

Character Studies for Youth

Introduction

The Character Study Series, comprised of ten lessons, was developed for young teens just coming into the teen ministry from the preteen class. A number of critical needs prompted this project. Too many preteens who have grown up in the church know all the right spiritual answers, but don't necessarily understand what it takes to have a heart for God and to have a deep, emotional relationship with him. Their parents and teen leaders can be fooled by their seeming innocence and eagerness and have a hard time identifying their sin and helping them to repent.

These studies will help mature young teenagers and develop in them the character they need before they begin the studies for those moving toward conversion (i.e. First Principles studies).

The character studies can also be used to help convict teenagers about a specific character trait they need to develop, even while they are involved the basic discipleship studies.

Character studies are also effective in helping teens who have already become disciples grow in their walk with God. They are perfectly suited for use during discipleship times.

It is our prayer that, while there is no single, guaranteed formula for studying with teenagers, these character studies will provide extra help for tailoring your studies to meet the needs of each individual teen.

How to Use the Character Studies

First of all, explain the purpose of the character studies to the teenager if you are using the studies to build their character before they begin the First Principles study series. The teenager needs to be displaying a conscious effort and progress toward maturity.

In studying with the teenager, it is essential that you, as a leader, allow the teenager to answer the questions. Draw their hearts out by allowing them to respond (Proverbs 20:5). After they have responded, add what you see is also important and continue to ask stimulating questions to be sure they understand. Have a conviction that shallow and generic responses are unacceptable. When you ask a question, an example of a shallow response is, "I don't know the answer." Ask them if they would like to know, and help them search for the answer. Examples of generic responses are "I need to obey," "Because God says so," "The Bible," etc. Ask them *why* they need to obey, *why* God says so, and continue to ask these types of questions until you have truly drawn their hearts out. Help them to see that a relationship with God is not knowing the right information or doing things "because I have to." Rather, out of a sincerely loving relationship between the teen and God, they should *want* to do what God asks. They need to obey out of a willing spirit through an overflow of their personal love for God (Acts 13:22).

At the end of each study, we've asked that the teenager write a one-page essay on what they've learned from the study. They need to bring their essay to the next study for you to read. This will assist you in determining how much the teen is really learning and how much they are connecting with God. It also helps draw out the teen's heart through their own words.

Feel free to add your own scriptures, discussion or examples to the studies to most effectively meet the needs of the teenager you are working with.

Pray at the end of each study.

Finally, believe in each teen you are studying with—even when it takes months or years for them to connect with God in a heartfelt way. God's word will not return to him empty (Isaiah 55:11), and each study will plant seeds which will help them to develop a godly character.

Honesty

To the leader of the study: Honesty is a critical character trait to have as a teenager. One of the tendencies in the

sinful nature of a teenager is to lie. Lying manifests itself in half-truths, exaggeration and deceit. The goal of this study is to free teens from the trap of lying and to help them see that honesty is absolutely God's way.

The more open you are about your life, the more open the teenager will be.

Introduction

Ask:

1.) Why do teens lie? *Some answers:*

- a.) afraid of getting in trouble
- b.) want to look good in front of others
- c.) ashamed and embarrassed about something

Leader of the study should share some lies they have told and why they told them—even from their teen years.

2.) To whom do teens lie?

- a.) authority figures
- b.) (parents,
- c.) teachers,
- d.) ministry leaders, etc.)
- e.) friends
- f.) siblings

3.) What do they lie about?

- a.) performance (i.e., report cards, chores, Bible reading, sports performance, homework, etc.)
- b.) treatment of others

The goal of this study is to get you to see that honesty is what God wants from you and that when you are honest, you are like God.

The Scriptures

Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24

Name some different things God knows about you.

Why does it make sense to be honest all the time?

- a.) God knows and sees when we even just think about lying,
- b.) God knows and sees when we tell half-truths, when we exaggerate, when we're deceitful and when we blatantly lie.

Bottom line: God knows everything about us. Lying to others instantly leads to lying to ourselves and ultimately, lying to God.

