

# CULTivate Your Character

group leader's guide

Kelli B. Trujillo

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# How to Use This Guide

This four-week discussion guide is ideal for small groups of six to twelve participants. If you are using this guide with a larger group of women, create multiple small groups of six to twelve that can consistently meet together for these discussions.

Each session includes:

- **Pair Up**—A chance for participants to reflect on their week's experiences with a partner.
- **Tune In**—A brief time of prayer focused on tuning in to God's presence.
- **Talk Through**—Small group discussion questions that open the week's themes.
- **Reflect On**—Small group Scripture exploration and discussion.
- **Live By**—A brief time of prayerful corporate Scripture contemplation.
- **Step Out**—A concluding exercise focused on life application.
- **Offer Up**—A closing prayer to wrap up your meeting.
- **Plan On**—Specifics about preparation for next week's meeting.



# True Character

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 1–7 in *Cultivate Your Character*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

## Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Cultivate Your Character* days 1–7 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

## Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God's presence.

## Talk Through

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- What do you most hope to gain from this four-week devotional journey on character? Why?
- If you were to describe what God is like to a curious child, what character traits of God would you likely emphasize? How might you describe God's character differently to an adult struggling with difficult spiritual questions?

## Reflect On

Invite volunteers to read aloud **Psalms 103** and **145**.

- Which phrases describing God and his character stand out to you most? Why?
- What other aspects of God’s character, in addition to those mentioned in these psalms, are especially meaningful to you? Why? (Encourage participants to draw upon their notes from day 3 “Examine.”)

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:14** and **14:7**.

- God revealed his character throughout the Old Testament and then, in a profoundly miraculous and new way, through Jesus in the Gospels—God himself, in the flesh. Based on what you know of Jesus through Scripture and your relationship with him, how would you describe Jesus’ character in three to four words? Why did you choose those specific character traits to highlight?
- Consider the list in day 6 “Create.” It contains a variety of character traits various authors have ascribed to Jesus. Do any of them surprise you? Are any different than what you may have thought of on your own?
- How does Jesus’ character help us get a fuller picture of our Trinitarian God and what God is like? Be specific.
- When has God revealed his character to you during a significant point in your life or in your relationship with him? (Encourage participants to draw upon their notes from day 5 “Worship.”)

## Live By

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **Psalms 145:8** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

*Optional:* Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.  
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.  
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## STEP OUT

Prompt participants to apply this week's study to their lives by zeroing in on one specific character trait of God that they'll focus on in prayer, worship, and contemplation. Invite participants to write it in their journals and/or share that trait with a partner or with the entire group.

## OFFER UP

Close with a time of group prayer, inviting participants to take turns praying aloud with a focus on worshipping God for his character.

## PLAN ON

Remind participants to journey through days 8–14 for next week's meeting. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.



# REFLECTION

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 8–14 in *Cultivate Your Character*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

## Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Cultivate Your Character* days 8–14 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

## Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God's presence.

## TALK THROUGH

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- Who comes to mind for you when you hear words like *virtuous*, *moral*, or *good character*? Why? It can be someone you know personally or a well-known person from history or today.
- On the flip-side, who comes to mind as an opposite example—someone with poor character or moral failure? Why? (Keep names private unless this is a famous person or well-known incident.)



- What are some virtues or traits of good character that our culture values or praises? And on the other hand, what are some virtues or character traits that seem to be neglected, ignored, or undervalued by our world today?

## REFLECT ON

Prompt participants to reiterate some of the traits of God's character you discussed in the last meeting, then discuss:

- What's your reaction to the idea that as Christians we are to reflect God's character in our lives?
- Which of these traits can we reflect? Which are beyond our human abilities?

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **1 Peter 2:9–10** (preferably NLT).

- How well do you think the church does at showing the goodness of God to others? Share an example you've observed in which a Christian's actions, demeanor, or overall character showed the world God's goodness.
- Review the "Ponder" experiences in days 13 and 14. Over the centuries of Christian history, believers emphasized the seven biblical virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and love as markers of the Christian life. What is your reaction to this historic organization of the virtues? Is it helpful? Unnecessary? Thought-provoking? Explain.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Colossians 3:12–14**.

- Though this may seem at first like a tame, feel-good list of virtues, it's actually a radical challenge to live a bold, completely countercultural and radically selfless way of life. Which virtue in this list do you find to be the most challenging or difficulty to embody in your life right now?
- When have you been encouraged, ministered to, or blessed by someone embodying one of these godly traits? Describe your experience.

## LIVE BY

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **Colossians 3:12–14** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

*Optional:* Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.  
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.  
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## STEP OUT

Direct participants to form pairs in order to talk through the life application challenge in day 10 “Act.” Invite them to brainstorm together a specific response to **Colossians 3:12–14** that they will each put into action.

