9. Character and Integrity

Learning Objectives

- To explore what it means to have good character and how character effects our leadership
- To explore why having integrity is important for Christians
- To reflect on areas of our own character and make a plan for change.

Welcome [5 mins]

Welcome the group to this session, recap the last session and review how the challenge went.

The challenge was to pick one verse from the "Identity in Christ" Bible verse sheet each day and reflect on it for a couple of minutes.

🏸 **Bonus Game: [10 mins]**
Select a game that will best suit your group and setting. Consider games this week that fit with the theme of influence, such as influencers and celebrities.

> ***Pray for the session***

Introduction [5 mins]

Ask – If I [or pick another leader] **was going to end up on TV next week, what do you think it would be for?**

You can make this fun and light hearted.

Ask - What do you want to be known for and why?

You can do this in pairs to start with depending on how comfortable the group is at sharing.

In our culture, people are often celebrated and remembered for their achievements. However, many of us want to be known for who we are as people as much as our achievements. During this session, we're going to look at our character, and how we can grow into the people we want to be remembered as.

Bible Focus [30 mins]

Character & Leadership

In Small Groups:

Think of some people who were great leaders. Who comes to mind?

Get Feedback

ASK - What qualities make a good leader?

Get feedback from the whole group and write their answers on a flipchart/whiteboard. Don't comment on the people's suggestions at this point; simply write them down.

Now hand out flipchart paper to each small group.

On your flipchart paper, draw and label the "perfect" youth leader. What makes them the perfect youth leader? What qualities do they have? How do they behave, look, dress? What do they do?

Get feedback after 5 minutes; this can be lighthearted but try and steer the group to some more serious conclusions. Refer back to the board and note if any qualities were similar or conflict with what you wrote on the board earlier.

ASK - Can you be a "good" leader without doing good? = Yes,

Draw out some examples.

It depends on how we define "good" in leadership. If good simply means success, then there have been many "successful" leaders who haven't necessarily been "good" but have achieved their goals, whether they are about wealth, fame or power.

Ask – Who are some obviously "bad" leaders who have been successful? e.g. Hitler, Stalin etc.

As followers of Jesus, we don't simply want to be "successful" in the eyes of the world. We should be aiming to lead differently. Worldly "success" should not be our goal. Remember back to the discipleship session where we learnt that a Christians' goal is to live more like Jesus.

📖 **1 John 2:6** says "Whoever claims to live in him must live [or walk] as Jesus did.

As Christians we should be aiming to lead more like Jesus. Jesus was the ultimate influencer! Many non-Christian historians will acknowledge that Jesus changed the world more than any other person. We have to be something different to the world. God has called us to look different.

> Christian leadership is about Christlike influence, influencing others to think like Christ, influencing the culture to be more Christlike.

Character:

Whenever we hear someone talk about holiness, it's tempting to brace yourself to feel guilt and condemnation.

However, character and holiness actually have more to do with relationship than they do about rules.

Tim Keller (theologian) says:

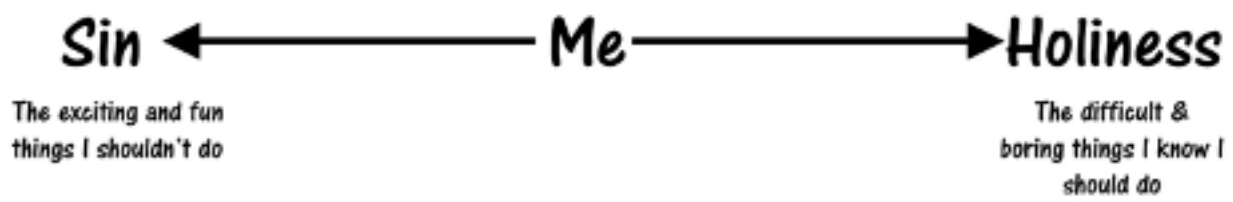
> *"If we fully understood the way we break God's heart when we sin, then we wouldn't be so obsessed with avoiding sin... It's not about avoiding sin, it's about being right with God's heart.* ***It's not about avoidance, it's about relationship... when your relationship is so strong with Jesus, we're far less likely to pick up the trash and to want to carry it with us. So we need to change the way we spend our energy, we need to stop trying not to sin and start trying to spend all our time focused on God."***

Remember back in the prayer and calling sessions, we talked about how we are motivated more by love than by duty and guilt.

