Character Matters: Week 1, Legacy

**Series Overview:** We build our lives by the choices we make. We build good character brick by brick, thought by thought, action by action, habit by habit, through daily exercising of courage and determination (Merritt). As followers of Jesus, we are called to live a life that honors him and shows his love to others. We cannot do that without good character. We must do the right thing, no matter the cost. Character still counts. It always has, and always will.

**Week Overview:** Character Matters, Week 1 – Legacy

* What do you want your legacy to be? How do you want people to speak of you when you have left this earth? When we think about our legacy (what we did in this life) we need to begin with character. It is the small, foundational decisions that we make every day that shapes the person we become. To have a legacy like no one else, we need to have character like no one else.

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Story about the millionaire house on pg 23 of character still counts

**Tension (What’s the Struggle):** Low character comes at a high cost. But we often don’t think about what that cost is. We don’t often think about the long-term consequences to our actions. To understand the importance of character, we need to think about more than just our own lives, in the here and now. We need to understand what our character means for the world around us, in the present and for eternity.

**Text (+ Supporting Text):** Proverbs 22:1, 2 Peter 1:5-11

**THP:** Character is the impression your life leaves on others

**Supporting Points (Not Required):**

* Leave a legacy of character
* Reputation is what other people think you are. Character is who God knows you are
* Our character has eternal implications. Not just for ourselves, but for the world around us

**Application (Call to Action):** Write out what you want your legacy to be

This week we are going to be starting a new series called Character Matters. In this series we are going to be talking about how we build our lives by the choices that we make. We build our character (the impression our lives leave on others) with our thoughts, actions, and habits by daily exercising courage and determination. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live a life that honors him and shows his love others. We cannot do that without good character. We must do the right thing, no matter the cost. Character still counts, and we are going to look at how we can live lives of character that honors God.

*\*\*\*\*If you want to use this story as an opening example, I would read it verbatim. The details really give the story its proper juice and could be a good starting point to the series\*\*\*\**

In the book, Character Matters, the author ends the first chapter with a story that paints a powerful picture of character, or lack of it, in action. I want you to really listen to this story and try to see the importance that every one of our decisions that we make ultimately shapes our character:

The story in the book reads like this: I read about a multimillionaire who asked a builder to construct a house. He showed him the blueprints and then gave him a huge amount of money. The millionaire said to the builder, “You probably won’t need all of this money, but I want you to have plenty to build a solid house. When you are finished, you can keep whatever money you have left over.”

The builder smiled. He thought to himself, *I can build a house for a fraction of this money. Then, I can pocket most of the money for myself!* So, he began to throw the house together with haste. He placed studs five feet apart; he pounded only one nail per board; he slapped on a thin coat of paint, and he threw on the shingles and barely covered the roof of the house. When he was finished, he knew the house wasn’t solid, but at least it looked good and he had lots of money left over. He went back to the multimillionaire and said, “Here is the key to the house.” The millionaire smiled, and said, “Oh, I forgot to tell you…the house is yours.”

Each of us is constructing our lives by the choices we make. We build good character brick by brick, thought by thought, action by action, habit by habit, through daily exercising of courage and determination. The decisions we make affect others, but they also shape the place where we must live alongside each other. When we shortcut character, we shortcut ourselves. Eventually, what is on the inside of your house will show up on the outside. Character still counts.

As we can see from that story, character matters. The builder thought he could skimp and save on all the important details of building a house and keep the rest of the money for himself. However, he had to end up living with the consequences of his own actions. Who would want to live in a house like that? It looks great on the outside, but on the inside, it is incredibly unsteady and could collapse at any minute.

I can’t help but read through this story and think that if Jesus was doing his ministry on earth today, he would look around at all the new custom home builds going up and come up with this great idea of a story for a parable. He would then look at us and say, who is the builder in this story? I think he would have us ask ourselves, am I the builder? As the author said after the story, we are building our character with every single decision we make. To have character that honors God, takes courage and determination. We are going to dive into what that looks like next week, but for now I want us to look at that story and ask ourselves the question, am I the builder?