## OFFER UP

Close by having participants to stay in pairs and pray for each other, specifically asking God to help their partner grow in faith, hope, and love.

## Plan On

Remind participants to journey through days 15–21 for next week’s meeting. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.



# Transformation

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 15–21 in *Cultivate Your Character*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

## Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Cultivate Your Character* days 15–21 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

## Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God's presence.

## Talk Through

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- What is something you've learned or accomplished in your life through practice and hard work? (For example, a hobby, sport, musical pursuit, skill acquired at work, and so on.)
- Virtuous living requires intention and effort—but it cannot be done by determination alone! Share about a moment over the past few weeks in which your efforts to be virtuous through your own strength failed.

## REFLECT ON

Invite volunteers to read aloud **Ephesians 2:8–9; 4:3; Titus 3:8; and 2 Peter 1:5, 10.**

- We are saved by grace—not by our own efforts—but we’re also called by God to put our own full effort into living rightly. How would you explain the relationship between God’s grace and our own efforts when it comes to changing our character?
- Which error do you tend to fall into most often: relying so heavily on God’s grace that you neglect the call to apply your own strength and determination to changing, or focusing so heavily on your own efforts to change and live rightly that you neglect relying upon God’s grace and power? Explain.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Galatians 5:16–25.**

- How does this passage challenge you in light of the role the Holy Spirit desires to play in your life? Which word or phrase challenges you most? Why?
- One critical part of transformation is the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin. How has the Holy Spirit’s conviction been a blessing in your life? If you’re able, share a personal example. (Encourage participants to reference day 19 “Journal.”)

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 15:1–11.**

- What do you think it really means to “remain in” or “abide in” Christ?
- How can a focus on abiding in Christ—being intimately connected with him—lead to the actions of personal transformation? When have you experienced this? Or how have you observed this in the life of a Christian you look up to?

## LIVE BY

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **John 15:4–5** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

*Optional:* Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.  
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.  
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## STEP OUT

Challenge participants to set aside twenty minutes this upcoming week, outside of their normal schedule, to intentionally focus on being with God—such as taking a walk outdoors, singing worship songs alone, or quietly contemplating God’s presence.

## OFFER UP

Close by leading the group in praying the “Jesus Prayer” in unison one time, then allowing a short period for silent prayer. (Direct participants to find the “Jesus Prayer” in day 20 “Pray.”)

## Plan On

Remind participants to journey through days 22–28 for next week’s meeting. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.



# Changed . . . Changing

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 22–28 in *Cultivate Your Character*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Cultivate Your Character*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

## Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Cultivate Your Character* days 22–28 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

## Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God's presence.

## Talk Through

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- Has this four-week focus on virtuous living been inspiring and encouraging? Or discouraging and disheartening? Or some combination of both? Explain.
- How did it feel to honestly take stock of your life in light of godly virtues this past week? What's your reaction to your experiences with confession and *examen*? Why?
- Reflect on your life as a Christian over the past several years. Do you think you've practiced the discipline confession enough in your spiritual life? Why or why not? Or,

on the other hand, do you tend to err on the side of scrupulosity? (Refer participants to day 23 “Journal.”)

- You’ve studied many God-honoring, biblical virtues during this journey. If you’re willing to share, which of them do you still feel weakest in? Explain. (Encourage participants to refer to day 22 “Journal.”)

## REFLECT On

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Psalm 51**.

- Which words, phrases, or ideas in this psalm are hopeful?
- How can true repentance and confession bring hope and healing? Explain.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **James 1:22–25**.

- Which ideas, insights, or suggestions from this past week’s journey stand out to you as helpful ways to more effectively respond to God’s Word with life-changing action? Why?
- Often it’s “easier” to exhibit God-honoring character in dramatic moments (like ethical dilemmas, moments of crisis, or times of obvious temptation); it can be much more difficult to exhibit godly virtue in the normal reality of our everyday lives. How do you feel challenged to show faithfulness to God in the “small occasions” of your normal life? (Prompt participants to consider Fenelon’s quote in day 27 “Symbolize.”)
- How have you been ministered to by other Christians during this spiritual journey? How do you desire to lean deeper into Christian community in the days and weeks to come?

## Live By

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **James 1:25** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

*Optional:* Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.  
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.  
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## STEP OUT

Direct participants to form pairs and work together to craft (and share) specific goals for growth in character using the day 25 “Journal” instructions.

## OFFER UP

Close by directing participants to hold their written goals in their hands and lift them up in a posture of offering. Lead the group in praying for God’s help, courage, and strength to accomplish these spiritual growth goals through the power of his Spirit.

## Plan On

Remind participants to complete days 29–30 on their own, being sure to highlight the Go Deeper ideas.

*Optional:* Organize a time for your group to gather at a park (or in your church) so that each participant can find space alone to do the Go Deeper “Personal Retreat.” Afterward, gather together to talk about your experiences.