

Introduction

We all know that character is important to leadership. It only takes a second to think of the many leaders in ministry who have fallen because of a chink in their armor of character. We need to help students come to the realization that developing godly character is necessary to their spiritual growth. This is what the Character Series is all about.

Learning about character is a great way to help students start the process of becoming a leader. LeaderTreks believes character is the foundation of leadership. It is the basis upon which leaders develop the influence to lead. The Character Series is designed to help students see their character through God's standard. These Bible studies allow students an objective viewpoint of their own character in light of Scripture. Most students' self-perception is somewhat middle-of-the-road. "I'm not as 'bad' as the worst people I know, but I'm probably not as 'good' as I could be." Completing these studies will help students understand what Christian character is and what they need to do to grow.

The life of a student can be tough. Many pressures pull them in many directions. It is up to us to help them find the inner strength to resist the distractions of the world. Encouraging godly character growth in the lives of your students will help them in this battle.





Ready-to-Change Indicators

The Bible has a lot to say about the development of strong inner character. The Character Series is designed to encourage godly character growth from studying the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). These nine aspects of a godly nature include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The goal is to take students beyond the theoretical understanding of the fruit of the Spirit to the everyday application of becoming more like Christ.

Often, Bible studies on the fruit of the Spirit often don't make much difference in students' lives. Even teaching it over a nine-week series sometimes doesn't produce marked growth in character. The problem is not found in the verses studied but in the readiness for the students to accept their need to change. Students must first be ready to change before they can address shortcomings in their own character. In short, if they don't care about character, a small group Bible study on the topic won't produce life change. In response we developed a Bible study that encompasses three "ready-to-change indicators" – attitude, awareness and accountability. By looking at each of these areas students can gauge if they are ready to make the changes in their character that need to take place.

- » Attitude – The willingness to change
- » Awareness – The knowledge of what to change
- » Accountability – The steps to take toward change

Each session is built around these ready-to-change indicators. By reinforcing these ideas in each session, students will be able to address what needs to change in their life for each of the fruits of the Spirit.

As the facilitator, be sure to address each of these areas with your students. Encourage them to think about how they feel about the fruit of the Spirit being discussed. Help them to examine how aware they are of their need for change in that area. Encourage them to create a specific, measurable plan to see growth in that area of their life. By breaking each session down into these steps you will help your students grow in their character.

You will also want to encourage your students to talk about what they are learning with their family and other friends. Helping them get others involved can broaden the perspective that they need in their lives.

Dream big for your students as they go through this process. God may have much to teach them. And never forget that you are a student too. Be sure to apply these lessons to your own life. By living out these traits, you show your students what Godly character can do in the life of someone they know and respect.

How does this curriculum work?

This book contains four sessions, each focused on one of the fruits of the Spirit. The objective is for jr. highers to obtain a full understanding of each fruit and apply that knowledge to their lives.

This Facilitator's Guide contains everything in the Student Guide, plus some additional material. The table below outlines the parts of each session and provides an approximate timeframe, which you can adapt to meet the needs of your group. The shaded parts are included in both the Facilitator's Guide and the Student Guide.

Student Guide

Session Outline	Included in Facilitator's Guide Only	Approximate Timeframe
Leader's Recap	A reminder to follow up on the previous week's application goals set by students	10 minutes
Objectives	A list of the things your students will learn or do	
Activity	An activity that reinforces the character trait being studied	10 minutes
Optional Video	A suggested TV clip that relates to the character trait	10 minutes
Leader's Intro	A way for you to introduce the topic and Bible study	2 minutes
Attitude	Includes a definition of the fruit and a story of a real life person who displays this character trait in a surprising or powerful way	5 minutes
Awareness	Explores what the Bible has to say about this character trait, along with discussion questions	15 minutes
Accountability	Gives students a chance to think about how to apply the character trait to their lives. It is important that they learn to set application goals that are specific and measurable.	10 minutes
Additional Resources	Websites, books or songs that give you additional information on the characteristic or people mentioned in the session	





Helping your students make specific applications

Helping your students make specific and measurable applications is a powerful step to facilitating transformational change in their lives. Simply put, applying God's Word changes lives. Measurable applications should answer the questions what, where, and when.

