

# NEW TITLE MENTORING FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

## INTRODUCTION

Most students currently enrolled in New Life studies come from a background of secular institutions in which many undesirable academic and social habits were developed. In New Life adults are admonished to develop the character qualities of Christ. In fact, this has equal importance with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills they will be gaining. The fact is that a student who only has “head” knowledge is not a complete student. If knowledge alone were enough to make a student successful, countries like America, where Christian literature abounds, would be as close to Christ-like perfection as is humanly possible. But you don’t have to look very deep to find out this is not true. Nor is advanced education in the greatest institutions known to man today the answer. Studies have even shown that churches whose pastors hold doctor’s degrees are actually slightly less successful than those with lower education! How can this be?! The answer is simple: their education made them a one-sided person.

As a coach you have heard the New Life motto repeated many times by now: “**know, be, do.**” Each of these elements is important in total person training, but today I would like to emphasize the second of those three words—“**BE.**” Socrates reminds us, “The first key to greatness is to be in reality what we appear to be.” We know that character is a concept that is nearly extinct in the world today. That is not a surprise. What is shocking is how hard we have to look to find it in *Christian* circles.

Sixty distinct character traits have been identified in the life of Jesus. They include tolerance, compassion, contentment, diligence, and many more. The list goes on and on. These sixty character traits and definitions are listed under 09.GP5-7SM. Conforming students to those traits requires more than attending bi-weekly seminars. It requires a consistent and conscientiously coordinated effort at home, church, and New Life activities. Moses understood how important it was to involve character development in all areas of life when he wrote what is known as the *Shemah*. Even today the *Shemah* is an important part of Jewish religious tradition. In our Bibles it is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Let’s read that passage together:

DT 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* 5 *Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* 6 *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* 7 *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* 8 *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* 9 *Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

## I. DEVELOPING CHARACTER

The basic philosophy necessary to develop a balanced adult is found in Colossians 2:7.

COL 2:7 *...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

### A. He must be properly planted (Psalm 1 and Luke 6:43-45)

We read that a person is to be “rooted” in Christ. But what does that mean?! How do you plant a person properly? How can you help him have good roots? Psalm 1 is a beautiful passage that sheds some practical light on these questions. Verse 3 tells us about a blessed man. It says:

PS 1:3 *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Who is this person that we are reading about? What is this river that gives him continual strength? That’s what the first two verses in this psalm talk about. Let’s look at them now.

#### 1. Stay away from harmful influences.

PS 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Pregnant mothers are careful to avoid certain types of medicine or even coffee; because they understand that they need to protect their child from harmful influences even though it has not yet been born. The first thing we read in this passage is that the Christian who wants to be strong and fruitful avoids the advice of the ungodly. He avoids the places where people who reject God's ways, and he avoids the behavior of the scornful. This is one of the most basic things you can start helping your students with.

## 2. *Delight in the law of the Lord.*

PS 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night.

The river that feeds the righteous man is the Bible. But did you notice we are talking about more than a trickle? This isn't just a small mountain stream; it's a whole river. We aren't just talking about forcing students to half-heartedly read their Bibles a few minutes every day. They need to be motivated so that reading the Bible will become the burning desire of their heart--a delight.

It's interesting to look at the remainder of the chapter:

PS 1:4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

PS 1:5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

PS 1:6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself the difference between the wicked and the righteous? They are the ones who do the opposite to what is good. And what is the result of their lack of character? It's hard to think of a stronger contrast than between a tall, unmovable oak and the chaff buffeted about by the wind, almost completely unnoticed.

## B. He must be built up in the faith

There is another passage of Scripture that talks about this need to be well planted.

LK 6:46 *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. 49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."*

Now let's try reading verses 46-49 again, with one small change. This time we'll replace the words "house" with "student," "earth" with "humanism," and "rock" with "Christ's teaching."

*"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a student, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on Christ's teaching. When a flood came, the torrent struck that student but could not shake him, because he was well built. 49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a student on humanism without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that student, he collapsed and his destruction was complete."*

Humanism is a way of thinking that puts man at the center of the universe. Allowing a little humanism here and there weakens the foundation. A little self-centeredness, and we start to see cracks appearing in the walls of the building. Without changing the meaning of the verse, we've come to understand it in a whole new, personal way.

## C. He must have a proper reservoir from which to continually draw life

But in order for your students to become people of integrity, people of character, more must happen than reading their Bibles once a day or doing the next New Life lesson. You, as the coach, must make each lesson come alive in a practical way in the present-day village life of your student. You must fill their empty reservoirs until they flow over and affect all areas of their lives.

