

Character Matters

7 things the Lord hates



Leader's Guide

A Study for Lent

Based on Proverbs 6:16-19 (NRSV)

2021



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OVERVIEW

For about a dozen years, first at Hopewell UMC in Downingtown, PA, and now on the North District of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, District Superintendent Rev. Steven C. Morton has followed a vision of creating fresh, affordable, intelligent Bible Study curriculum for the local church, employing the teaching skill of Elder colleagues in the EPC.

This brand new study for the Season of Lent 2021, *Character Matters*, flows from the language of Proverbs 6:16-19. Study participants will journey through the “seven things the Lord hates,” moving each student toward confession of the sinful practice/tendency... and challenging disciples toward a personal and corporate character which is far more holy! Intended to begin the week of Ash Wednesday, this study in seven sessions addresses the “seven things the Lord hates.” Session eight of the curriculum is a post-Easter word of encouragement from Bishop Peggy Johnson.

Character Matters has been designed to be conducted in a group setting, either virtually online or in an in-class environment. No “homework” is required of participants. Study materials include a video presentation of each of the sessions consisting of an introduction, scripture reading, and lesson presentation. As group leader, your role will be to facilitate the group sessions using the video presentations and the corresponding worksheets included in this Leader’s Guide. The study makes use of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

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SUGGESTED FORMAT

Each of the eight sessions will require a minimum of 60 minutes. You may find, however, that your group prefers a slower pace, or to accommodate larger groups, that scheduling a 90 minute block of time better fits your needs.

Gathering of the group

Opening prayer

Brief verbal introduction to the session's topic

Video presentation

Group response and conversation

Worksheet exercises (three small groups)

Reassemble for full group discussion

Announcements

Closing prayer



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VIDEO STUDY SESSIONS

- Session 1 - Rev. Alicia M. Julia-Stanley, Shamokin: First UMC
Haughty Eyes: the battle of pride vs. humility
Biblical narrative: II Chronicles 26 - *Uzziah's Hubris*
- Session 2 - Rev. Daniel G. Herner, Berne: Salem-Berne UMC
A Lying Tongue: when falsehood trumps truthful speech
Biblical narrative: Acts 5: 1-11 - *Ananias and Sapphira: Killer Lies*
- Session 3 - Rev. John J. Keretzman II, Canadensis UMC and Mountainhome UMC
A Heart that Devises Wicked Plans: duplicity and collusion instead of purity
Biblical narrative: Genesis 4: 1-16 - *Cain and Abel: Wicked Inclination*
- Session 4 - Rev. Jennifer S. Freymoyer, Shoemakersville: Salem UMC
Feet that Hurry to Run to Evil: our bent toward the dark side above our eagerness to do good
Biblical narrative: Acts 19: 21-41 - *The Unthinking Mob*
- Session 5 - Rev. Robin G. Fisher, Effort UMC
A Lying Witness Who Testifies Falsely: perjury vs. honesty in legal and civil matters
Biblical narrative: I Kings 21: 1-16 - *Jezebel's Scoundrels: Justice Perverted*
- Session 6 - Rev. Richard K. Brown II, Hellerton: St. Paul UMC
One Who Sows Discord in a Family: contentiousness vs. peaceful harmony
Biblical narrative: Numbers 12 - *Sibling Rivalry: A Family at Odds*
- Session 7 - Rev. Paul R. Crikelair, Cherry Valley UMC and Poplar Valley UMC
Hands That Shed Innocent Blood: tolerating violence and murder rather than preservation of life
Biblical narrative: II Samuel 11 - *David and Uriah: This Man was Innocent*
- Post Easter
- Session 8 - Bishop Peggy A. Johnson, Eastern Pennsylvania Conference and Peninsula-Delaware Conference, United Methodist Church
Resurrection Power Moves Us to Life and Godliness
Biblical text: II Peter 1: 2-11 - *Seven Things God LOVES*



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SESSION 1

Haughty Eyes (Proverbs 6:17)

II Chronicles 26 - "Uzziah's Hubris"

