DISCUSS | CHALLENGE | GROW

THE FORGE

FOR TEENS



BUILDING CHARACTER.
CHOOSING WISDOM.
BECOMING MEN.

- REAL CONVERSATIONS
- REAL CHALLENGES
- REAL GROWTH

YOU'RE NOT FINISHED.
YOU'RE BEING FORGED.

9 WEEK
DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE FORGE FOR TEENS

THE AIM OF THE FORGE FOR TEENS

Becoming the man you want to become.

Growing up isn't just about getting older. It's about discovering **who you are, what you stand for and the kind of man you want to become.**

The Forge is about **real conversations, honest questions and practical challenges** around identity, friendship, choices, pressure, resilience and purpose.

You won't just sit and listen. You'll be encouraged to **speak, listen, challenge ideas and think for yourself.**

The Forge has a Christian foundation, exploring what the Bible – and the example of Jesus – can teach us about becoming men of **strength, courage, humility, integrity and compassion.**

You don't need to have all the answers. Just bring **your questions, your experiences and your opinions.**

You're not finished. You're being forged.

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Session 1 | # FORGED, NOT FINISHED

Nobody starts life as the finished article.

START HERE

Nobody starts life knowing exactly who they are going to become. Growing up is partly about discovering what you're good at, what matters to you and what sort of person you want to be.

Think about something you're good at now. It could be football, gaming, music, drawing, cooking or a particular subject at school.

Were you good at it the first time you tried?

Probably not. You had to learn. You made mistakes, got things wrong and had another go. Over time, you got better.

Becoming a good man works in much the same way.

You don't have to have everything figured out yet. You're still becoming.

THE POTTER

Imagine watching someone make a pot from a lump of clay. They put the clay on a wheel and slowly begin to shape it.

Sometimes it doesn't go to plan. The clay might collapse or the pot might lean to one side. It may not look anything like what the potter had in mind.

The potter doesn't simply throw the clay away. They work with it again, reshaping it and starting over when necessary.

The important thing is that the potter can see what the clay can become, even when it doesn't look much like the finished pot.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Jeremiah 18:1–6

> ***The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, "Go down to the potter's shop, and I will speak to you there." So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over.***
>
> ***Then the Lord gave me this message: "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.***

Jeremiah watches a potter working with some clay. The pot doesn't turn out as expected, so the potter reshapes it.

God then says:

> ***"As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand."***

It's a simple picture, but it says something important about how God sees us. He doesn't expect us to arrive as the finished article. He is still working in us, teaching us and helping us become the people we were created to be.

Being unfinished doesn't mean you've failed. It means there is still more to come.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Everyone gets things wrong. You might lose your temper, make a poor decision, hurt somebody, fail a test, get dropped from a team or simply realise that you haven't handled a situation very well.

When that happens, it's easy to think, "I'm just rubbish at this," or "I'll never change."

But one bad decision doesn't have to become part of your identity. A difficult experience can teach you something about yourself and help you make a better choice next time.

The important thing is what you do **after** things go wrong.

WHAT DOES JAMES SAY?

James 1:2–4

> ***Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.***

James talks about difficult experiences and says that they can develop perseverance in us. In other words, some of the things we would rather avoid can actually help us grow.

That doesn't mean we have to pretend that difficult things are enjoyable. Some experiences are genuinely painful and disappointing.

It does mean that we can choose not to waste them.

When something goes wrong, instead of only asking, *"Why did this happen?"*, we can also ask:

"What can I learn from this?"

THINK ABOUT IT

What's something you're much better at now than you were three years ago?

Can you think of a time when you failed at something but learned something useful from it?

When something goes wrong, what is your usual reaction?

Do you tend to give up, get angry, blame someone else or pretend that you don't care? Or are you usually able to try again, ask for help or work out what you could do differently?

YOU ARE STILL BEING SHAPED

There are lots of things that influence the person you are becoming. Your family, your friends and your experiences all play a part. So do the things you succeed at and the things you struggle with.

The choices you make also matter. Every time you decide how to respond to something, you are developing habits and character that will stay with you.

That doesn't mean your past controls your future.

You can learn, change and grow.

You can become more patient. You can become more responsible. You can learn to control your temper, deal with disappointment and treat people better.