John 8:44

What can you learn from this Scripture?

- a.) Lying is Satan's language.
- b.) Satan is the father of lies.

Bottom line: Satan is behind every lie.

Mark 7:22 How would you define "deceit"?

- a.) shading the truth
- b.) not telling the whole truth, usually to make yourself or a situation look better
- c.) not saying what you are really thinking, not being open (giving answers like "Fine," "okay," or "I don't know" when you know there's more in your heart)

Bottom line: Saying what you are really thinking is very important because that's the only way you can get the spiritual help you need to be able to change your heart.

Revelation 21:8

Does God take lying seriously? Absolutely yes!

Bottom line: Liars go to hell.

Personal Heart-Check Questions

- 1) When are you most tempted to lie?
- 2) Are you willing to change your life and be totally honest all the time?

Practical Applications

James 5:16 When you lie:

- a.) Confess it to the person you lied to.
- b.) Confess it to your parent(s) and/or teen leader,
- c.) Tell them that you are sorry and you want to change,
- d.) Then, go on your way happily and joyfully because you did what was right before God.

Write out one page about what you've learned from this study, some things you have done or will do differently because of this study, and how all this will help you be a disciple someday or how it will help you be a better disciple if you already are one.

Humility

To the leader of the study: Humility is essential in beginning and maintaining a relationship with God. Pride, the opposite of humility, is often difficult to see in oneself and difficult to define in one's character. It can be described as stubbornness toward God and his Word and others, or as independence from God or others.

Try to use specific examples of interactions you've observed between the teenager and others that show a lack of humility and share from your own life as well.

Introduction

- 1.) What is pride?
 - a.) being stubborn
 - b.) thinking you are better than others or above others
 - c.) thinking your ideas are best and that things should always go your way
 - d.) not admitting wrongdoing or apologizing

Leader of the study should share how they were prideful as a teenager

- 2.) What do you think humility is?

Possible negative responses:

- a.) being wimpy and letting people walk all over you
- b.) letting people tell you what to do c.) having no opinions

Possible positive responses:

- a.) listening to input and getting help from God and others
- b.) taking correction well
- c.) apologizing for sin

The goal of this study is for you to see your pride so that you can humbly accept and respond to the word of God.

The Scriptures

Philippians 2:5-8 How was Jesus humble?

- a. He was God but became a man.
- b. He became a servant when he could've been a ruler,
- c. He *died* for others!

Bottom line: To be like Jesus is to be humble.

Ephesians 4:2-3

How does God want us to get along and be unified with others?

- a. be completely humble and gentle (no selfishness)
- b. deal patiently with people
- c. focus on our *love* for others so that we can bear with their faults

Bottom line: To get along with others, we must put ourselves aside—that's what Jesus has done for us.

1 Peter 5:5-6

How can humility be like clothing?

- a. put it on everyday before you go outside
- b. not a natural part of us—has to *be put on* (thought about)
- c. should be the first thing people see about us

What is in store for-the humble person?

- a.) Grace
- b.) "lifted up"— growth and blessing
- c.) relief because his burdens and anxieties will be carried by God instead of himself
- d.) Better relationships (As God opposes the proud, so do other people!)

Bottom line: The humble person is on God's team.

Personal Heart-check Questions

- 1.) Do you see the pride in your life? When is it hardest for you to be humble?
- 2.) Are you willing to change your prideful ways and attitudes and be humble toward God and others? Be specific about what ways and to whom.

Practical Applications

Isaiah 66:2b

God is fired-up about the humble person, and the humble person totally respects what the Bible says. Humility is not being phony by not expressing your opinions, but humility is considering others before yourself and having the loving, selfless attitude of Christ even when you express your own opinions.

To be humble when you sin:

- a.) accept full responsibility
- b.) make no excuses
- c.) do not be defensive
- d.) apologize humbly, and rejoice in being pleasing to God and like Jesus

When others sin against you:

- a.) tell them in a respectful way (don't give in to fear or intimidation)
- b.) focus on your love for them and not on what they have done to you
- c.) forgive them and forget about it, moving on to being even better friends

Write out a one-page description of how you have seen your pride and how you can turn it into a humility that will make you ready to study the Bible to become a Christian.

