The Character of God

• The creation of the world was initiated by God. (See Genesis 1:1, 26.)

• God initiated a relationship with us by loving us first even though we were utterly unlovable. (See I John 4:19, Romans 5:8.)

• Jesus instructed the disciples to see the deeper needs around them and respond with prayer. (See Matthew 9:36–38.)

• Jesus came to seek and save the lost. (See Luke 19:10.)

• The Spirit moved Philip to take initiative at the right time and right place. (See Acts 8:29.)

Key Concepts

1. Initiative Involves Looking Ahead. Have you ever thought about what it will be like when you are older? What are you hoping to do or be? How can you take initiative now to prepare for the future? Perhaps you can learn to work with people and grow in character. Perhaps to prepare now for the future you can save money, study a specific subject, or learn skills such as repair work or cooking. “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished” (Proverbs 22:3). Even when we don’t know what lies ahead, we know that God is preparing us for the future as we are obedient in our daily tasks. You will not regret applying yourself to what is before you now and looking ahead to prepare for the future.

2. Initiative Requires Looking Around. Jesus took the initiative to reach out to others when He saw their need. (See John 4:6–7, Luke 19:5.) Look for needs around you. Does someone need the door opened? Do you see someone hurt and needing help? Do you have an opportunity to evangelize? Could you clean up a mess? Are you aware of a friend drifting away from the Lord and needing encouragement and prayer? If you do not see a need, take the initiative to ask what you can do. A person with initiative looks around to see what needs to be done and then does it without having to be asked.

3. Initiative Considers Priorities. Finish what you are responsible to do before starting something new. You may see a need before it is the right time to meet it. Leaders in the New Testament church saw there was a need to serve widows but could not continue their teaching ministry and meet this duty, too. Instead, they delegated this important need to wise, honest men. (See Acts 6:1–6.) Consider what is priority at the moment so that you do not leave a trail of unfinished projects. As you begin a new task, subject, or activity, check with your parents to make sure it is a good idea. Initiative examines the course ahead to make sure it is the right one and moves forward at the proper time.

Initiative in My Life

• Isaiah 30:21—As I am taking initiative, am I careful to listen to God’s direction?

• Matthew 5:23–24—When I become aware that I have offended someone, do I take the initiative to make things right?

• John 4:35—How can my family and I take initiative to share the Gospel this month?

• Philippians 4:8—Do I take initiative to set my thoughts and affections on things that please the Lord by meditating on His Word every day?

• James 4:17—Do I wait to be told to do a task or do I take initiative to help?
Initiative in the Life of the Shunammite Woman

Read II Kings 4:8–17 as a family and discuss the following questions:

1. What was Elisha’s need that the Shunammite woman noticed, and how did she meet it? “And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread” (II Kings 4:8). What could you do to help prepare meals at your house?

2. Was the Shunammite woman under authority while demonstrating her initiative? “And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall . . .” (II Kings 4:9–10a). Why may it be important to check with your authorities before you take the initiative to start a project?

3. Did Elisha have to ask for things or did the Shunammite woman put what he needed in his room before he asked? “Let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick” (II Kings 4:10b). When you knew you would have a guest in your home, what did you do beforehand so he would feel welcome?

4. How did Elisha feel about the Shunammite woman’s initiative to meet his needs? “And [Elisha] said unto [Gehazi], Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care” (II Kings 4:13a). How do you feel when someone sees your need and offers to help you? Who do you know that has a need that you could offer to meet?

5. The Shunammite woman’s initiative blessed the prophet, and he desired to bless her. Who noticed how she might be blessed? “And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old” (II Kings 4:14). When someone says they don’t need anything, do you still try to notice what you might do or say to help them?

6. How did the Lord honor the Shunammite woman’s initiative to help the prophet? “And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her” (II Kings 4:17). Do you think the woman was expecting anything for her care for the prophet? Do you expect a reward for your initiative or is your motivation to please the Lord?
The Prophet’s Room is Ready

“Let us make a little chamber . . . and let us set for him there a bed, and a table . . . when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”

—II KINGS 4:10

Initiative is recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it.
Memory Verse

ROMANS 12:21

“Be not overcome of evil,
but overcome evil with good.”

Memory Verse Game: Hot or Cold

Choose a child to be “It.” Have him close his eyes while the rest of the children agree on a spot to hide an object, such as an eraser or a water bottle. Tell “It” to open his eyes and begin to search for the hidden object. The other children are to give him hints by quoting the verse softly or loudly depending on where “It” is in relation to the hidden object. Read to the children: As “It” looks for the hidden object, let’s help him find it by quoting the verse softly when he is far away from the object (cold) and loudly when he is closer to the object (hot).” Give different children the opportunity to be “It” until the children have quoted the verse often enough that they have it memorized.

Doers of the Word

Ask God how He wants you to apply the verse, i.e., “be the first to take a stand for what is right” or “look for ways to help Mom” or “be kind in return when someone is rude.” Then fill in the blank with His answer:

“Dear Lord, I yield to You and am willing to apply this verse. Help me to __________________________ __________________________. I ask that You would develop Initiative in my life. Amen.”

When the Lord gives you an opportunity to apply this verse, discuss it as a family and write it down in your personal journal to later recall God’s working in your life.
Initiative Spy Glasses

Introduction
Read to the children: “This month we are asking the Lord to develop initiative in our lives. What a privilege to respond to the work He is doing to change us into the image of His Son! Today we are going to make ‘initiative spy glasses’ to remind us to look for needs that He wants us to meet and be willing to help without being asked.”