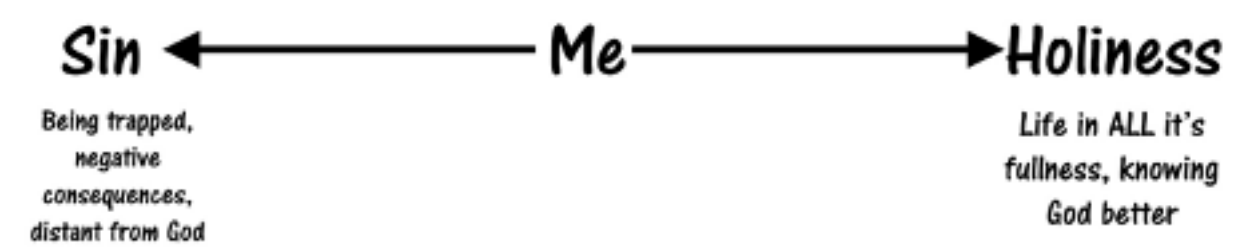
We shouldn't see holiness as a duty, something we need to do to keep an angry God happy. Instead, let's see it as a key to knowing God better. Let's see it as the door to a better life the way the creator intended.

Draw the diagram below on a whiteboard or flipchart paper

Instead of this:



Let's view the choices before us more like this:



Bonus:

If you have something really valuable, you will probably want to keep is safe by locking it away.

Imagine a locked treasure chest containing gold – without the key, it will take an incredible amount of effort to open the chest. You might try hitting it, dropping it, prying it open with a crowbar. But, if you had a key, it would only take a small amount of effort to turn the key and unlock the chest.

For thousands of years, the people of God had been trying to obey God's command in Leviticus 11: 44 to "be Holy because I am Holy." – Which means to be pure, clean, set apart and different. By their own effort and will power, they tried to follow those rules for thousands of years, BUT they failed time and time again.
It was like trying to crack open the treasure chest of "holiness", but none of their human efforts were enough to open the chest.

When we notice areas of sin and impurity in our lives, we can easily fall into the temptation of thinking the solution is that we need to try harder, grit our teeth and do better.

BUT effort alone is NOT the key. In the gospels Jesus gives us the keys to living life God's way and experiencing life to the full.

The Apostle Paul sums it up this way,

📖 **Read**
Galatians 5:16-23

"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever[a] you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

In small groups, look at Galatians 5:16-23 and list the following:

- **What commands are there?**
- **What we should avoid?**
- **What is the fruit of the Spirit?**
-

Growing in our character means to grow to look more like Christ, to grow in the fruit of the Spirity.

Note that the main command in the passage is to "live by the Spirit". It does NOT say live by trying to be more loving, joyful, peaceful etc. Therefore, the place we should place our effort, is to "*live by the Spirit/in step with the Spirit*" and as a result the fruit in our lives will be more love, joy, peace" etc...

📖 **Luke 6:43-45 says:**
"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and ad bad tree can't produce good fruit. A tree is identified by its fruit... a good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart."

Jesus said there is a natural overflow from our hearts to our actions.

When we notice a negative behaviour or pattern in our lives, rather than just trying to stop the behaviour it can be more helpful to ask how close am I to the Spirit and how can I get closer.

Integrity

One way we can think about our Character is the idea of Integrity.

The Dictionary defines integrity as;

> *the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.*
> *OR*
> *the state of being whole and undivided.*

Show the image of Blackpool rock, either using a printout or powerpoint.



[*"Blackpool Rock" by jadepalmer. CC BY-ND 2.0]*

A stick of rock is a great example of "Integrity". No matter where you cut it, it says the same thing the whole way through.

It is one thing to work on our language and behaviour in front of others, to project a certain view of ourselves, but it's another to truly live it out in all areas of our lives. A good question to ask ourselves about integrity is:

> "Who are you when no-one is looking?"

The Pharisees are great examples of people and leaders who lacked integrity. Jesus saved some of his strongest words for them.

📖 **Read Matthew 23:27-28:**
"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

The Pharisees had the appearance of good religious leaders down perfectly. However, it was all for show. Jesus described the pharisees as whitewashed tombs. In Jesus' time they used to paint tombs white so people didn't accidently go too near them and become ritually "unclean". Just like those tombs looked "pure" and white on the outside but inside were full of death, the Pharisees looked holy on the outside but inside their hearts still were full of selfishness and greed.