Grace

To the leader of the study: The understanding of grace is the foundation for a love-motivated relationship with God, rather than one that is works motivated. Often teens raised in the church can be little Pharisees in the making, knowing the requirements of the Christian life, but missing the heart motivation. Similarly, overachievers (in the world or in the kingdom) are valued by others and value themselves based on their performance. The goal of this study is to build security, self-esteem and worth based on God's forgiving love and not on the teen's Christian duty or perfect performance.

Your personal examples and analogies will make the difference in their understanding of a potentially broad and complex concept.

Introduction

Ask:

1.) What is grace?

Some answers:

- a.) undeserved forgiveness
- b.) an "in-spite-of" kind of love
- c.) acceptance even without perfect performance
- d.) real love

(Give some examples and analogies from your own life.)

2.) Where does grace come from?

- a.) a Christian receives the substitution of Jesus' righteousness for their sinfulness (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- b.) after baptism, the blood of Jesus covers over my sins, allowing me to be justified: "just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned" (1 John 1:7)

INPUT=Our Heart Sin, Imperfection, Filthy Heart

GRACE

OUTPUT=God's View
Forgiveness, Perfection, Sinless Heart

Bottom line: Grace is almost too good to be true, but it is! The goal of this study is to help you to see the real God who loves you and how valuable you are to him. He valued you at the cost of his only Son, whom he gave up so that there could be grace to forgive your sins and restore your relationship with him.

The Scriptures

Psalm 103:8-10

What are some sins in your life?
What do you deserve for them?

- a) punishment (grounding, removal of privileges, jail, etc.)
- b) not being trusted by people

Bottom line: God sees everything that we do and think, and he knows what we deserve. Yet, it is his grace that gives us forgiveness rather than punishment.

Romans 8:1-2

What does "no condemnation" mean?

- no punishment
- not feeling "in the doghouse"
- not feeling like God and others are looking down on you

Bottom line: We can never earn grace. Grace comes through Jesus' sacrifice for our sins and frees us from the condemnation that we deserve because of our sins.

1 Corinthians 15:9-11

What is Paul because of grace?

- a) a forgiven man
- b) a Christian

What effect did God's grace have on Paul?

- a) He worked hard for God.
- b) He lived his whole life for Christ(Philippians 1:21).
- c) He was a very grateful man.

Bottom line: Grace completely changes our lives.

Personal Heart-Check Questions

- 1.) What should God's grace produce in you? Does it?
- 2.) How should you respond to God's grace? Will you?

Practical Applications

Decide that you will live for God *because* of his grace and not to *earn* his grace.

Write a one-page letter to God expressing your understanding of his grace (using a personal example from your life) and your gratitude for his grace.

Purity

To the leader of the study: Our society exalts sexual immorality, and it's raging out of control. Teenagers have hormones that are newly active, and they can let them rage out of control. However, God has made it clear that he wants us all to let the natural sexual desires remain dormant until they can be expressed within the marriage relationship.

In the Bible the term "purity" is most often referring to sexual purity, but it also is used to refer to being free from contamination by worldliness in general. Contaminated water is undrinkable, just as a contaminated heart is unacceptable to God. The purpose of this study is to help teenager's to understand and embrace God's convictions about purity.

Share some of your challenges with purity when you were a teen.

Introduction

- 1) Have you, or has anyone you know, had food poisoning? Do you know what happens? Since the food is contaminated and poisonous, the body does everything possible to flush the poison out! It's really gross, but if the poison is not removed, the person could die.
- 2) What are some ways teenagers are impure in everyday life?
 - a) lustful thoughts/fantasies and, "the second look"
 - b) watching movies or TV shows with sexually explicit scenes and themes
 - c) reading pornographic magazines or visiting pornographic sites on the Internet
 - a) listening to or telling dirty jokes
 - b) flirting (desiring attention from the opposite sex and acting or speaking in such a way as to get it)
 - c) sexual immorality
 - d) masturbation

The goal of this study is to help you to take hold of God's convictions about purity of heart and life. It will also help you see that following God's plan is always the most fulfilling in the long run. Being contaminated and poisoned by the world will *damage* your soul. God has a great plan for your life and is excited about watching it unfold for you in his time!