Example of an application that isn't measurable:

I need to trust God more.

Example of a measurable application:

I know that I need to trust God more, so I'm going to learn more about people who really trusted God with their lives.

What? I'm going to find and learn about two people in the Bible who really trusted God.

Where? I'm going to do this at Starbucks

When? In the morning before school on Tuesday and Thursday.

When students make an application they can measure, they will be able to say at the end of the week that they are beginning to live out that principle in their lives. They will be able to tangibly see their growth, and not wonder if they grew or not.

The Character Series is broken down into three volumes.

Volume 1 – Attitudes: Love, Joy, Peace, and Patience

The first volume of the Character Series is devoted to the first four fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians chapter 5. These four attributes represent attitudes which show the reflection of God's influence in our lives. These attitudes are essential in our walk with God and our outreach to the world around us. Volume 1 of the Character series explores these attitudes by looking at examples from Scripture and the lives of current people. You will be able to understand and examine how each of these attitudes is reflected in your life.

Volume 2 – Actions: Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control

The second volume of the Character Series examines the last five fruits of the Spirit. These can be classified as actions that flow out of the life that is devoted to God. A life marked by these fruits of the Spirit will have an impact in the world. By learning about these actions through biblical and current examples, you will be able to scrutinize your own life to see if you are living out these actions.

Volume 3 – Biblical Examples: Paul, Jonathan, Josiah, Daniel, and Mary

The third volume of the Character Series takes a look at people in Scripture who lived lives of integrity and character. Each of these examples will point out the value for living a life marked by character. By looking at their situations and applying the lessons they learned, you will be able to transfer the same principles into your life.

LOVE

In this session, students will:

- » Learn a definition of love that supersedes emotion. It is a verb.
- » Examine ways other people are trying to share God's love with the world.
- » Identify God as the origin for and source of love.
- » Make a plan to be more loving to three people this week.

Activity: Duct Tape Disabilities

As students gather, give them an index card that indicates which body part they will be unable to use during your meeting time (right arm, left leg, mouth, eyes, both hands, ears, etc.). Depending on the part, use duct tape/ear plugs/blindfold to render that part useless and to indicate to others the "disability." Consider having a snack or some other activity during this time to give students the opportunity to help each other.

Video (optional)

The Movie – Pay It Forward

The Setting – A seventh grade class has been given a year long assignment by their social studies teacher. The assignment is to come up with a plan to change the world and implement it. One boy (Haley Joel Osment) came up with the concept of "pay it forward."

The Clip – The clip begins (36:15) in the boy's garage where his mother (Helen Hunt) has heard a noise. The noise turns out to be the homeless man who was a beneficiary of "pay it forward." The clip explains the plan and shows the heart of a seventh grade boy who saw a need and did something about it. The clip ends (40:47) with the mother offering the homeless man a cup of coffee.

Discussion Questions:

- » What did the young man in this clip do that showed love?
- » What are three things that may have motivated his actions?
- » Do you think a plan like that would work? Why or why not?

Leader's Intro

Introduce this session by saying something like:

How would you define love? If we went around the room right now and each of us gave a definition of love, my guess is that we'd come up with a lot of different definitions. Tonight we're going to discover a definition of love by finding out what God has to say about it and learning about a young boy who lived it.





Attitude

Love means caring enough about someone else's well-being to act in their best interest.

When Ryan Hreljac was in first grade, his teacher told the class about developing countries where children were dying because they didn't have clean water to drink. Ryan was told that \$70 could be used to build a well and provide clean drinking water for a community of people. The eager 6-year-old went home that night and told his parents he needed \$70 to take to school the next morning. When they asked why, he told them about the people in other countries who needed clean water. The Hreljacs told Ryan that seventy dollars was a lot of money, and they dismissed his request as the passing whim of a young child.

The next day after school, Ryan mentioned the money to his parents again, saying that people were dying without clean water. Ryan's mom told him he could earn the money by doing extra chores if he was serious about buying a well for people who needed it. She helped him make a chart to see how much money he would need. For every two dollars he made, another level on the chart was reached. After four months of doing extra chores like washing windows, vacuuming and clearing debris after an ice storm, Ryan had achieved his goal! The 6-year-old had earned \$70. In spite of all of his hard work, Ryan's main purpose remained clear. He did not change his mind and use the money for himself. He worked hard for people who needed something Ryan could get out of any faucet in his home – clean water.

