

Lesson 31 - Character Development

1. The Bible does not use the word "character" but what word does it use? **Matthew 7:16, 20**

EGW: Sin is the transgression of the law. God declares, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." Notwithstanding all the profession of lip and voice, if the character is not in harmony with the law of God, those making profession of godliness bear evil fruit. {RH, May 7, 1901 par. 4}

2. What was preached to be brought forth? **Matthew 3:8**

EGW: If we are to have pardon for our sins, we must first have a realization of what sin is, that we may repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. We must have a solid foundation for our faith; it must be founded on the word of God, and its results will be seen in obedience to God's expressed will. Says the apostle, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Faith and works will keep us evenly balanced, and make us successful in the work of perfecting Christian character. Jesus says, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Speaking of temporal food, the apostle said, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." The same rule applies to our spiritual nourishment; if any would have the bread of eternal life, let him make efforts to obtain it. {ST, June 16, 1890 par. 4}

3. If we do not develop proper character, what is our fate? **Matthew 3:10, Matthew 7:19**

EGW: Many tell us, "You are too particular. God does not expect us to be constantly on guard lest we make mistakes. He is too good to hold us accountable for our course of action day by day." But we are to remember that the way to destruction is broad, while the way to eternal life is strait and narrow. Listen again to the words of the great Teacher: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." This shows us that we are to be guarded on every side, lest we mistake the way. We must be careful not to listen to agents of the great adversary, who would guide our feet into forbidden paths, as our first parents were led into transgression. {ST, October 29, 1885 par. 4}

Our Lord does not leave us in darkness as to whom to trust. Here is the rule by which to decide; "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every

good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." Here is the test by which to judge every man who claims to be a teacher and a guide to the people. And now listen to his startling denunciation of those teachers who make high pretensions to godliness, while their works do not correspond with their profession: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Do their high claims prove them to be genuine Christians and reliable guides? No, indeed! We must look carefully at the life and character, the words and deeds. {ST, October 29, 1885 par. 5}

4. What is required to bring forth a good character or fruit? **Matthew 13:8**

EGW: The sower is not always to meet with disappointment. Of the seed that fell into good ground the Saviour said, This "is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." "That on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." {COL 58.1}

The "honest and good heart" of which the parable speaks, is not a heart without sin; for the gospel is to be preached to the lost. Christ said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Mark 2:17. He has an honest heart who yields to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He confesses his guilt, and feels his need of the mercy and love of God. He has a sincere desire to know the truth, that he may obey it. The good heart is a believing heart, one that has faith in the word of God. Without faith it is impossible to receive the word. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6. {COL 58.2}

5. What can prevent good fruit from forming? **Luke 8:14**

EGW: Cares, riches, pleasures, all are used by Satan as he plays the game of life for human souls. If these tares are not dug out of the heart, they will spring up and bear their harvest. The heart must be diligently searched as with a lighted candle, that all defects may be seen in the light of the law of God, His standard of character. Every briar and thistle must be uprooted as soon as it makes its appearance. If this is not done, men, women, and youth will sell their birthright for some worldly advantage. . . . {7MR 179.1}

6. Those that do not bring forth a good character, what happens to the connection with Jesus? **First half of John 15:2**

EGW: "My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away." While the graft is outwardly united with the vine, there may be no vital connection. Then there will be no growth or fruitfulness. So there may be an apparent connection with Christ without a real union with Him by faith. A profession of religion places men in the church, but the character and conduct show whether they are in connection with Christ. If they bear no fruit, they are false branches. Their separation from Christ involves a ruin as complete as that represented by the dead branch. "If a man abide not in Me," said Christ, "he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." {DA 676.5}

7. If we are producing fruit with a connection to Jesus, what can we expect to have happened to us?
Second half of John 15:2