The Scriptures

1Thessalonians 4:3-8

What are some things we need to do to stay pure?

- a) avoid sexual immorality
- b) control our own bodies

Bottom line: God has high standards for us to be totally different from people in the world. We need to have the same expectations for ourselves as God does. He doesn't call us to anything that is not possible. When we are impure, we hurt God and ourselves and, if someone else is involved, them.

2Timothy 2:22

What are "the evil desires of youth"? *sensual pleasures like sex and drugs and reckless abandon*

Why do you think God says these evil desires have to do with youth?

- a.) They are *new* experiences, so they appeal to curiosity,
- b.) Teenage bodies are changing sexually,
- c.) The "young, wild, free, indestructible" mentality can take hold of young people.

What does it mean to "flee" from something? *to desperately run away, usually from something dangerous (a murderer, etc.)*

What does it mean to "pursue" something? *to go after it with all your heart*

Bottom line: We have the right to choose where we spend our energy in life—whether on worldly goals or on spiritual ones. God calls us to run away from what our human nature screams for us to go after: destructive, worldly desires, activities and thoughts. We must instead go after the challenge of being godly in a god less world.

Ephesians 5:3-5

How much is a hint?

What does God say to replace impurity with?

What does it mean to have no inheritance?

Bottom line: God takes purity very seriously!

Personal Heart-Check Questions

- 1) How are you different from your friends in
- 2) the world?
- 3) Are you willing to change your life, thoughts, and habits to be radically pure all the time?

Practical Applications

Read Psalm 119:9. Remember that when you are tempted, the Word will help you to resist sin.

Memorize scriptures about purity/impurity to have ready for when you are tempted with this sin.

Read James 5:16. Confess your sin to someone who can help you. Remember that God loves you and forgives you! Next time, ask advice about motives, times with boys and girls together, dates, etc.

Write out a one-page essay about what you have learned from this study and how you were convicted. Write down how you are personally going to change and some things you will do different from now on.

Respect

To the leader of the study:

In today's society, respect is in a sad state of affairs. We see a lack of respect in the classroom, in athletics and against those given authority by the government. But that's the world and it's different for those who love God. There must be an uncompromising, relentless expectation of young teenagers to respect those they are called to respect. Every aspect of disrespect must be challenged their lives from this study. I do believe deep in the hearts they do want to respect others. Help draw out of them.

Introduction

Ask:

- 1.) What does respect mean? *Some answers:*
 - a.) look up to
 - b.) admire
 - c.) listen to

The answer: To feel or show honor or esteem for; hold in high regard.

The goal of this study is to help you see how important respect is to God and to teach you 10 needs to be respected.

Scriptures

Mark 12:28-30

Best place to start is respect for God.

How do you show respect for God?

By loving God with all you've got.

How do you love God with all your heart and soul (emotions)? Mind and strength (actions)?

- a.) share your heart with him in prayer
- b.) do all God asks of you
- c.) serving God (i.e. by being a servant to others)
- d.) finding out, by studying, how to be with God in heaven
- e.) constantly think about God and what Jesus would do in every situation

Bottom line: You show respect for God by honoring him by who you are, what you say and how you live. Your respect for God will directly use you to respect others, as he commands.

Ephesians 6:1-3

Respect your parent(s).

How should you honor and show respect for your parents?

- a.) obey them right away without complaining
- b.) love them unconditionally
- c.) listen attentively and look them in the eyes when they speak
- d.) be open with them (share your heart with them)
- e.) appreciate and value them for who they are and all they do for you
- f.) have respectful body language

Bottom line: Any disrespect for your parent(s) needs to change. The result of respect is that it brings joy to God and joy to your family.