PHP 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

## D. He must fill his treasure chest

LK 6:43 *“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>44</sup> Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. <sup>45</sup> The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.*

Do you see what these verses are saying? A man’s heart is like a treasure chest. It contains good things. What value is a treasure chest that contains no treasure? It is worth nothing. Its value comes from the treasure it contains. And a treasure chest will only contain treasures if someone puts them in there in the first place. A treasure chest full of rotten apples isn’t going to do anyone a whole lot of good. As a matter of fact, we wouldn’t call it a treasure chest anymore; we would call it a garbage can.

### 1. **Choosing positive instead of negative input**

The apostle Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That takes place when we replace a student’s old thoughts with new ones.

For example, we can replace negative input with positive input at church. This is why we have the exposition of the Scriptures on Sunday morning: we come together and hear once again what the truth really is. It is not that what everyone is telling us is true; those philosophies are wrecking people’s lives. Another key place for replacing negative input with positive input is the bi-weekly discussion seminar; there students learn what the truth is, what really helps and heals and works.

A student’s mind is renewed in his personal Bible study when he sits down with the Word of God. When he is confused and doesn’t know where he is at in life, then he can renew his mind by reading a passage and thinking it through and letting the Word speak to his heart. He goes back to his routine determined that his life will be in line with the Word of God. That is the way it should be! Has he learned these skills from you? Have you demonstrated them? Do you practice them? Are you a coach who is making his students successful?

### 2. **Choosing conscious and subconscious conditioning**

Spending time with people of character is another way to gain positive influence. Workshops are a terrific help to coaches, so are the regular team meetings. Don’t miss out on them!

We need to evaluate our lives frequently, comparing them to the character traits we see listed in the Bible. Think about how your students are doing in each of those areas. What area is their weakest? What steps can you take to help them improve that area? A Daily Character Planner is one tool that can help with this, (see 09.GP5-7SM). But its power will be greatly decreased if you don’t help your students to prepare ahead of time, thinking about what areas they really need to work on.

### 3. **Principle of “Treasure Chest” input/output**

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart. The more good things he has stored up the more good things he can bring out. This is a principle that has been proved true: bad movies do have a negative impact on people; likewise Bible memorization has a very positive impact. As a coach set an example and do not slack off assisting and verifying your students with their Bible memorization projects in the various New Life materials. There are two principles here. There must be input before there can be output. And the more input provided the more output is possible.

### 4. **Diligence — praise — diligence — praise cycle**

Motivate students to do diligent work. When a student does something good (no matter how little), lavish praise on him. Praise produces diligent work, which in turn receives praise, which produces diligence, and so on in an endless cycle. During each discussion seminar find items of praise for various individual students. Be specific when offering praise. Praise struggling students, they need it the most.

### 5. **Omissions filled with Christ-centered input.**

Unbelievers are involved in **committing** sins. Believers are often guilty of sins of omission. After salvation a student’s character often displays glaring areas of neglect. Blind spots are common. Christ’s specific command therefore was to teach them “all things.” New Life materials with Christ-centered input from you, the coach round out a person until his character is “above reproach.”

### 6. **Choosing a diet of wholesome food instead of “junk food.”**

When teenagers eat lots of potato chips and candy bars, we expect to see a lot of pimples popping up on their faces and to see that they are acting lethargic. But those whose parents give them a careful diet of nutritious vegetables and fruits are a picture of glowing health and vigor.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a famous American poet who lived a century and a half ago, said, “Character gives splendor to youth, and awe to wrinkled skin and gray hairs.” So many of the decisions that affect character are tiny. Watch TV or go for a walk? Read a novel or help in the kitchen? Read the news or tell the kids a Bible story before bed? But it doesn’t take long till the effect of wrong choices builds up, just like dust covers a beautiful painting. We need to be careful to choose to build with precious stones.

## **II. THE EFFECT OF BALANCED CHRISTIAN TRAINING ON A STUDENT’S LIFE**

As you help your student to develop the character traits of Christ, this will influence every area of his life. He will not only know more and have developed and refined his ministry skills, he will be a man who can live out what he has learned and what he is preaching and teaching to others.

### **A. At work**

When the student’s mind is transformed by the Spirit of God, he no longer looks at people the way he used to. A student then sees a man as a person, even though he has been a crotchety, grouchy, old boss whom the student thought was out to make every moment of his life unpleasant. The student begins to see that this man is a person with an ulcer, a man who has his own problems and troubles, and one whom he needs to help. A student becomes tuned into the spiritual side of people’s needs, and can respond to that instead of to their actions.