- 1. Talkback with Pastor Alicia** - After such remarkable success, what led to King Uzziah's downfall? What important life-lesson is the remembrance of his leprosy intended to teach? How do we today convey arrogance or humility with our eyes?
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - Some of us may not be comfortable talking about our loving God having a list of "hates" - but the Hebrew prophets were not so reluctant. Review Psalm 11:5, Jeremiah 12:8, Hosea 9:15, Amos 5:21, Zechariah 8:17, and Malachi 2:16 for evidence of God's hatred. How does the image of an angry God inform our practice of repentance?
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:3) Scriptures throughout the Bible warn against pride, and encourage humility instead (II Samuel 22:28, Obadiah 1:4, Habakkuk 2:4, Zephaniah 3:11, Matthew 23:12, Romans 12:16, Galatians 6:3). How do we call down those in authority who act *high-handedly* (Numbers 15:30) and with obvious arrogance? What have been the best practices or most efficient influencers in helping maintain your own modesty?



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SESSION 2

A Lying Tongue (Proverbs 6:17)

Acts 5:1-11— "Ananias and Sapphira: Killer Lies"

- 1. Talkback with Pastor Dan** - Identify from memory any instances in the Hebrew Scriptures (O.T.) where disobedience to God brought death. Do you think Ananias and Sapphira were compulsive liars? Did they die in order to prevent them from further sinning or was God teaching the church something through their death? A phrase often heard between parents & children or in many other relationships is "*I was not being completely honest*" (not telling the whole truth). Discuss situations where that is possible. Is it the same as lying? What does James 3:5-13 warn about the tongue and good character?
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - The Book of Proverbs has much to say about lying and deceit. Review these passages: 10:18, 12:19, 12:22, 17:7, 21:6, 26:28. In life, have you found that habitual liars generally do get their comeuppance? What have been the best practices or most effective influencers in helping you to avoid a lying tongue?
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:10) Truth-telling can bring us enemies or prevent us from "rewards" which are attractive to others. In what ways have you experienced the blessing of truth-telling which was hard? What are the negative consequences in organizations (families, businesses, local churches, entire nations) where deceit is tolerated?



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SESSION 3

A Heart That Devises Wicked Plans (Proverbs 6:18)

Genesis 4:1-16 — "Cain and Abel: Wicked Inclination"

- 1. Talkback with Pastor John** - Identify those critical moments in Cain's descent into anger and aggression. What is the role of confession in preventing us from spiraling into similar patterns? Jesus identifies twelve *evil intentions* which flow from the human heart in Mark 7:21-23; have any of these messed up your church, your family, your workplace?
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - Wisdom literature in the Bible often seems to promise that evil schemers will be thwarted in their efforts and punished accordingly. Review Proverbs 12:2, Job 5:12, and Psalm 10:2. How fully have you experienced this to be true?
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.*" (Matthew 5:8) Apparently we are not naturally pre-disposed toward this pure heart, however! Discuss our United Methodist confession about Original Sin: "*It is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is far gone from original righteousness, and by his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.*" (UM Book of Discipline, p, 67) How we do develop this *pure heart* which successfully resists the temptation to devise wicked plans?



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SESSION 4

Feet That Hurry to Run to Evil (Proverbs 6:18)

Acts 19:21-41 —“The Unthinking Mob”

- 1. Talkback with Pastor Jenny** - What factors lead to the “angry crowd” behavior of folks in church? What is the impact of confusion (or even blatantly false information) in creating a mob mentality? Can you think of an occasion when Romans 7:15 was your only real alibi, personally? Cite examples of persons in your experience who, like the “town clerk” (Acts 19:35), used reason and calm to disarm an otherwise destructive movement of people.
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - Proverbs 4:26-27 advises the listener to walk in a straight path. Ephesians 4:1-3 describes some of the characteristics of that walk. How do we develop holy feet, rather than wayward feet? What are the best practices which slow down our tendency to run to evil? What is the role of the faith community in making disciples of Jesus Christ whose feet support a message of peace, good news, and salvation for all (Isaiah 52:7)?
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*” (Matthew 5:6) Social media, for all of its advantages, is also a frequent trap for some who hurry to run to evil (cf. James 1:19) Discuss some of the other realities of modern life which contribute to our temptation toward misbehavior and mischief. What are the rewards of leaning in to *righteousness*, instead of succumbing to momentary temptation?



