't to just get rid of bad character traits. We actually want to replace them with good character qualities.

Write down a good character trait, which you want to develop in the place of a character defect.

What would it look like for you to live out this trait in everyday life?

3rd Step Become aware of the consequences of your good and bad traits.

God created humans to love good and hate evil. By tempting mankind to disobey God, Satan turned that around and led people to hate good and to love evil.



The principle behind this is very simple. As long as something is associated with discomfort and pain we avoid it. Likewise, we strive towards things that are associated with happiness and pleasure. The problem is sometimes we enjoy things that are bad for us like drugs or laziness. We can benefit immensely from this principle when we remember to associate the good things we want to accomplish with joy and happiness and the bad things, which we avoid, with discomfort and pain. In the long run, God's way leads to joy and happiness and Satan's way leads to suffering and destruction.

When we want to overcome a character defect and in its place develop a positive character trait, we need to ask ourselves the following questions:

- How have my character defects negatively affected my life, my relationships, and my development? What would be the consequences if I hung on to it?
- If my bad character traits were replaced with the good ones, how would my life be positively affected? In turn, how would affect my relationship with others?

Write down the positive and negative effects for the character traits you noted above.

Negative effects of the bad trait	Positive effects of the good trait

4th Step Make a definite decision for the good trait.

When you can see the consequences clearly, it shouldn't be difficult to make a decision to strive for the good character trait. Don't say, "I'll try to change." But rather say, "With God's help I will change!"

Write out your decision!

5th Step

Look for role models, who epitomize this trait.

Contemplating about the lives of people, who epitomize our new character trait, is a wonderful source of motivation and strength. Jot down biblical characters and historical figures of present day people, who could be your role models.

Spend time thinking about these role models, study their lives in the Bible, and read their biographies and autobiographies.

6th Step

Practice the new character trait.

Just like everything else in life we want to do well, we have to live out and put into practice our new character traits. Think about the situations in which you could practice your new character trait. Which good habits could help you to develop your new character trait?

7th Step

Don't give up!

Realize that your character defect didn't form overnight. Don't be discouraged if you fall. God won't let you fall! Stand up and continue your journey with God!