A student begins to see that money and material things are no longer as important as they once seemed to be. The big thing in his life no longer becomes the matter of whether he can close this deal and make so much money, but whether he will do it in a way that honors and glorifies his Lord and his God—whether he makes money or not. That is a sign of a man who cannot only preach but can also live the gospel.

### **B. In the home**

#### **1. *Come into a proper relationship with wife and children.***

As the student begins to work on areas like humility, alertness, and flexibility, he will begin to respond to the needs of his family instead of just centering on his own needs. He will take the proper leadership in his home and give an example that his children will be eager to follow.

Can you imagine what this will mean to your student’s wife and children? The wife is going to faint when her husband comes home from a long day of work and says, “Honey, can I do the dishes for you?” His children will be squealing with delight when, instead of plopping down in front of the TV, he asks them if they want to play a game with him.

#### **2. *Desire to live from God’s point of view.***

As you continue to work with your student you will begin to see character qualities being developed in his life. All of the academic courses that he has been taking will begin to influence the way he looks at the world and life. The influences of a humanistic philosophy will change to a Christian worldview. This in turn will enable him to train his children in the ways of godliness instead of leaving them to struggle with atheistic philosophies from school.

### **C. In the church and Ministry**

Your student is going to start having proper respect for those who have authority over him. Maybe this means his pastor and elders, or perhaps his coach.

Wouldn't you love to have students who always wrote neatly, completed all their assignments, and turned in everything on time! Just think how good it would make you look as a coach. If the student is learning to be like Christ through you, how can he help but try to do his best in everything. Instead of having to threaten him to get any work done, he will become a humble person who hungers for righteousness and wisdom.

And you can be sure that his pastor and his wife will be encouraging him to do his best. They can see what a difference it makes to their lives when he learns character!

## D. Through Practical Assignments

### 1. *He will be able to develop a proper perspective of the centrality of God.*

Discipling is a slow process; it takes time. Church-based training keeps the student in the middle of everyday life. This combination provides an ideal way to develop a God-centered lifestyle. His daily home studies and the bi-weekly discussion seminars help him to develop a God-consciousness which pervades his whole life. Later new materials applied to new life experiences help him to develop even more deeply the proper perspective on the centrality of God.

### 2. *He will be able to relate scripture to daily life.*

The heavy emphasis throughout the New Life materials on scripture and the regular applications required in them enables the student to relate scripture to daily life and develop a truly Bible-based ethic and family lifestyle.

### 3. *He will be able to use the diligence-praise cycle.*

Through active mentoring by the coach the student will assimilate and emulate the coach's lifestyle. He will learn to discuss, he will learn the 'sandwich' approach and he will learn the diligence-praise cycle. His lifestyle will change from a negative mode into one of a positive encouraging one. As he uses praise with others they will become more diligent. Others will want to be with him, associate with him and work under him. His praise-diligence cycle will earn him the credibility to be a discipler of men.

## CONCLUSION

You are involved in the spiritual ministry of growing church leaders. Every time you lead a New Life group, you are giving them the head knowledge they need to be successful. When they do their practical assignments, they are involved in learning how to use some of this material in real life. But they will not be balanced students unless they also develop in character. Spiritual work is not something you can do because you know more than somebody else, or because you have practiced certain skills. The success comes in "who you are." Are your students seeking to become like Christ in every aspect of their inner life? Are you helping them to do that? Are you challenging them to develop character qualities?

Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Everyone faces different challenges. God wants to bring healing to all areas of our lives. He wants to give us pleasant relations with everyone, to make us smarter, to give us peace. He wants to, but we have to start thinking like He does. We have to start reacting His way. We have to start developing His character. This is where we learn that the methods of the Christian are not rivalry and competition, but obedience to the Word of God and a heart that expects God to do something. Then life becomes exciting. God wants your life at work and at home to be exciting, even with this constant battle around you, so that you might understand how to live and overcome and conquer in the name of Jesus.

With Christ all things are possible. We are more than conquerors. You can do it. You can make sure that your students are balanced in their learning. Your students depend upon it. The church depends upon it. The future generation depends upon it. The country depends upon it. Yes, you can do it. Yes, with Christ all things are possible. Yes, we are more than conquerors.

Amen and amen!

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

*Practical assignment*

- 1. Write out a plan to encourage your students in their character development. Begin to implement it and bring a report including the plan and some of the results you have seen (if any fruit has already appeared).

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