1 Peter 2:17

Name others you absolutely need to respect

- a.) sibling(s)
- b.) coaches of athletic teams
- c.) leaders in the church
- d.) policemen and other government officials
- e.) teachers in school
- f.) people running clubs/activities you're part of

1 Thessalonians 5:12

Why should you respect spiritual leaders?

- a.) They've been given a responsibility and you should make their responsibility a joy.
- b.) It builds your spiritual character to respect others,
- c.) God says so.

Romans 13:1-7

Respecting rules, regulations, laws and guidelines.

Why wouldn't you follow these?

- a.) To have an unfair advantage over someone
- b.) Because you're rebellious

Why should you follow these?

- a.) God expects you to.
- b.) It builds your spiritual character,
- c.) You contribute to order rather than participate in disorder.

Name some rules, regulations, laws and guidelines you need to follow at home, at school and at other people's houses.

Bottom line: The fact of life is that there are rules, regulations, laws and guidelines to follow everywhere you go. God expects us to follow them as long as it doesn't contradict the Bible. You must repent of any disrespectful attitude in any of these areas.

Overall bottom line: Romans 12:10. Respecting others and respecting rules will show how spiritually mature you are. Also, the more you respect people and rules, the more respect you will get back from others.

Personal Heart-check Questions

1. Would God say he feels like you respect him? Would your parents?
2. To whom are you most tempted to be disrespectful? How will you repent?
3. What rules, regulations, laws or guidelines are you most tempted not to follow? How will you repent?

Practical Applications

Write out one page about what you've learned from this study and what you will do differently because of what you learned.

Note to leader of study: If a teen has an extreme problem with respect, he may have an extreme problem with respecting himself. Please do an appropriate follow-up study on that subject.

Righteousness (No Matter What)

To the leader of the study:

Righteousness is one of the most unpursued qualities of Jesus. To be righteous is to be like Jesus. The goal of this study is to challenge and inspire the teens to seek righteousness with all their hearts.

You must be open about your life to facilitate openness in the teenager.

Introduction

Ask:

1.) Describe "righteousness" in your own words.

Some answers:

- a.) doing the right thing
 - b.) being obedient to God and parents
 - c.) obeying laws
- 2.) When is it most challenging to be righteous?
- a.) when you feel peer pressure
 - b.) when things are hard
 - c.) when you just don't feel like obeying
 - d.) when you don't understand

The goal of this study is to help you to biblically define righteousness and to help you see your need to be righteous in every situation no matter what.

The Scriptures

1 John 3:7 Who is righteous?

- a.) Those who do what is right.
- b.) Those who are not led astray.
- c.) Those who imitate Jesus.

James 2:21-22

What made Abraham righteous?

- a.) He offered Isaac,
- b.) He obeyed God.
- c.) He obeyed with faith.

Bottom line: To be righteous is to do what is right and to obey God's commands.

Matthew 26:38-39

How was Jesus feeling? Overwhelmed, sad or sorrowful, "This is hard," "I do not want this" How did Jesus respond

to his feelings?

- a.) He was open about them in prayer.
- b.) He was willing to do God's will.
- c.) He made a decision to obey, no matter what.

Bottom Line: We must do what is right even when we do not feel like obeying God.

Acts 5:28-29

Why were the apostles being persecuted?

- a.) They filled the city with the words of Jesus.
- b.) They made people feel guilty about hurting Jesus.

How did they handle the persecution?

- a.) They were bold.
- b.) They obeyed God no matter what.
- c.) They did what was right or righteous. Bottom line: In the face of persecution or peer pressure, we must do what God says.

Personal Heart-check Questions

- 1) Is righteousness a daily goal in your life?
- 2) What areas are you most tempted to be unrighteous?

Practical Applications

Matthew 6:33

Start every morning by seeking God first.

- a.) Pray to be righteous.
- b.) Be open about areas of weakness.
- c.) When unsure of what to do, ask, "What would Jesus do?"