After Ryan had earned the money, his parents helped connect him with an organization that built wells in Uganda. When he gave them the money he had worked so hard and so long to earn, they were very appreciative. They told him his donation was very important, but it would cost much more than \$70 to build a well. It would cost \$2,000! That didn't discourage Ryan. Instead, he decided right then and there to work harder and earn the rest of the money.

With the help of his classmates and his community, Ryan was finally able to earn enough money to build the well. He met with the engineer from Uganda who actually built the well. At Ryan's suggestion, the well was built near an elementary school in Uganda. Ryan's school in Ontario began a pen pal program with the school near the well so they could get to know the students who were benefiting from the clean water. Ryan's pen pal was Jimmy. Over the years, Ryan and Jimmy's relationship grew closer and closer. Ryan visited Uganda to see the well, the school and Jimmy. Ryan and Jimmy are now brothers. Jimmy lives with the Hreljacs in Canada.

Currently, Ryan's Well Foundation has collected over one million dollars to build clean water wells throughout Africa. It all began with the love a 6-year-old had for people he'd never met. He was so concerned that people didn't have access to clean drinking water, he did something about it.

Awareness

Read 1 John 4:7-21.

First John is a letter written with a purpose – to confirm the truth to the readers of the all surpassing power of Christ which is displayed through His love for us. John is a man we should all take seriously, for he was with Jesus for three straight years. He saw what real love was – sacrificial and unselfish. In this passage, John describes that love, a love that can only come from God.

- » How do we know God loves us?

- » What is the connection between God loving us and our ability to love others?

- » How is God's love made complete in us?

Accountability

- » On a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high), how would you rate your love for God? Your love for others? Why?

- » Based on the passage we just read, your love for others is a reflection of your love for God. Are your ratings the same? Why or why not?

- » List three people you need to do a better job of loving.

- » Come up with a specific action that will show love to each of those three people over the next week. Remember that good applications always answer what, where and when.





Additional Resources

- » www.ryanswell.ca is the website for Ryan Hreljac's foundation.
- » *The Revolution: A Field Manual for Changing Your World*, edited by Heather Zydek, is a collection of stories about people and organizations seeking to change the world.
- » *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers* by Gary Chapman is a book that helps the reader to understand how other people feel and express love. Great resource for parents and ministry leaders alike.

JOY

Leader's Recap

Ask your students how they did on the application goal they set last time. If they did well, celebrate. If they struggled to follow through, ask them what they would need to be able to follow through this week. A phone call? An email?

In this session, students will:

- » Distinguish between joy that is lasting and happiness that is fleeting.
- » Determine areas in which students are content and areas where they are discontent.
- » Commit to three ways of expressing joy over the next week.

Activity: Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy

Gather assorted magazines, catalogs and newspapers that have multiple pictures of people. Pass them out to students and have them cut out people they think are showing happiness and people they think are demonstrating joy. Have two poster boards – one labeled “Happy” and one labeled “Joyful.” Give students the opportunity to take turns taping or gluing their cut-outs onto the appropriate poster board and explaining why they think that person is happy or joyful. Emphasize that happiness is a temporary emotion and that joy is a lasting contentment.

Video (optional)

The Movie – The Lion King tells the story of a young lion cub, Simba, born to be king of the jungle and the opposition he faces from various places, including himself.

The Setting – Simba has just run away after the accidental death of his father. Timone and Pumba find him in the desert and decide to make friends with him before they become the next meal.

The Clip - The clip begins (42:20) with Timone and Pumba splashing water on a dehydrated Simba. They explain the importance of putting the past behind you and the motto “hakuna matata” (which means no worries). The clip ends when the song ends (47:53).

Discussion Questions:

- » How is the motto “hakuna matata” similar to joy? How is it different?
- » How do Timone and Pumba display contentment?
- » Did Simba receive good advice? Why or why not?