Supplies
Two toilet paper rolls, a pipe cleaner, 30” piece of yarn, and markers.

Instructions
Give each child two toilet paper rolls and a pipe cleaner. Twist the pipe cleaner in a figure-8 to hold the toilet paper rolls together. Tie ends of the yarn to the pipe cleaner on either side of the spy glasses. Use markers to decorate and write: “Look for ways to help.”

As the children color their “spy glasses,” read to them: “Sometimes we forget to notice what needs to be done around us. These ‘initiative spy glasses’ are to remind you to look for needs with which you can help. Don’t wait to be asked. If you see something and know what to do, offer to help. What needs has God brought to your attention today?”

Initiative is recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it.
Spot the Need

Show the children the picture below. What in this picture could you take initiative to put in order? Give the children a few minutes to study the picture. Then say: “On the count of three, we are going to look around our house and take initiative to correct or improve one thing that needs to be done. When you have completed a task, come back and sit down. One, two, three, go!”
“Must I Go, and Empty-Handed?”

The young man seemed gripped by the testimony he was hearing. Thirty-year-old Charles Luther leaned forward, not wanting to miss a single word. From the pulpit, the visiting evangelist A.G. Upham looked at the congregation as he shared about the last words of a dying young man:

*What a dreadful accident! The young man, who had only been in Christian service for a month, lay on the bed in critical condition. His Christian friend, realizing the young man was not going to make it, tenderly asked, “Are you afraid to die?” Looking up in pain, the youth answered, “Friend, no, I am not afraid to die, for Jesus has saved me. But I have not been able to lead even one such as I was to Christ, in the time that I have known Him. No, I am not afraid to die; but oh! If I go—must I go, and empty-handed?” Oh, the shock, regret, and sorrow that must have filled their hearts that day.*

The last words of the dying fellow reverberated in Reverend Luther’s mind. Indeed, the young man had a sad realization—he would know the joy of meeting his Lord face-to-face and the sorrow that he was bringing no one with him. Reverend Luther sensed words forming in his mind, inspired by the heartbreaking testimony. Finding a spare piece of paper in his Bible, he quickly began jotting the words down. As fast as he wrote, more lines tumbled into his mind:

*Not at death I shrink nor falter,  
For my Savior saves me now;  
But to meet Him empty-handed,  
Tho’t of that now clouds my brow.*

Later, while Reverend Luther was attending a meeting in Rhode Island, he passed his poem to George Stebbins. Stebbins was an American Gospel hymn writer and composer who was also associated with D. L. Moody in evangelistic work. He put many hymns to the music we know them by today. Indeed, Stebbins found Reverend Luther’s hymn to be one of the easiest poems that he would put to music.

Once the hymn was put to music and published, another true story occurred. This time the testimony told how God used the hymn to touch an unbeliever:

*On a Sunday morning in a mission hall service in Essex, England, a reckless, godless man happened to attend. One of the hymns sung was “Must I Go, and Empty-Handed?” During the singing of that particular hymn, the third verse hit the man like a blow.*

*O the years in sinning wasted,  
Could I but recall them now,  
I would give them to my Savior,  
To His will I’d gladly bow.*
The words choked in his throat. Deeply impressed by what the words were saying, he could not sing them. After the service, the man returned home miserable. Deeply distressed, he was unable to eat his dinner. That afternoon he wandered about, ending up at a Bible class for workmen. Imagine his shock and astonishment when, as he walked in, he heard the same convicting hymn from the morning mission service being sung here at the other end of the village! Falling to his knees, he immediately surrendered his life to the Lord. He was a truly changed man afterwards, and his life demonstrated a desire to no longer waste his years in sin but to follow Christ!

Initiative is “recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it.”

Even though the dying young man in the beginning of this hymn history bemoaned his lack of initiative in soul-winning, he probably had no idea that his confession would result in touching another who would pen a song that would inspire many to witness for Christ. Praise God for his initiative to share his despair with his friend rather than keep it to himself! His acknowledgment of his sinful lack of initiative was used by God in such a way to actually encourage other believers to see the need and bring unbelievers to Christ!

O ye saints, arouse, be earnest,
Up and work while yet ‘tis day;
Ere the night of death o’er-take thee,
Strive for souls while still ye may.

We will not always have opportunity to take initiative. What needs to be done so others might hear the Gospel? What other needs do you see about you? Remember this young man’s painful regrets and show initiative now, before it is too late!

Bibliography:

This hymn and the other 11 featured hymns of this year’s character curriculum are available on CD. The hymns are sung by home educating families to piano accompaniment. Go to store.iblp.org/product/CBCH2.html for more information.
Must I Go, and Empty-Handed?

Charles C. Luther (1847–1924)  George C. Stebbins (1846–1945)

1. Must I go, and empty-handed, Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
2. Not at death shrink nor falter, For my Savior saves me now;
3. O the years singing wasted, Could I but recall them now,
4. O ye saints arise, be earnest, Up and work while yet 'tis day;

Not one day of service give Him, Lay no trophy at His feet?
But to meet Him empty-handed, Tho' of that now clouds my brow.
I would give them to my Savior, To His will I'd gladly bow.
Ere the night of death o'er-take thee, Strive for souls while still you may.

Must I go, and empty-handed? Must I meet my Savior so?

Not one soul with which to greet Him—Must I empty-handed go?

Initiative is recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it.