

STUDY 2 CHARACTER COUNTS

INTRODUCTION

+ + +

Obey God and Deny Self.

A key marker of a Christian is obedience to God and His Word. God's Word calls us to bring our lives into conformity with who Christ is. We are to be like Christ, so we must bring our character, lifestyle, and habits into conformity with His.

Writer Bio

Brett Selby

wrote the learner pages for this study. He is a husband, father, preacher, and teacher. His day job is that of Regional Ministry Partner for Oklahoma Baptists, encouraging and equipping pastors.

Heather Johnson

adapted the learner pages for the *YOU* audience. She is an educator and Bible teacher. She serves New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary as the Women's Life Coordinator and Assistant Director of Thrive, a ministry wives certificate program.

Dr. Jerome Coleman

wrote the Daily Readings for this study. He is the lead pastor of the First Baptist Church of Crestmont, Willow Grove PA. He has a Master's from Luther Rice University, Stonecrest, GA, and an earned Doctorate in Pastoral Leadership from Carolina University, Winston-Salem, NC.



A BIBLE STUDY ON LIVING WITH CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

+ + +

How do you find out about a person you do not know? One way could be to ask someone about that person's character. It's a request for a description of that person so that you can know who he, or she, truly is.

When someone describes another person by their positive traits, such as kind or generous, or by their negative traits, such as mean or hypocritical, these are characteristics, a description of who they are as a person at the most fundamental level. That's character. The basic message of this study is that character is a big deal. Character counts.

From a faith perspective, our character determines the impact we can have on other people. Whether we have integrity, show generosity, or live humbly and at peace with ourselves, determines how others are influenced. We can either draw others toward Christ or push them away from Him. Having Christ-like qualities is important.

The passages we will study will help you answer the question, "What am I going to do with myself?" We won't get a list to recite for you all the things we should be, but the lessons will point to the reasons why our character counts.

SESSION 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
GOD EQUIPS US FOR
CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER.

2 PETER 1:1-11

MEMORY VERSE

¹ Simeon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those who have received a faith equal to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

³ **His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.**

⁴ By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge,

⁶ knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness,

⁷ godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble.

¹¹ For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

KEYWORDS

Everything required (v. 3)–

In Jesus, God has provided everything necessary for our growth in Christlikeness.

Useless (v. 5)–The Greek term should not be confused with being worthless. Rather the term refers to someone who is unproductive, idle, or lazy.

Blind and shortsighted (v. 9)–

Those who are spiritually blind and shortsighted are those who for whatever reasons are failing to grow spiritually in Christ.

Richly provided (v. 11)–Term is the same word “supplement” (v. 5). Both uses reflect cooperation between God and believers in spiritual growth.

WHY IS CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER VITAL TO THE BELIEVER?

You may have heard the phrase, "The proof is in the pudding." Dictionary.com explains that this phrase can mean that you judge something by your experience with it and that your experiences can tell you about something's real value or truth.⁹

Every year during awards season actors, singers, athletes, and famous personalities get up before thousands in live audiences and millions on TV to receive recognition for their achievements. Many of them open thank you speeches with, "I want to thank God for this opportunity" or "I thank God for the gift he gave me."

Regretfully, when you look at some of their lives, there is little evidence of Christlike character. Simply saying that they love God, does not mean that they possess godly character. For many, "The proof is not in the pudding." Character reveals the truth about who we really are.

An ancient letter written to some believers in Christ affirms that what is needed for a character makeover is available to those who believe. While it takes some effort on our part to experience deep change, it brings lasting benefits.

We Are Equipped by Him //

2 Peter 1:1-3

One of the earliest followers of Jesus during His earthly ministry was Peter, the author of two books in the New Testament bearing his name. He was unpredictable, at times rising to the occasion with spiritual understanding, then turning right around and failing to grasp even the most basic truth about Jesus.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about. Peter believed that he was above ever being disloyal to Jesus even though others might be (Matt. 26:33). However, after stating boldly that he would never betray Jesus, within hours he denied Jesus and declared he never knew Him (Matt. 26:69-75).

It was a very visible and public failing for Peter. His character had been exposed at a key moment in his spiritual pilgrimage. And yet he became a key leader in the early church. How was this something that was even possible?

Clearly Peter had grown in his character. The gospels depict Peter as the impetuous spokesman of the early disciples. Once confident of his superiority over others, he came to see that as everyone stood before Jesus Christ, the ground



THE POINT: GOD EQUIPS US FOR CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER.

there was surprisingly level. This kind of humility is a mark of Christ-like character as we will discover later in this study. In fact, we never grow in character without it.

So partly out of his own experience but confirmed by God's revelation, Peter knew that growth in character was possible. Believing this is pretty important. When you really think about it, there is a lot of cynicism about the possibility of changes in character. The leopard can't change his spots (Jeremiah 13:23). Once a liar, always a liar, or so says the prevailing opinion. Once a cheater, always a cheater: isn't that the case?

No, actually that's not the case. The truth is completely different. People can change. People do change.