For me, there have been plenty of instances where I have made decisions that have brought my character into question, and I have had to live with the consequences of my actions. What the builder failed to do is think about the cost of his character. When people demonstrate high character, they have high morals, they act with righteousness, and they selflessly serve others.

When people have low character, they fail to practice self-control, they engage in slander and gossip and join in with whatever the masses of people are doing. Low character comes at a high cost. And a lot of times, we fail to think about what that cost may be. Because there are consequences to our actions, and some that have eternal implications.

To understand the importance of character, we need to think about more than just our own lives, in the here and now. We need to understand what our character means for the people in the world around us. We need to have an eternal perspective when it comes to character.

Because when we leave this earth, the people around us will either speak of us that we had high character, or low character. **Character is the impression your life leaves on others.** When people interact with you, what are their thoughts after sharing a conversation or a life experience with you? What impression did you leave on them? How did you impact a person’s life? Did they see the character of Jesus lived out through your actions and words? Leave a legacy of character.

2 Peter 1:5-7 says this: For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

Do you see how the attributes of character, (who we are in Christ) build upon one another? It goes from goodness, (holiness, the pursuit of Godly living) to adding knowledge onto that. When we add knowledge of God onto that, we gain self-control, because we can know that the life that God is calling us to live is far more valuable than what we think is best for ourselves.

When we practice self-control, we can exercise perseverance. We overcome obstacles in our life with the help of the Holy Spirit and repeating this self-control of our own human desires leads to the ability to persevere. And when we persevere, we can practice godliness. Which, in other words, is being like God, or holy. Set apart, different. When we combine all of these things into our faith, we have mutual affection. Compassion for others and seeing them the way God does, it leads us into this love for the world that we begin to serve and love others like never before.

And I want to emphasize that all of this, is done with the help of the Holy Spirit. God’s spirit living inside of us as believer of Jesus Christ. We have the power to be able to live these things out. These are the things that make up our character and leave an impression on others.

Peter goes on in verses 8-11 to say: For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Are you kidding me?? That is absolutely insane. What an amazing promise that Peter lays out there. If we aren’t absolutely psyched about that thought, of a rich welcome into the kingdom of Jesus we need to really think about what eternity holds for us. Peter is laying out for us the simple steps of building a life of character that is honoring to God and will give us a rich reward in heaven someday and bring countless others with us.

Because these attributes that Peter is talking about leaves impressions on others. If people see followers of Jesus living these things out, it makes an impact and they want that same kind of life. I don’t want us to miss verse 9 though. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

How many times do we forget that when we said yes to Jesus, confessed our sins and declared him Lord of our lives that we are forgiven from our past and we are made new! Because of that, we can live a life that they Holy Spirit enables us to live out these incredible attributes of character. But Peter cautions us that if we aren’t seeing that in our lives, it is because we have forgotten that God has made us new again, clean from our past mistakes.

So, to have character that honors God and leaves an impression on others, we need to remember that Jesus has made us new. We are a new creation, the old is gone, the new life in him has begun. That is our faith that Peter references at the beginning of this passage. Then, we build to that faith goodness, and then knowledge of God, and on top of that, self-control and perseverance, followed by godliness, and mutual affection, and then finally love.

And people will look at us and ask, “What is so different about your life?” and that gives us the opportunity to share how Jesus has changed us and we can point to these attributes of character in our lives, and give them the opportunity to say yes to Jesus, and begin the same journey that ends with a rich reward when we enter into the kingdom of God.

I think it is pretty significant, the author of this passage and who is saying these words. It is Peter, the most famous disciple of Jesus. He is teaching us about character, and the promise to which it leads. And we often view Peter as this big screw up who betrayed Jesus 3 times and the rooster went cock-a-doodle-doo and that is often the end of our discussion about Peter. But what about when Jesus forgave him? What about when Jesus said he was the rock of the church? The same church that we are a part of today, 2,000 years later.

Talk about a legacy. Talk about leaving an impression on people’s lives because of his character. Peter can teach about these things of character because he lived it out! He was forgiven of his betrayal by Jesus, made new, and was never the same after that. Peter became the rock of the church that started a massive movement across the world and has reached us today and we are a part of that church today because Jesus forgave Peter, changed his life, and the Holy Spirit enabled him to live a life honoring to God that displayed his love to others. It left a massive impression on the world around him and a legacy that we are still a part of 2,000 years later.