Write out one page about what you've learned from this study about righteousness; some things you should do or will do differently because of this study; and how this will help you be a disciple today.

Training Yourself to Be Godly

To the leader of the study: A teen embarking on studying the Bible must have the maturity to follow through with the life-changing decisions that they will make throughout the study series. One way that their maturity can be discerned is by their efforts to train themselves in godliness through their personal Bible study and their conduct around other teens. Look for signs that they are taking their spiritual progress into their own hands and not waiting for others to do all of the initiating.

The goal of this study is to help them to see their need to be self-motivated in their relationship with God and their pursuit of the studies. Hopefully they will come away with the confidence that they can mature in their character quickly.

Introduction

Ask:

- 1) What is involved in training? (athletic, spiritual)
 - a.) repetition
 - b.) learning the basics

2) How will you train yourself to be godly?

- a.) consistent, daily times with God in Bible study and prayer
- b.) sharing your faith daily
- c.) having self-control in challenging situations

The goal of this study is to help you to see that your spiritual progress depends on your willingness and effort to build your relationship with God on the foundation that has been laid by others. God wants each of us to take personal responsibility to mature and grow. To be godly requires self-discipline and seriousness in heart and mind.

The Scriptures

Philippians 2:2-13 Who is responsible for your salvation? pick one: parents, teen leader, church, or you

What does it mean to "work out your own salvation"?

- a.) obedience to God, even when other spiritual people aren't around
- b.) personal attention to your spiritual welfare
- c.) fearing God

Bottom line: God puts the responsibility to work out your salvation on you. Then when you start working, he works in you to help you live out his purpose.

1 Peter 2:2-3

What does it mean to crave?

- a.) to have an intense desire
- b.) can't wait to get it What is "pure spiritual milk"?
- c.) the Bible and prayer b.) godly advice from parents, teachers and leaders
- d.) Christlike examples

Bottom line: What we desire, we pursue. You must cultivate an appetite for a godly character by "tasting" the goodness of the Lord through your personal Bible study and imitating godly qualities in others.

1 Timothy 4:12

What example can you set for other teens?

- a.) Bible study and prayer being daily and life-changing
- b.) daily evangelism with faith
- c.) homelife (Christianity starts in the home!)
- d.) serving without hesitation e.) speaking to others to build them up and not tear them down, whether it's a
- e.) challenge or an encouragement; giving from your heart in all conversations
- f.) acting maturely in church (not silly or immature)
- g.) being real and sincere in your motivation to become a Christian

Bottom line: Even though you are young, you can inspire others by your godly example.

Personal Heart-Check Questions

1. What areas do you see that you need to mature in?
2. Are you willing to take responsibility for seeking to change in these areas?

Practical Application

- 1) Keep a journal for your quiet times so that you can remind yourself of the things you are learning and growing in.

- 2) Decide that you will be an example to the other teens when you are in the fellowship.
- 3) Go over the studies we are doing so that you can be sure to put the things you are learning into practice.
- 4) Write a one-page essay describing the areas that you need to grow in and what you will initiate to see them change.

What's Your Dad Like?

IMPORTANT NOTE: Ask the teen to write out their view of God before you get together to study the Bible. When you sit down to study, ask them to give you their essay, and hold on to it until the end.

To the leader of the study: A teenager's view of their dad will affect how they view God. In order to be in a healthy relationship with God, the teen must understand what God is like and begin to love him deeply.

Special notes: Even if the teen's dad is not with the family, he still has a presence and an impact on his child's life. Use the Introduction time to draw out how they feel about him, whether present or absent. Also, be sure to encourage teens who don't have a great example in a dad that God is the perfect Dad for them.

Open your time together by sharing about your own dad.

Introduction: Think about your own dad. Pretend I've never met him or heard about him. Describe him to me. Some sample questions to help the teen:

What does your dad love to do? Hate to do? What are some of his best character traits? Worst? How do you know how he feels about you? When is he most proud of you? What makes him mad?

