

Section Two

Spiritual Formation: Developing Godly Character

SYLLABUS

DESCRIPTION:

This is the second course in our program of “Spiritual Formation,” and it addresses a subject which is absolutely essential to the success of any person’s ministry. Without godly character no one can produce good “fruit” (Mt 7:17, 18). So a person’s character is the foundation upon which their calling and gifting rest.

OBJECTIVES:

This course is designed to do three things:

1. Define those qualities which make up a godly character.
2. Enable the student to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses within their own character.
3. Develop a plan to improve those areas that are weak and form a plan to maintain personal spiritual health for a lifetime.

FORMAT:

Classes should meet for one hour and ten minutes on a weekly basis for 12 sessions. Class meetings will consist of video lecture from Steve Schell and include small peer group discussions.

TEXTS:

Cole, Neil. *Cultivating a Life for God*. Colorado Springs, CMA Resources, 1999, 128 pages.

Schell, Steve. *A Strategy for Developing the Spiritual Health of a Congregation*. 1983. pp. 1-94.

TEXTS FOR PERSONAL PROJECT (choose one):

Cordeiro, Wayne. *The Divine Mentor: Growing Your Faith as You Sit at the Feet of the Savior*. Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 2007, 240 pages.

Franklin, Jentezen. *Fasting*. Lake Mary, Charisma House, 2008, 240 pages.

Schell, Steve. “Our Daily Bread.” Audio sermon. Listen at:

<https://www.lifelessonsublishing.com/copy-of-essential-doctrines>

Or go to link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UM1riYTnpNZmE6ozbo31VqAa7Lb26-E4/view?usp=share_link

Schell, Steve. "Learning to Rest." Audio Sermon. Listen at:

<https://www.lifelessonsublishing.com/copy-of-essential-doctrines>

Or go to link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fsxbOm3uPbywxOW4A7D6AwNFKVylz2PC/view?usp=share_link

Schell, Steve. "Working and Resting." Audio Sermon. Listen at:

<https://www.lifelessonsublishing.com/copy-of-essential-doctrines>

Or go to link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hquT3jfmXLjtX86-vKgRFZc176_YbV1l/view?usp=share_link

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

1. A reflective, one-page typed book report on the course textbook *Cultivating a Life for God*. This report shall contain a brief summary of the book and how it has impacted your life.
2. Read pp. 1-94 of "A Strategy for Developing the Spiritual Health of the Congregation" and answer the discussion questions found in your course materials in preparation for group discussion (access article at: <https://www.lifelessonsublishing.com/copy-of-essential-doctrines>).
3. Each report will include your name, date submitted, name of the course and name of the individual book studied.

PERSONAL PROJECTS AND REFLECTION:

- Select one of the optional texts, read the book and answer the questions found in your course materials.
- Develop your personal plan for developing disciplines into your life including a schedule and the disciplines you have built into your life. Please include the discussion questions found at the end of your course materials.
- As you read through the course materials and work through the exercises, please set aside your own quiet time to reflect on what you believe God is speaking to you.

FORMAT FOR RESPONSE REPORT:

(One report is required for each of four texts in Reading Assignments)

- Type double spaced with 1-inch margins. Not to exceed two pages. No title page.
- Name
- Class Name & #
- Date

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ENTRY:

Last name, First name. *Title*. Publishing Place, Publisher, Date, # of pages. If a second line is needed, it should be indented.

CONTENT SUMMARY AND IMPORTANCE:

Give a short summary of the contents of the book in the following order:

- The most important lesson I learned.
- How does it apply to my call?

INTRODUCTION

God's call is something we hear. His gifts are something we discover. But godly character is something we develop because everyone faces temptation, and everyone has weaknesses. Longevity in ministry is based on knowing how to reduce the opportunities for temptation and how to respond when it comes. Everyone who steps out in ministry for the Lord will face temptation, so each of us must build into our daily lives disciplines that will strengthen us spiritually before temptations arrive. This is what Jesus was trying to teach His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mt 26:41).

In other words, we should never assume we are above temptation; that type of pride will always lead to a fall. In fact, effective ministry will stir up more temptation, not less. The enemy will try to cause us to stumble in order to stop the damage we are causing to his kingdom. But God has provided everything we will need to walk in victory. So the goal of this class is not simply to assess your character in terms of strengths and weaknesses but to introduce you to some foundational spiritual disciplines so that as you reflect on your personal needs, you can develop a customized plan for yourself. Please recognize this truth: no matter where you start in your walk as a disciple, because of the resources Jesus Christ has given you, you can stay spiritually healthy for the rest of your life.

