



Main Point: Our character determines how we respond to what's going on around us.

Key Scriptures: Proverbs 22:1; 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 15:1-2; Luke 16:10; Proverbs 10:9; Genesis 37:1–17

Introduction

Hello and welcome everyone! I want to start today by asking you to use your imagination. What if I told you that I had something special to give you? I'm talking about something extremely valuable and profoundly important. If you possessed this one "thing," I could guarantee your success in some of the hardest areas of life.

If you had this gift, you would find yourself navigating peer pressure more easily, so, while everyone else is folding, you'd be standing firm. You would be the kind of person who makes good, ethical decisions even when you are 100% sure no one is watching. You would find yourself developing genuine relationships built on trust and mutual respect rather than manipulation. You'd be able to bounce back from failure and disappointment without losing your mind, and most importantly, you'd find your life naturally aligning with God's will.

Now, let's be honest. What would you be willing to do to get that? What would you be willing to pay for a "guarantee" like that? [\[Teacher's Note: Allow for responses.\]](#)

Usually, when we think of things that are valuable, we think of money, talent, or intelligence. But those things can't guarantee any of what I just listed. You can be rich and still be a slave to peer pressure. You can be a genius and still have zero healthy relationships. No, the thing I'm talking about is *character*.

The problem is that we live in a culture where character isn't very popular. We live in a world that is obsessed with the visible. We are the most photographed, filtered, and curated generation in human history. We spend hours making sure the lighting is right for a photo, but we don't spend five minutes making sure our hearts are right before God.

To show you what I mean, let's look at a strange bit of data. Did you know that millions of Americans have bad knees? It's a serious health issue. According to journalist Sue Kelly of *USA Today*, there are over 660,000 websites dedicated to sore knees and how to care for them; offering exercises, stretches, and medical advice to help people avoid surgery.

That sounds like a lot of websites, right? But it pales in comparison to the number of websites devoted to the problem of ugly knees. There are over four million websites dedicated to how knees *look*: whether they are too knobby, too fat, or just look weird.

Think about the priority there. As a society, we are far more concerned with the aesthetics of our knees than we are with the actual function of the joint. We care more about how we look in shorts than whether or not we can actually walk.

This is exactly how many people approach their lives. We spend hours dressing up the body—the social media feed, the outfit, the reputation—while we completely neglect the spirit. We are obsessed with the external image while the internal infrastructure is crumbling.

But God has called us to a higher standard. He has called us to be as clean and pure on the inside as we appear to be on the outside.

1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV) reminds us of a hard truth...

"For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

For the Christian, character is of the utmost importance. If you don't focus on forming your character now, while you're a teenager, you risk drifting into behaviors that become habits. By the time you are an adult, those cracks in your character become canyons that are increasingly hard to bridge.

There is a verse in the book of Proverbs that serves as the main focus for this new four-week series I've titled *"Pit to Palace."*

Proverbs 22:1 (ESV)

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