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SESSION 5

A Lying Witness Who Testifies Falsely (Proverbs 6:19)

I Kings 21:1-16 — "Jezebel's Scoundrels: Justice Perverted"

- 1. Talkback with Pastor Robin** - What do we usually intend to infer when we call a woman "a Jezebel?" Describe Jezebel's abuse of the Israeli legal system as recorded in I Kings 21. What is your feeling about the work of The Innocence Project in contemporary America?
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - The Book of Proverbs repeatedly condemns the *false witness* (cf. 12:17, 14:5 & 25, 19:5 & 9), perhaps reflecting the strong language of Deuteronomy 19:15-21. What has been your experience of the American legal system? How can the Church help to *purge evil* (v. 19) from the system, and truly promote liberty and justice for all?
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*" (Matthew 5:5) Land disputes are a recurring challenge in the Hebrew court system - cf. Deuteronomy 19:14 & 27:17, Isaiah 5:8, Hosea 5:10, Job 24:2, Proverbs 22:28. Have you ever been involved in any difficult land disputes or inheritance claims? How does one remain "*meek*" in the midst of such controversy?



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SESSION 6

One Who Sows Discord in a Family (Proverbs 6:19)

Numbers 12 — "Sibling Rivalry: A Family at Odds"

- 1. Talkback with Pastor Rick** - Describe how harmony within a family reflects God's intention for the Church and can be a foretaste of heaven. What are the issues which cause separation and strain among Moses, Aaron, and Miriam in Numbers 12? Have you known any family conflicts on earth which seemingly can only be healed with Divine intervention? Have you known any persons (or perhaps been a person) who is particularly gifted in mediation which leads to family harmony?
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - The Book of Proverbs includes many and varied prescriptions for family life (cf. 12:4, 13:24, 15:27, 17:1, 17:6, 19:13, 20:20, 21:9 22:6). Which ones stand up across time? Which ones may need some adjustment for today's world?
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" (Matthew 5:9) The scriptures are filled with examples of bad family behavior (cf. Genesis 9:20-25, Genesis 21:9-11, Genesis 26:34-35, Genesis 37:3-4, Deuteronomy 21:18-20, II Samuel 11:2-4, II Samuel 13:11-14). What others can you think of? In the midst of any of these offenses and bad behaviors, how does one practice being a peacemaker in family life?



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SESSION 7-Holy Week

Hands That Shed Innocent Blood (Proverbs 6:17)

II Samuel 11 — "David and Uriah: This Man was Innocent"

- 1. Talkback with Pastor Paul** - Remind yourselves of how David, Manasseh, and Judas were responsible for *the shedding of innocent blood*. Note the divine punishment merited out to each of them due to their sin. Discuss the concept of "internal murder:" the suggestion that we, the people, are complicit with (and responsible for) the murderous decisions made by our leaders or by society at-large. Do you personally feel that sense of responsibility?
- 2. A Word to the Wise** - Proverbs 6:17b highlights the protection of "*innocent blood*" consistently found in Hebrew law and tradition (Exodus 23:6-7, Psalm 94:21, Isaiah 59:7, Jeremiah 22:3, Ezekiel 22:27). Do you agree that the nation, as a whole, often pays a price when *innocent blood* is shed? What is the church's role today in announcing & indicting those powers which have a hand in shedding *innocent blood*?"
- 3. Be Blessed** - Jesus said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*" (Matthew 5:7) Review Matthew 27:3-10 where we find the only New Testament use of the phrase "*innocent blood*." (v. 4) Discuss the traditional Holy Week symbol of "*thirty pieces of silver*" (v. 9, cf. Exodus 21:32, Deuteronomy 27:25, Zechariah 11:12-13). How does the purchase of "*the potter's field*" (Matthew 27:7) illustrate God's regard and merciful provision for those on the edges of society?



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SESSION 8—Post-Easter

II Peter 1:2-11 —"Seven Things God LOVES"

1. **Talkback with Bishop Johnson** - In what ways do we sometimes make our walk with God harder than it has to be? What is the role of resurrection faith in providing us assurance of our entrance into the eternal kingdom?
2. **A Word to the Wise** - Proverbs 6:16-19 doesn't include every body part in its poetry (i.e., ears, lips, belly, fingers, etc.). Reflecting on all that has been discussed in this study, draft your own anatomically correct (and PG-13 appropriate) poem describing Seven Things the Lord Hates.
3. **Be Blessed** - How do the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:3-12 line up with our list of Seven Things God LOVES in II Peter 1:5-7? Where do you see similarities? What would be your Top Ten (or Top Seven, or Top Three) "Traits of Christian Character?"