EGW: The word of Christ is the bread of life that is furnished for every soul that liveth. To refuse to eat this bread is death. He that neglects to partake of the word of God shall not see life. Receiving the word is believing the word, and this is eating Christ's flesh, drinking his blood. To dwell and abide in Christ, is to dwell and abide in his word; it is to bring heart and character into conformity to his commands. In the parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus shows the vital connection that must exist between himself and his followers. He says: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." {RH, January 14, 1896 par. 3}

8. Since we cannot form a good character ourselves, what do we need in our lives? **John 15:4-5**

EGW: The character of the Christian is shown by his daily life. Said Christ, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." Our Saviour compares himself to a vine, of which his followers are the branches. He plainly declares that all who would be his disciples must bring forth fruit; and then he shows how they may become fruitful branches. "Abide in me, and I in you; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me." {RH, April 26, 1881 par. 2}

9. What are we considered if we bring forth much fruit? **John 15:8**

EGW: Will you consider what is the quality of the fruit that you are bearing? Are you a fruit-bearing branch on the parent vine stalk, or are you producing fruit that bears no resemblance to the living vine? I ask you seriously and solemnly, What is the character of the fruit that you produce? Does it do good to souls? Is it the fruit of self-denial, of self-sacrifice, the fruit of meekness, patience, long forbearance, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness and love? Is this fruit budding and blossoming for God and His glory in working as Christ worked to save perishing souls? Remember, if "ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be My disciples." Without this evidence you are not Christ's, neither is Christ yours. You have no right to the Christian name. . . . {1MR 377.1}

10. What is the practical list of a right character? **Galatians 5:22-23**

EGW: The Holy Spirit operates the same the world over. When it is received into the heart, the whole character is changed. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." [2 Corinthians 5:17.] Old habits and customs and national pride and prejudice are broken down. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." [Galatians 5:22, 23.] When these are abiding in the soul, there will be unity of thought and action. {GW92 364.2}

11. What are we to show while having the fruit of the Spirit? **Ephesians 5:9**

EGW: The apostle Paul describes the fruit which the Christian is to bear. He says that it "is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5:9). And again, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22, 23). These precious graces are but the principles of God's law carried out in the life. {SL 80.2}

12. Having the proper character develops what? **Romans 6:22**

EGW: "When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" [Romans 6:20-23]. {13MR 222.1}

These are not the words of Sister White, but the words of the Lord, and His messenger has given them to me to give to you. God calls upon you to no longer work at cross purposes with Him. Much instruction was given in regard to men claiming to be Christian when they are revealing the attributes of Satan, counteracting in spirit, word, and action the advancement of truth, and are surely following the path where Satan is leading them. In their hardness of heart they have grasped authority which in no way belongs to them, and which they should not exercise. Saith the great Teacher, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn." Men say in Battle Creek, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we" but they are using common fire. Their hearts are not softened and subdued by the grace of God. {13MR 222.2}

13. What two things do bad character people reject? **Jeremiah 6:19**

EGW: God, who searches the heart, takes notice of its desires. He will forgive your past life of frivolity, your pretense, your deception, if you will now repent and seek His grace, that you may live unto Him and Him alone. "The Lord looketh upon the heart." "He remembereth that we are dust." "I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their own thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto My words, nor to My law, but rejected it." This need not be your case, but it will be unless you turn square about. {16MR 314.2}

You cannot make this change yourself, but Jesus can, and will do this if you ask Him and submit yourself wholly to Him, not seeking your own will but God's will, no longer trying to please self but educating yourself to be useful. Your time is golden and should be spent in seeking to lay up a treasure in the heavens. You must forget your darling self. Live no longer to please yourself, but to please God. {16MR 314.3}