The man you become will be shaped by many small decisions made over many years.

WHAT SORT OF MAN DO YOU WANT TO BECOME?

Forget about what job you might have or how much money you might earn.

Think instead about the sort of person you would like to be.

Perhaps you would like people to see you as kind, brave, honest, reliable, funny, confident, wise, generous or someone they can trust.

Choose three qualities that matter to you:

....

Why did you choose them?

DISCUSS

Talk about these questions together. There aren't necessarily right or wrong answers.

1. **Why do you think people sometimes find it difficult to admit that they've got something wrong?**
2. **What's the difference between failing at something and being a failure?**
3. **Can you think of someone who has become stronger because they've been through something difficult?**
4. **Why do you think we sometimes give up when we might actually be capable of improving?**
5. **Do you think people can really change? What makes you think that?**

A DIFFERENT WAY TO LOOK AT FAILURE

The next time something goes wrong, try changing the question you ask yourself.

Instead of thinking, *"Why am I so rubbish at this?"*, try asking, **"What can I learn from this?"**

Instead of thinking, *"Why does this always happen to me?"*, ask, **"Is there anything I could do differently next time?"**

And instead of deciding, *"I'm never going to be good at this,"* ask yourself, **"What would getting better actually look like?"**

You don't have to get everything right straight away. **What matters is that you keep learning.**

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

KEEP GOING

This week, notice one situation where you would normally give up, get angry or decide that you're simply not good at something.

Instead, stop for a moment and think about what you could learn from it. Then have another go, ask someone for help or try doing it differently.

It might be something small: a piece of homework, a sport, an argument with a friend or something you're trying to learn.

Don't waste an opportunity to grow just because something didn't go right the first time.

REMEMBER

You are not the finished article, and neither is anyone else your age.

The person you are today isn't necessarily the person you'll be in five or ten years. Your mistakes don't have to define you, and your failures don't have to determine your future.

The Bible gives us the picture of a potter working patiently with clay. God is still shaping you, and there is still plenty of growing to do.

> *"As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand."*

THIS WEEK

Something I'd like to get better at is:

Something I've learned from a mistake is:

One quality I'd like to develop is:

One thing I'm going to keep going with is:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You don't become a strong, wise and responsible man overnight. It happens gradually, through the choices you make and the experiences you go through.

Some of those experiences will be enjoyable and some won't. You'll get things right and you'll get things wrong. You'll learn things about yourself that you like and things that you'd rather change.

That's all part of growing up.

The important thing is **not to assume that who you are today is all you can ever be.**

You're not finished. There is still plenty of shaping to come.

Session 2 | **IDENTITY**

What makes you, you?

START HERE

If someone asked you to describe yourself, what would you say?

You might talk about your family, your friends, the things you enjoy doing or the things you're good at. You might describe yourself as funny, quiet, confident, competitive, creative or a bit of a geek.

You might say you love football, gaming, music or being outdoors.

All of those things tell us something about you, but they don't tell us everything.

As you grow up, you're going to discover more about yourself. Some things will probably stay the same, while other things will change.

Part of growing up is working out who you are and what really matters to you.

PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS

There are lots of things that help shape our identity.

PEOPLE

Think about the people around you.

Your parents and family have probably had a huge influence on you. So have your friends, teachers, coaches and other people you look up to.

You might also be influenced by people you've never actually met. A footballer, musician, YouTuber or someone you follow on social media can still affect the way you think and behave.

Sometimes we don't even notice it happening. We pick up the way people talk, the things they find funny and the things they think are important.

Who has influenced you most?

What is it about them that has influenced you?

PLACES

The places where we spend time can also affect us.

Home might be where you feel most comfortable. School might bring out a different side of you. You might behave differently when you're with your football team, at the gym or with a particular group of friends.

Some places seem to bring out the best in us. Others can make it harder to make good choices.

Where do you feel most like yourself?

Is there somewhere that brings out a different side of you? Why?

THINGS

Think about the things you spend your time doing.

Music, gaming, YouTube, social media, films, sport, books and the websites you visit can all influence the way you think.

That doesn't mean these things are necessarily good or bad. The important question is what effect they are having on you.

What do you spend most of your free time doing?

Which of these things do you think has the biggest influence on you?

BEING DIFFERENT

Think about the people in this room.