So, what do you want your legacy to be? How do you want people to remember your character? Because it starts with remembering that as followers of Jesus, we are forgiven. We are made new. And the Holy Spirit enables us to live out these attributes that make up our character.

\*\*\*Salvation call time\*\*\*\*

After salvation call, action step for students who are already believers can be picking out where they are at in their journey, and writing it out:

For those of us who have been followers of Christ for a while now, where are you at? Do you need to remember that you are forgiven, and your past sins wiped clean? Then write down on your note card: I am forgiven. Maybe others of us are really good at some of these attributes, but we know God is calling us to honor him in all of these areas. So, pick which one of these attributes on the screen that Peter talks about that you feel like God is asking you to deepen your character in. Write it in your note card and pray that the Holy Spirit will help you with that character attribute.

All of these things Peter is talking about make up our character that honors God and displays his love to others. It leaves an impression on others and defines our legacy when we leave this earth and enter into the rich reward awaiting us in the kingdom of God. So, what character attribute will you ask God to help you grow deeper in?

**Kylee:** I think the opening story is a really great set up for the rest of the message. It introduces the idea of character in an engaging way. I think you could tie the bow by alluding to the story again at the end of the message. Ask students to reflect on how they have built their house or even pulling the story back. Two things to consider...first I think the section where you mention the Holy Spirit could be more drawn out. It’s important to start this series with the foundation that building character is not a matter of “doing good works” but communing with the Holy Spirit. You did a good 1-2 sentence explanation, but I think this is an important thing to expand on. Second, some places for real life examples that students might be facing or experiencing is always helpful. Awesome job! Love how this is starting.

**Aaron**: Solid start. This a good spring board into the rest of this series. I think the THP needs to be cleaned up a bit. The first option that came to mind was, “Leave a Legacy of Character”. Let’s brainstorm this more. I like that you have the opening story, but let’s find another chance it the script to insert a personal story or illustration. After the opening you, it’s non-stop information. I think there is huge potential for a application/reflection moment in this message. Maybe students can write down words that they hope people use to describe them when they are gone? This will help make the concept of a legacy tangible.

**Scott:** This reminds me of that famous leadership book the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. He asks people to write what they want people to say about them at their funerals. From the perspective of a friend, a spouse, and a child. Doing so reveals that we don’t want our legacy to be about financial success and being the man. We want to be remembered as loving, good people. Helping students do or see that could allow them to see that character matters to them, even at a young age. It’s not something lame or for later on. It’s desirable now! I also like the idea of leaning into that forgiveness piece and maybe make that an anchor for the application time. Chances are students will hear this and feel like they’ve already messed up and don’t have strong character. It’s important that they know that they’re forgiven and now is a great time to turn it around, letting God redeem them from the struggle and into an example. Great start!

**Micah:** Good start. I like how you pulled that story of the millionaire. I also like that there’s a little more after the salvation call. I think it needs to be tied up at the end though either with prayer or with a closing statement. Another thing: The supporting point, “Reputation is what other people think you are. Character is what God knows you are” I think the second part should read, “Character is WHO God knows you are.” I think that drives the point home a little more. The THP is a little lengthy. Let’s brainstorm a more succinct takeaway. Last thing, the way you set up the story in the book feels more like a presentation/sell of the book itself. Can this be re-written to introduce the book but then help students lean more into the story? Way to go!

Kent: I agree with a lot of the points above.

I need a personal story in there somewhere to allow students to relate with the communicator.

I love what Scott referred to about what do you want said at your funeral... what if we had students write that out for themselves at the beginning of the message... have them hold onto it the whole time and then go to it at the end... just a thought!

Love the start Ryan!

**Harrison:** I think the building story might need a tad more explanation. I know about building framing just from working with Rod. I bet most students would not know how many nails go into studs or how far apart they go. Knowing just how bad that house is will help the story hit harder. Second, adding in a personal story moment might make it connect more. A story of choosing the right thing and it costing a lot at the beginning would work well.