DEFINING CHARACTER

Our "character" is built one choice at a time. You might define character as the habits we've formed over the years. When confronted with certain situations, each person develops patterns in the way they respond. As time goes on, we react more and more instinctively without even thinking about what we are doing. The process begins during the first months and years of a child's life. Daily circumstances confront each child with choices such as whether to lie or not to lie, to share or not to share, to wait patiently or be demanding, or to be bold or to be afraid.

And, of course, we all grew up in very different environments. Some children grow up with parents who train them well. Good choices are encouraged and bad choices are disciplined. But others are raised by parents who themselves have bad character. So when we come to Christ, we begin our walk of discipleship in very different places. One person might have a long history of making bad choices. Some bad habits may have become deeply embedded, so now that person must go through the painful process of radically redirecting those areas of their character. Others may have come to Christ with less "baggage." Yet no one escapes the discipline of the Lord (Prov 3:11, 12). He accepts us just as we are but then immediately begins His fatherly work of moving us toward His ultimate goal: becoming like His beloved Son.

ONE COMMON STANDARD

One common standard for godly character has been set for all of us. Put simply, every believer is to become like Jesus Christ. Paul says God decided this even before He created the human race. Listen:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (Ro 8:29).

This means every believer can expect to be in a process of constant change because the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in us refining us to look like Jesus. There are, of course, many different cultures around the world, so how we express godly character may look different from one culture to the next, but in the end, it is the heart and character of Jesus into which we are all being molded. For example, no one can say, "In my culture, lying is acceptable, so as a Christian I can still lie." Regardless of what our culture may approve of, since Jesus didn't lie and commanded His disciples to be people of our word (Mt 5:33-37), than neither can we. And this simple test can be applied to every area of our attitudes and behaviors which means our standards for godly character will be much higher than the standards found in human culture.

OUR SOURCE

There is only one source to which we can turn to discover these standards and that is the Word of God. So part of this course will include surveying the New Testament as objectively as possible to discern which character qualities the Lord considers to be the most important. Then we will try to define these in practical, observable terms, and finally, we will evaluate our own character by using a "spiritual health inventory" but also by prayerfully allowing the Holy Spirit to highlight areas needing our attention.

A FAIR ASSESSMENT

People vary widely on how they view themselves. Some are more tolerant toward themselves, while others are highly critical of nearly everything they do. They question every motive. If you were to ask such a person who is highly critical of themselves to evaluate their own character, they might tell you they are the worst of sinners. While their zeal is admirable, their harsh

assessment is not. By attributing wrong motives to everything they do, they deny the positive things God has done in them. After all, Paul says,

He who began a good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Php 1:6).

If indeed "...it is God who is at work in [us], both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Php 2:13), then it's virtually impossible for a true believer not to have made progress toward Christlikeness. In order to maintain a proper perspective toward ourselves, we need to give thanks for the good as much as we need to acknowledge the bad. A fair assessment of both our strengths and weaknesses will awaken hope that those areas where we are weak can change.

CONVICTION VS CONDEMNATION

The Holy Spirit regularly shows us our sin so we can repent and not fall under its control. But the Bible calls the devil the "accuser of our brethren" (Rev 12:10), not only because he tempts us to sin but because once we commit the sin, he turns and shames us for our failure. He brings condemnation, not conviction. He wants to produce in us self-loathing and hopelessness which in turn strips us of our confidence in prayer and makes us want to hide from God. So as we enter this process of self-evaluation, it becomes very important to keep in mind the distinction between condemnation and conviction. All of us will recognize weak areas in ourselves, but if that awareness leads to condemnation, the process will have been a failure. Instead, our goal should be to recognize areas where we are vulnerable to temptation so we can develop disciplines which will enable us to find victory over those temptations. In other words, we are taking an honest look at ourselves so that we can walk in freedom, and the call God has placed on our lives will not be hindered by flaws in our character.