Peter wrote that it was God's power given to us that makes a change in character possible. In addition to that, this empowerment is complete. In verse 3, an amazing statement is made: "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness." No one is excluded from that incredible promise.

HOW DOES IT CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK TO KNOW YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE?

So, once we accept the premise that this type of transformation is possible, then we begin to wonder how it happens. Yes, I want to change. How do I do that?

A genuine renewal of character is not something into which we are guilt tripped. It's something to which we are called. The greatness and goodness of Jesus drew Peter toward a transformed character. He came to realize that Jesus was so much better than he was (Luke 5:1-11). But it also dawned on him that this teacher from Nazareth had the power to change his life.

So that's why he wrote to those early believers and assured them that God had given them everything they needed to grow in Christlike character. And nothing's changed about that. The same is true for us.

We Endure in Him // 2 Peter 1:4-8

Yes, it is true that God gives us everything we need to become like Him, but the process is hardly automatic. It begins with God's promises to us—statements in the Bible about what He will do and what is always true. As we cling to what God has affirmed, we can "share in the divine nature" (v. 4). In other words, we can grow in godliness. We can grow in our character.

While the world around us isn't helping us grow in character, it isn't the only impediment. Peter reminded his readers in verse 4 that



DIGGING DEEPER A PORTRAIT OF PETER

A survey of Peter's life shows the development of his Christian character. God is faithful as we allow Him to grow us to use us to build His Kingdom.

- Peter responded immediately to Jesus's call (Mark 1:16–18).
- Peter knew Jesus. In Matthew 16:16, Simon Peter knows Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."
- Peter falls asleep while Jesus prays (Mark 13:32–38).
- It is recorded in the New Testament Gospels that Peter denies Jesus 3 times.
- In Acts 2, Peter proclaims Christ, and about three thousand were added to the church (Acts 2:41).

Peter's walk with Jesus began with obedience to Jesus's call. While he made mistakes along the way, he stayed close to Jesus and learned of Him and from Him. Later, God used him to build the Church. How can you stay close to Jesus so that He can use you?

How can you stay close to Jesus so that He can use you?

there is corruption in the world but there is also evil desire in us.

The word for “evil desire” is just one word in the original language used by Peter. It literally means “over desire,” a desire that goes too far. We find something that we enjoy, such as a hobby or a friendship. Nothing wrong there. But we can go too far with it, and it becomes an obsession. Many character flaws are due to excessive desires. Even good things become bad when we love them more than anything else, including God.

These words of Peter set the stage for his readers to think about what they needed to do. They would be required to exercise diligence (“make every effort,” (v. 5) in their character growth.

Think of the growth God desires for us to experience in our lives as a “virtue catalog” built on faith in Jesus Christ. Here are the entries:

- **Goodness.** Good character has a magnetic quality to it. We are drawn to people who are truly good.
- **Knowledge.** A desire to pursue goodness is stimulated by knowledge and understanding.
- **Self-control.** The ability to control self, involving the ability to say “no” to our flesh.
- **Endurance.** All attempts at personal spiritual growth will meet with resistance. When we fail or relapse, we must pick ourselves up and begin again.
- **Godliness.** A person can attempt to grow in character for selfish reasons or out of a desire to impress others. True godliness points to Jesus.
- **Brotherly affection.** True growth doesn’t take place in a vacuum or in an ivory tower. It always transforms relationships with others.
- **Love.** My affection and adoration of God increases if I am experiencing true personal transformation.

WHICH OF THESE ATTRIBUTES STAND OUT TO YOU AS CHALLENGING IN THIS PASSAGE?

But these qualities are not ends in themselves. They are not trophies in a spiritual museum, encased in glass with “For Display Only” signs on them. They are not displays hung on the walls as reminders of past achievements. Not at all.

Instead, they make us useful in God’s kingdom. Look at each one of the qualities that Peter encouraged his readers to pursue. Imagine how each one could be utilized in the work that God is trying to do in the world right now.



Our Efforts Are Toward Him //

2 Peter 1:9-11

In Peter’s era, the churches he ministered to were plagued by false prophets and teachers. But it wasn’t just a leadership issue. Even at the most basic entry level, congregations had to sort through whose faith was genuine. So, the aged apostle used an important word in verse 10: “confirm.”

Some professing believers at the time of the writing of 2 Peter were not growing in their faith. Their experience of God’s grace was not real to them; it was not at the core of their life. It didn’t captivate their imaginations. Peter described it as a failure of memory, the opposite of what it means to remember. Spiritual realities must be brought back into the center of our spiritual life. What confirms a person’s faith as genuine?

First, making progress in personal character development is a sign of true faith. Knowing Christ brings transformation to our character.

THE POINT: GOD EQUIPS US FOR CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER.

A second way to know that faith is legitimate is a future-oriented perspective. True believers don't just live in the present. When Christ changes me, I begin to think in terms of the next life and the age to come, not just this present life. This is why Peter challenged his readers in verse 9 with a bold assertion: "The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted."