The Scriptures

Luke 15:11-24

What is the son like before he leaves?

- a.) selfish—took his dad's money before he was even dead
- b.) very sinful—reckless, wild, sensual

Even though the son was really mean to his father when he left, how did the father respond when the son returned?

- a.) excited
- b.) gave him gifts
- c.) called people together to celebrate

Bottom line: God is a compassionate and loving Father who desperately wants to be with us. He is not a judgmental God, waiting to zap us for every mistake. He is not an uncaring God, laughing at our pain. He wants to welcome each one of us home in our relationship with him.

John 8:1-9

What was Jesus' reaction to this woman's embarrassing, humiliating sin? (Keep in mind that Jesus' character is the exact representation of God's character.)

- a.) sensitive to her embarrassment
- b.) treated her sin like any other—not, "Oh, I can't believe you did that!"
- c.) totally forgiving, even though that sin was punishable by death

Bottom line: Forgiveness is part of God's character. Understanding our need for forgiveness and God's willingness to totally forgive us helps to draw us closer to him, to love and appreciate him more.

Hebrews 12:5-11

How does this passage say it feels to be disciplined?

- a.) like hardship
- b.) painful
- c.) unpleasant

Why does God discipline?

- a.) for our good (to keep us from walking on evil paths)
- b.) so we can learn lessons in order to make better decisions in the future
- c.) so we can be secure that he loves and cares for us

What is our Dad in heaven like?

- a.) He unconditionally loves.
- b.) He forgives all of our sins.
- c.) He disciplines us for our good.
- d.) He believes in us and wants us to live happily ever after.

Jeremiah 29:11

This passage sums up how God takes care of us when we seek him.

Personal Heart-Check Questions

- 1.) Do you want to be closer to God?
- 2.) Let's read your essay now. Is your view of God different now than when you wrote this?
- 3.) Do you see any relationship between how you personally view your earthly father and how you view your heavenly Father? 4.) Are you willing to open wide your heart to God and let him be the Father to you that he wants and needs to be?

Practical Application Questions

Write out a one-page essay about what you've learned from this study and why you think this is an important study to do in order to become a disciple or grow as a disciple.

Pray every day to see God as the Bible describes him, not as you feel or think he is.

Who Are You Living to Please?

To the leader of the study:

People-pleasing is predominant among teens. As they develop a stronger sense of their own identity, they seek approval and acceptance from others. Christian-parented teens are commonly motivated by people-pleasing to study the Bible. They feel a great deal of pressure to study the Bible to please their Christian parent(s), siblings and friends. They can strive to give the "right" responses to questions—not necessarily their own true heartfelt responses.

Introduction

Ask:

1.) Whose approval is important to you? Who do you want to please or get approval from? Some answers:

- a.) myself
- b.) parents, teachers
- c.) teen leaders and older disciples
- d.) friends

2.) Why?

- a.) to be accepted, liked, popular
- b.) to feel good about myself
- c.) because it feels good to be praised

The goal of this study is to help you to see the importance of pleasing God and seeking praise and approval from Him.

The Scriptures

John 5:41-44

What is Jesus teaching in this Scripture?

- a.) We need to follow his example by focusing on getting praise from God, not people.
- b.) We will please whom we love. Bottom line: These people knew the truth but did not follow it because of peer pressure. They cared more about their reputation with people than they cared about doing what was right before God.

Galatians 1:10

What does Paul tell us about the difference between pleasing people and pleasing God?

They are opposites!

When are you tempted to do the God-pleasing thing but with people-pleasing motives?

- a.) going to church
- b.) obeying parents just because they said so, not because you want to please God
- c.) serving, but wanting recognition for all you do by peers or leaders

Bottom line: When we strive to please God, we may not be popular with the world, but keep in mind that man's approval is temporary, while God's approval is eternal!

Mark 12:14

What does it mean to be "swayed by men"? Who are you most likely to be swayed by? What does "integrity" mean?