A FIRM FOUNDATION

There are few things more heartbreaking than to watch someone with a clear calling and strong gifting become disqualified because of ungodly character. This need not happen to anyone. The Bible promises us that God "...is able to keep [us] from falling and to make [us] stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jd 24), but it also says we must willingly participate in that process. Godly character is not achieved by being passive. It's not something God does to us without our involvement. Paul said,

...I discipline my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified (1 Cor 9:7).

Without the power of the Holy Spirit, no human is able to withstand the temptations of the enemy or resist forever the impulses and appetites that surge within our bodies (Gal 5:16-21). But by drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit, we can indeed put to death the deeds of the flesh (Ro 8:12, 13). And this is a skill we can and must learn to put into practice. It isn't that some believers are strong by nature and some are weak; the real difference is some know how to draw on God's power to overcome temptation, and some don't.

A DISCIPLINED BELIEVER

Basically, a disciple is a disciplined believer. The two words obviously come from the same root. A person who disciplines their life to bring it into conformity with their teacher is called a “disciple,” and in our case our teacher is Jesus. We want to think as He thinks and do what He does, and for that to happen we will need to build into our lives certain disciplines such as prayer, Bible meditation, worship, and even fasting. Each of us needs to discover ways to build up our own spiritual health on a daily basis and to develop open, accountable relationships with other believers.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS

Read pages 1-94 of “A Strategy for Developing the Spiritual Health of the Congregation.”
Download on <https://www.lifelessonsublishing.com/copy-of-essential-doctrines>

Answer the following questions in preparation for small group discussion:

- Chapter One: Discuss the church as a building, a body and a bride.
 - a. What qualities are present in a healthy church? (p. 20)
 - b. Which of these qualities do you consider to be most important and why?
- Chapter Two (A): Spiritual Health Diagnosis: List the subjective indicators of spiritual health (pp. 28-50).
 - a. Explain what a “subjective indicator” is. (p. 25)
 - b. Pick one of these subjectiveto spiritual health indicators, explain what the term means and why it is important
 - c. Explain where you have seen this indicator at work in your own life.
- Chapter Two (B): Spiritual Health Diagnosis: List the behavioral indictors of spiritual health (pp. 52-75).
 - a. Explain what a “behavioral indicator” is. (p. 25)
 - b. Pick one of these behavioral indicators, explain what the term means and why it is important.
 - c. Explain where you have seen this indicator at work in your own life.
- Take the Spiritual Health Diagnosis evaluation. (pp. 77-85)
 - a. Answer questions 1-80 to the best of your ability, don’t overthink your responses. (pp. 81-85)
 - b. Fill in the numerical value of your responses on the grid. (p. 86)
- Graph your results on p. 87 (Definitions are found on pp. 88-90). Be prepared to discuss which health indicators are high and which are low. What did you discover about your own character?

BOOK REPORT: *Cultivating a Life for God*—Neil Cole

Type a one-page report which contains a brief overview of the important concepts found in this book. The second part of this report should discuss the impact this material has made on your life and should also contain a plan to implement this information into your life.

PERSONAL PROJECT

Choose one of the following topics: being mentored by the Scriptures, fasting, keeping the Sabbath. Read or listen to the course material that corresponds to the subject you have chosen. Answer the following questions in a typed document containing both the questions and your answer.

- What is the basic premise of the material you have read or reviewed?
- What are the Biblical disciplines taught?
- Which of these disciplines are most needed in your life?
- How are you going to implement them into your life?
- How will this make you more effective in Christian service?

PERSONAL PLAN FOR DISCIPLINE

Please submit a typed plan containing the following information:

- Your weekly schedule, which is to include your devotional times, church activities, work schedule, leisure activities and rest.
- Indicate those changes you have made in your schedule as a result of this class.
- What new spiritual disciplines have you implemented into your life and why?
- Answer the discussion questions at the end of this document.

Remember, this is the “ideal” pattern, and interruptions will occur. That’s normal. Schedules can be changed. You’re writing it on paper or electronically, not carving it in stone. But a good schedule is very helpful. It helps us put into action the disciplines we want in our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the areas in which you are the most vulnerable to temptation? This list can be kept private if you desire.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. What are your daily spiritual disciplines? What patterns have you built into your days and weeks to help you stay spiritually healthy?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. Describe what you do during your “quiet time” with God.