As Christians we are called to live and lead with integrity, not like the pharisees who looked good for everyone else but consistent in who we are when no one is looking.

Testimony: [3 mins]

Ask one of the team to share examples of when they have seen people of influence demonstrate character and integrity positively and, if appropriate, negatively. Explain the impact it had on them and those around them. (Take care not to identify the people in the story if using a negative example).

📽️ **Bonus Video: Skit Guy's God's Chisel [6 mins]**

https://youtu.be/XRZ-wVrTjlk

This video can be great to lead straight into the response time below.
[The license only covers use of this video for the Catalysts resource, please don't use for any other purposes.]

Application: [15 mins]

We are now going to have some time to reflect and ask God to highlight any areas that we might need to ask for some help with our character.

Complete the Circle activity first and then if you have time choose another activity listed below to help participants reflect with God on areas of their character.
Make sure to encourage participants to focus on God's grace and also on actions they can take to grow in that area rather than just focusing on where they struggle.

💭 **Bonus -**
Try doing at least two of the application activities listed below.

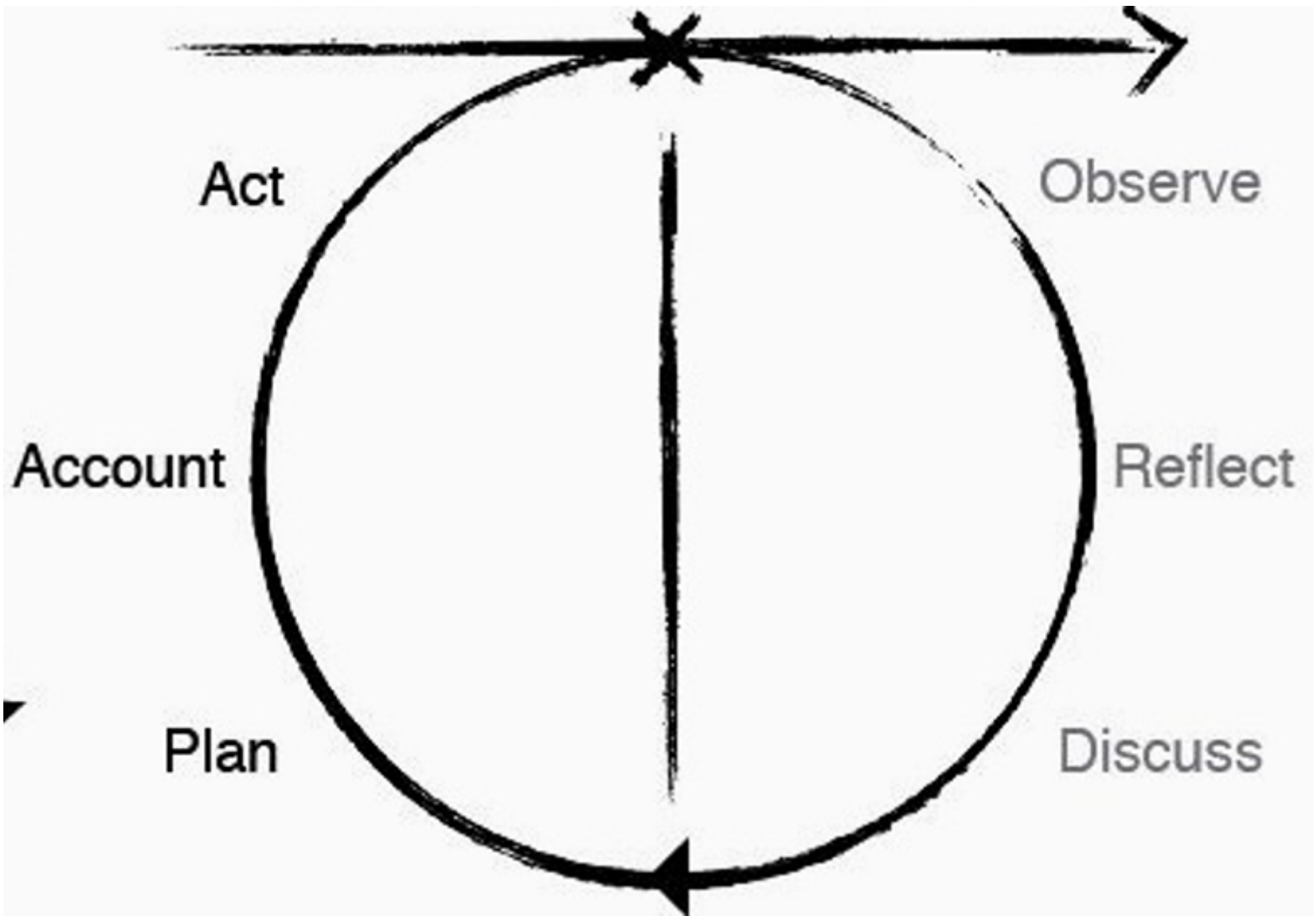
📌 **Activity: "The Circle" –** (A Lifeshape by 3DM and Mike Breen)