14. What does a bad character lead people to do? **Proverbs 10:16**

EGW: The teaching of this parable is illustrated in God's own dealing with men and angels. Satan is a deceiver. When he sinned in heaven, even the loyal angels did not fully discern his character. This was why God did not at once destroy Satan. Had He done so, the holy angels would not have perceived the justice and love of God. A doubt of God's goodness would have been as evil seed that would yield the bitter fruit of sin and woe. Therefore the author of evil was spared, fully to develop his character. Through long ages God has borne the anguish of beholding the work of evil, He has given the infinite Gift of Calvary, rather than leave any to be deceived by the misrepresentations of the wicked one; for the tares could not be plucked up without danger of uprooting the precious grain. And shall we not be as forbearing toward our fellow men as the Lord of heaven and earth is toward Satan? {COL 72.2}

15. What happens to the bad character people in the end? **Jeremiah 21:14**

EGW: "The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! . . . Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." {YI, January 25, 1894 par. 1}

16. What will happen to the earth as a result of all of the bad character people? **Micah 7:13**

EGW: The prophet made plain the fact that our heavenly Father allows His judgments to fall, "that the nations may know themselves to be but men." Psalm 9:20. "If ye walk contrary unto Me, and will not hearken unto Me," the Lord had forewarned His people, "I, even I, . . . will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste." Leviticus 26:21, 28, 33. {PK 429.1}

17. If the character is right, what will they be known as? **Isaiah 3:10**

EGW: "The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! . . . Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." {YI, January 25, 1894 par. 1}

The eyes of the Lord God of Israel are too pure to behold iniquity, and these utterances of the Lord through his prophets need to be considered by all who claim to be his people. God requires that

every man, woman, and youth should perfect a Christian character. The command is, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." Conformity to a low standard of Christianity is robbing the church of its vitality and power. The banner of piety, of Bible religion, has been trailing in the dust, because those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ follow their own ways, and conform to a standard which God has not given them, but one they have erected for themselves. But those who make a profession of Christianity, and yet fail to have true piety, are false lights, false sign-boards, pointing in a wrong direction. They call evil good, and good evil, darkness light, and light darkness. While claiming to be righteous, they indulge in loose practices after the order of the ungodly man, who has not the love or fear of God before his eyes. They fail to bring the principles of the truth they profess to believe into their life- practices, and regard their sins and errors as trifling things. {YI, January 25, 1894 par. 2}

18. What body part will also reflect a good character? **Proverbs 13:2**

EGW: Closely connected with Christ's warning in regard to the sin against the Holy Spirit is a warning against idle and evil words. The words are an indication of that which is in the heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." But the words are more than an indication of character; they have power to react on the character. Men are influenced by their own words. Often under a momentary impulse, prompted by Satan, they give utterance to jealousy or evil surmising, expressing that which they do not really believe; but the expression reacts on the thoughts. They are deceived by their words, and come to believe that true which was spoken at Satan's instigation. Having once expressed an opinion or decision, they are often too proud to retract it, and try to prove themselves in the right, until they come to believe that they are. It is dangerous to utter a word of doubt, dangerous to question and criticize divine light. The habit of careless and irreverent criticism reacts upon the character, in fostering irreverence and unbelief. Many a man indulging this habit has gone on unconscious of danger, until he was ready to criticize and reject the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." {DA 323.1}

19. What must we focus upon to develop a good character? **Proverbs 12:12, Ephesians 3:17**

EGW: God does not accept the most splendid service unless self is laid upon the altar, a living, consuming sacrifice. The root must be holy, else there can be no sound, healthy fruit, which alone is acceptable to God. The heart must be converted and consecrated. The motives must be right. The inner lamp must be supplied with the oil that flows from the messengers of heaven through the golden tubes into the golden bowl. The Lord's communication never comes to man in vain. {7T

248.3}

20. What is a good character better than? **Proverbs 8:19**

EGW: The law that they disobeyed was their life. Obedience to it would have made their characters as fine gold, their principles as the golden wedge of Ophir. The law that they chose to disregard and trample under foot would, if obeyed, have kept them in happiness and peace, and obedience would have borne fruit in sanctified love and beauty of character. The world would have been filled with holiness and purity. {13MR 382.1}