4. How has being in an L.T.G. helped you?

5. Is this a discipline you will continue to use in the future? If so, why? If not, why not?

6. Did you use fasting as a personal discipline before taking this course? If so, how has it helped you?

7. Did you participate in a “trial fast” during this course? If so, describe what you did and did not eat and drink, and how long you chose to fast.

8. What did you learn about yourself during your fast?

- Physically

- Spiritually

Did your ability to pray improve or decline? Why do you think happened?

Would you consider using fasting again in the future? Why or why not?

8. Let's suppose you suddenly experience a very strong temptation, and it doesn't seem to let go. What steps would you take to gain freedom from it?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

James 5:16 speaks of confessing our sins to one another. If you did something that needed to be confessed, to whom would you go? Why that person?

9. If you struggle with a long-term addiction, what steps are essential for you to walk in freedom?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

Where or when do you tend to experience this temptation?

How can you avoid that situation?

10. Have you ever watched someone's ungodly character hinder their ministry? Without naming names, what happened?

How were other people affected?

CLASS SCHEDULE

Classes are scheduled weekly for one hour and ten minutes.

It is best to read the assigned material early in the course to help you with the process of reflection. However, all reading must be completed before the course ends, and book response report must be submitted to the instructor. All videos are found at the Life Lessons Publishing website:

Week 1

Class Assignment: Introduction by instructors

Homework: Read Chapter 1: A Theology of Spiritual Health

Reading: "A Strategy for Developing the Spiritual Health of the Congregation" pp. 1-21

- Answer the study questions in the syllabus

Week 2

Class Assignment: Watch "Real Repentance."

Group Discussion: Study questions for video

Homework: Read Chapter 2A: Development of a Spiritual Health Diagnosis

- Identify subjective indicators, pp. 24-50
- Answer study questions in the syllabus

Week 3

Class Assignment: Watch Steps to Freedom Part 1: "A Changed Heart."

Group Discussion: Review study questions for video

Homework: Read Chapter 2B: Development of a Spiritual Health Diagnosis

- Identify Behavioral Indicators, pp. 52-75
- Answer the study questions in the syllabus

Week 4

Group Discussion: A Strategy for Developing the Spiritual Health of the Congregation

- Chapter One: Recognition; Repentance; Repositioning
- Chapter One: Metaphors for the church: building, body, bride
- Chapter Two: Subjective indicators of Spiritual Health
- Chapter Two: Behavioral indicators of Spiritual Health
- Review study questions for Chapters one and two

Homework: Take the Spiritual Health Diagnosis evaluation, pp. 77-85

Graph your answers on p. 87

Week 5

Class Assignment: Watch Steps to Freedom Part 2: “The Real Question”

Group Discussion: Discuss study questions for video

Homework: Review your results and diagnosis definitions, pp. 88-90

Week 6

Group Discussion: Spiritual Health Diagnosis

- Review the definitions of the indicators, pp. 88-90
- Which of your Spiritual Health Indicators are high?
- Which of your Spiritual Health Indicators are low?
- What did you discover that might help you develop a godly character?

Homework: Begin reading: *Cultivating a Life for God*

Week 7

Class Assignment: Watch Steps to Freedom Part 3: “The Power of Vision”

Group Discussion: Discuss study questions for video

Homework: Continue reading *Cultivating a Life for God*

Week 8

Class Assignment: Watch Steps to Freedom Part 4: “It’s an Outside Battle”

Group Discussion: Discuss study questions for video

Homework: Begin work on “Personal Project”

Book Report Due: *Cultivating a Life for God*

Week 9

Class Assignment: Watch Steps to Freedom Part 5: “Flee Don’t Fight”

Group Discussion: Discuss study questions for video

Homework: Continue to work on your “Personal Project”

Week 10

Class Assignment: Watch Steps to Freedom” Part 6: “Cleanse the Leaven”

Group Discussion: Discuss study questions for video

Homework: Finish working on your “Personal Project”

Week 11

Group Discussion: Discuss your “Personal Project”

- Which project did you choose and why?
- What did you learn from your study?
- How will this help you develop godly character?

Homework: Prepare your weekly schedule

- Identify the disciplines you are building into your life
- Answer the discussion questions 1-10

Personal Project Due

Week 12

Group Discussion: “My Character Development Plan”

- Share the disciplines you are implementing into your life and your weekly schedule
- Review the discussion questions 1-10

My Plan Due

- Turn in your “Personal Schedule”
- Turn in disciplines you have built into your life