Once we have identified an area of sin and struggle the next step is to ask what God wants us to do about it. The circle diagram can be helpful to work through.

[We recommend the lifeshapes for youth book by Rich Atkinson if you want to look into using lifeshapes further. www.timetorebuild.co.uk]

Watch the "Circle Video" from Moodle/Youtube.

You can also draw the circle on a board/flipchart and explain each step if you wanted.



📌 **X** – A moment in time where we are challenged.
****Observe**** – What happened? What did you do wrong/right? What did you realise?

****Reflect**** – Why did it happen? Why did that challenge me? Why did I react that way?

****Discuss**** – (This might be best done with your mentor in your next meeting) Why do they think it was a challenge for you? What do they see that you've missed?

****Plan**** – What are you going to do about it? E.g. to sign up to a reading plan on my Bible app

****Account**** – Who are you going to be accountable to?

****Act**** – Get on and do it

Encourage the young people to pick one area that God highlighted to them earlier and answer each point of the circle for that particular issue using the Circle handout.

📌 **Activity: Doing, Thinking & Feeling**

We'll start off by focusing on the following three areas; what we are doing, thinking and feeling.

Either hand out print outs or write the three areas and questions on a board or pieces of flipchart paper.

Doing	Thinking	Feeling
What are you doing that might be harming your relationship with God and others? This may include sinful habits, language, or inaction. What are you not doing? not reading, praying, going to church regularly etc.	**What patterns of thinking might be harming your relationship with God and others?** This may include having the wrong priorities in life (e.g. money/power), having an unhealthy thought-life, or wrong view of God.	**What emotions might be harming your relationship with God and others?** This may include how we are feeling about others (distrust, coveting, unforgiveness), or things that others have said over us.

📌 *Put on some background music and allow between 5-10 minutes for young people to pray and make some notes.*

Emphasise again that the Holy Spirit may challenge us, but he doesn't come to condemn us or make us feel shame. His challenge is an invitation to a richer life where know him and others better.

Pray to introduce the time, invite God to come and highlight an area he wants to change.

📌 **Activity: Confession prayer station**

Setup a confession themed prayer station. Visit https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com for some great ideas.

We like the following:

- ***The Shredder***

Setup an office shredder with the following Bible verse in front of it:
1 John 1:9 " If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Encourage the participants to write down on pieces of paper those areas of sin they want to surrender to God. They can then place them in the shredder as a symbol of surrendering them to God. (Be aware this activity is noisy so can be distracting if you want to create a peaceful atmosphere).

- ***The Cross***

You'll need a large wooden cross, post-it notes, pins and pens

Col 2:13-14 "You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross."

Similar to the shredder, you can encourage participants to write down prayers of confession on post-it notes and pin/nail them to the cross.

Get Feedback
God might highlight some sensitive areas during this activity, so it could be a good idea to split into smaller same-sex groups for this time of feedback. Invite the participants to share any reflections they had from the activity if they want to. It could help if a team member goes first to set an example but don't put any pressure on participants to share.

Conclusion & Challenge [2 mins]

Jesus called his followers to live like him and to be holy like him. We call this having good character and integrity. Having integrity means our character is not only good in the areas that other people can see but in all parts of our life. We can't do this by effort alone but as we get closer to Jesus and learn to live in line with His Spirit, there will be more fruit of the spirit in our lives.

Challenge:

This week's challenge is to work through an area God has challenged you on using the Circle activity and to talk about a plan with your mentor.

> ***Pray to end the session***