- a.) sticking to your convictions no matter what
- b.) doing what you said you would do and doing it on time

Bottom line: Jesus was not swayed by men because he saw them from a spiritual perspective. We need to imitate this quality in him.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10

Why should we care about trying to please God?

- a.) It doesn't just happen—it has to be a set goal.
- b.) We all (every single person, whether we believe in God or not) will be accountable for our lives,
- c.) Jesus died for us, and we need to live to please him.

Personal Heart-Check Questions

- 1) Can you relate to the people-pleasing Pharisees in any way?
- 2) Have you counted the cost of studying the Bible? Becoming a Christian will affect your reputation with your non-Christian friends.
- 3) What do your life-style and your priorities say about how much faith you have in God?

Practical Applications

Make three columns on a page. In the first column, list all the activities you are involved in— everything, including

studying the Bible, school activities, free time, etc. In the next column, write the reason you think you participate in it. Ask others who know you well to tell you why they think you are involved. Allow them to point out the areas where they see you "loving praise from men rather than from God," and write their insights in the third column. Be honest and encourage honesty! Bring the list to your next study, and review it with your teen leader. This will help you to see whom you are living to please and decide to please God instead.

Write out a one-page essay about why you really want to study the Bible. Include whom you are trying to please by studying and why.

Relationships with the Family

To the leader of the study: Family relationships are second only to your relationship with God. It is an absolute must that a teen's heart for their family is in the right place. There needs to be a deep abiding love and respect for their parent(s) and a strong, inseparable love for each sibling. From this study there needs to be a distinct change in the teenager's relationship with members of their family.

Note: This is not a study about the parent(s) or sibling(s) weaknesses. Hear the teenager out if they feel the need to voice some of the weaknesses so you don't frustrate them. Then you, the teen leader, go back and respectfully talk those issues out with his parent (s). Strongly emphasize to the teenager that this study will focus specifically on what he or she needs to change.

Introduction

Ask:

1.) What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses in your relationships with your family?

Some answers:

Strengths	Weaknesses
a.) cheerful	a.) irresponsible
b.) loving	b.) disrespectful
c.) affectionate	c.) independent

Proverbs 23:22-26

2.) What do you think will bring the greatest joy to your parent(s)?

- a.) listening to them
- b.) living by the truth
- c.) changing how you live at home

The goal of this study is for you to change your dynamics in your relationship with your family. The results will bring greater joy to your family.

The Scriptures

John 19:25-27

As Jesus was dying on the cross, what are some words you would use to describe how he looked after his family?

- a.) compassion
- b.) love
- c.) care

Bottom line: If Jesus shows that kind of care for his family, especially making sure his mother was taken care of, while dying on a cross, we need to daily care about our own families by being righteous and loving toward them.

1Thessalonians 5:12-13

Whom should you respect?

- a.) those who work hard
- b.) those over you in the Lord {Your parents fit into these categories!}

How can you show greater respect for your parent(s)?

- a.) listen right away
- b.) obey right away
- c.) verbally express to them that you love and respect them frequently or write it to them in cards or letters.

Bottom line: You've been given so much by your parents. You need to give back by always showing the respect they deserve and God expects you to have for them.

Ephesians 4:29-5:1

How do you get along with each sibling? (Go through each one.) In your relationship with your sibling(s), what should you get rid of?

- a.) bitterness
- b.) rage
- c.) anger
- d.) any bad feelings How should you treat your sibling (s) ?
- e.) with encouragement
- f.) with kindness
- g.) with compassion

Bottom line: In God's eyes, there is no such thing as sibling rivalry. You must treat all your physical brothers and sisters with so much love that this love is only surpassed by your love for God and your parent(s).

Personal Heart-check Questions

- 1) What needs to change the most in your relationship with your family?
- 2) How will you go about changing these things starting today?

Practical Applications

Apologize specifically to your sibling(s) about how you've fallen short and express to them how you want to be different.

Write a one-page letter to your parent (s) about how grateful you are for them, and how you will specifically change to show a greater respect for them (Ephesians 6:1-2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:13: obey, honor and hold them in the highest regard).