The third sure sign of genuine faith is the awareness of divine forgiveness. There is something about being given a second chance that energizes our hunger for character change. It creates a desire to be a better person, not to gain God's favor but because He has already granted it.

HOW DOES REMEMBERING GOD'S FORGIVENESS OF PAST SIN HELP BELIEVERS AVOID FUTURE SIN?

Peter made it clear that if you practice the attributes of Christ-like character, if you strive to affirm you belong to God's family, "you will never stumble" (v. 10). That's a pretty clear confirmation for who is seeking to develop their character.

Maybe the question should be, "What if I fail to utilize what God has provided to grow my character?" Confirmation of genuine faith is found in godly character. As we grow in the qualities listed by Peter, living them out in the nitty-gritty of daily life, we verify our possession of true faith.

DID YOU KNOW?

It can be hard to tell the difference between the Church and the world. In the Lifeway Research article, "Popularity of Sin Gives the Opportunity to Proclaim Truth,"¹⁰ the author reminds believers that many people lack clarity on what constitutes sin. Society has accepted behaviors and choices that were once clearly identified as sinful. While today's culture has a "tell it like it is" and "keep it 100" approach to public discourse, Christians are hesitant to talk honestly about sin. Believers should seek to understand what Scripture says about sin, redemption, and spiritual growth and bring the truth about salvation and living like Christ into everyday conversations. Casual conversations can become gospel conversations and help individuals understand their need for a Savior and begin the journey to personal transformation in Christ.

Biblical Truth: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

How can you help people clearly see how to live for Christ?

LIVE IT

Since God has equipped us for growth, how do we develop in Christlike character?

There is truly great news, we don't have to pretend to possess the qualities of character. We can become the real deal with the help of the Holy Spirit. It's about progress, not perfection. We can be confident that the qualities which God calls for can be authentically developed in us.

+ + +

- **Determine.** Before anything else, decide if you really believe that a change of character is possible. Don't give verbal assent to something you're not quite ready to accept as possible.
- **Dialogue.** Have a conversation with someone close to you. Consider someone who doesn't have anything to lose by telling you the truth. Ask them to identify your character flaws.
- **Identify.** Examine the virtue catalog in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Identify one quality on which you would be willing to work. Develop an action plan to grow in that area. After you've made progress there, select a second quality and repeat the process.

DAILY READINGS

1. CHARACTER COUNTS // 2 PETER 1:5-8

Reputation is who people think you are. Character is who you truly are. Your reputation should reflect your character, not deflect from it. Reputation is important because most people will know you by it. Does your reputation mirror your character? Or is your reputation a mask for your character? Is your public persona so different from your private one that if people saw you in private you would be unrecognizable? Would your family testify that you are who your reputation says you are? Character matters to God.

"... for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

2. SERVANTS SENT BY A SAVIOR // 2 PETER 1:1-3

While there is no one today who has authority equal to the apostles, Peter says that we have received a faith equal to the apostles. Apostle means "a messenger sent forth with orders." We have been sent forth by Jesus to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). However, the Gospel message is diminished if those who have been called to disseminate it have not been changed by it. We have no excuse because His divine power has given us everything required for godliness to demonstrate God's glory and goodness in our lives.

Let us hold to the hope that God will complete the work He has started within us. (Phil. 1:6).

3. SUPPLEMENTAL ASSURANCE // 2 PETER 1:5-11

The reasonable response to the God who through His divine power, has given us everything we need for life and godliness, great and precious promises, and has allowed us to share in His divine nature, is to make every effort to supplement, (meaning to strengthen by adding to) our faith. By adding to our faith, we are not earning righteousness, but we are assuring and evidencing the righteousness that has been credited to us by God through faith

in Jesus Christ. Supplementing our faith leads to a richer relationship with God because it deepens our knowledge of and intimacy with Him.

Because of our faith in Jesus, we are assured that we are the called and chosen of God.

4. GOOD GODLINESS // 2 PETER 1:5-7

Godliness is humility and reverence towards God that characterizes one's life. The characteristics (goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, brotherly affection, and love) described by Peter that should be added to strengthen one's faith are also manifestations of godliness. Another word for godliness is holiness. "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine" (Lev. 20:26). God never calls us to be or do something that he has not enabled or equipped us to conduct. If we are submitted to the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, then we will not gratify the desires of the flesh or sinful nature (Gal. 5:16).

Remember, you can do all things through him who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13).

5. THE GREATEST ATTRIBUTE OF GODLINESS // 2 PETER 1:5-7

Some scholars have argued that Peter's list of attributes is in ascending order. If so, then the greatest characteristic of godliness is love. In the Greek, "love" is the word *agape*. Agape is unconditional love not only for God and for one another, but even for our enemies. That's why agape is seen as God's unconditional love imparted to the believer through faith in Jesus Christ, resulting in the indwelling Holy Spirit, without which we could never genuinely love our enemies. Agape is an active love. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that our neighbor includes our enemies and anyone who has a need we can meet.

The love you've been called to extend to everyone God extended to you while you were still His enemy (Rom. 5:8-10).