You won't all like the same music, support the same team, have the same hobbies or have the same sense of humour.

You won't all be good at the same things either.

And that's actually a good thing.

Imagine if everyone was exactly the same. We would all have the same ideas, the same interests and the same abilities.

Our differences are part of what makes life interesting.

You don't need to become a copy of somebody else in order to belong.

What's something about yourself that you're glad is different?

What's something you're good at that some of your friends aren't?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Psalm 139:13–14

> ***"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!"***

The Bible's message is that you aren't an accident or a copy of somebody else. God made you deliberately, with your own personality, abilities, experiences and potential.

That doesn't mean everything about us is perfect. We all have things we need to work on.

It does mean that you don't need to spend your life wishing you were somebody else.

There is value in being the person God made you to be.

THE PRESSURE TO FIT IN

Being different sounds great until you're the one who feels different.

At school, there can be a lot of pressure to fit in. You might laugh at something because everyone else is laughing, even though you don't find it funny. You might join in with something because your mates are doing it. You might pretend to like something because you don't want to be the odd one out.

Wanting to belong is completely normal. We all want to feel accepted.

But there is a difference between **belonging to a group** and **changing yourself completely to fit into it**.

Have you ever gone along with something because you didn't want to be different?

You don't need to name anyone or describe the situation if you don't want to.

Why do you think it's sometimes difficult to say no when everyone else is doing something?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Romans 12:2

> ***"Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."***

The Bible isn't telling us that we should be different just for the sake of being different.

It's encouraging us to think for ourselves rather than simply copying everyone around us.

That can take some courage.

Sometimes the easiest thing is to go along with the crowd. But if you know something isn't right for you, being able to say no is an important part of growing up.

WHO OR WHAT IS SHAPING YOU?

Think again about your people, places and things.

For each one, ask yourself whether it is helping you become the person you want to be.

Does this person bring out the best in me?

Do I feel able to be myself around them?

Does this place make it easier or harder for me to make good choices?

Are the things I watch, listen to and spend time doing having a positive effect on me?

CHOOSE YOUR INFLUENCES CAREFULLY

You can't control everything that influences you. You don't get to choose your family, your school or everything that happens around you.

But there are plenty of choices you can make.

You can think about who you spend your free time with. You can decide who you follow online. You can choose what you watch and listen to. You can decide whether a particular friendship or activity is bringing out the best in you.

These things don't completely define who you are, but over time they can have a real effect on the person you become.

What do you think makes someone a good influence?

What makes someone a bad influence?

DISCUSS

Talk about these questions together. You don't have to agree with everyone else.

1. **Have you ever started liking something simply because your friends liked it? Why do you think that happens?**
2. **Do you think people behave differently depending on who they're with? Why?**
3. **How much influence do you think social media has over what teenagers think is cool, attractive, successful or normal?**
4. **Is it possible to be yourself and still fit in with a group?**
5. **What matters more when choosing friends: having things in common or knowing that you can trust each other?**

THE IDENTITY TEST

The next time you're deciding whether someone or something is a good influence on you, try asking yourself three questions.

Does it bring out the best in me?

Think about whether you become kinder, more confident, more responsible or simply a better version of yourself around this person or in this situation.

Can I be myself?

You shouldn't have to constantly pretend to be someone you're not just to keep a friendship or fit into a group.

Does it make good choices easier or harder?

Some people and situations make it easier to do the right thing. Others make it much harder.

You don't have to get rid of everything that challenges you. But it's worth noticing what is helping you grow and what is pulling you in a direction you don't want to go.

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

Check Your Circle

This week, take some time to think about three areas of your life.

PEOPLE

Who brings out the best in me?

PLACES

Where do I feel comfortable being myself and where do I tend to make good choices?

THINGS

What am I spending my time watching, listening to or doing?

Now ask yourself:

Are these helping me become the person I want to be?

You don't need to make a dramatic change. Just choose **one thing** that you could do differently this week.

Maybe it's spending more time with someone who brings out the best in you, taking a break from something that isn't helping you, or being a little more confident about being yourself.

REMEMBER

There is nobody else exactly like you.

Your personality, your experiences, your interests and your abilities all help make you who you are. You don't need to become somebody else to have value.

At the same time, the people you spend time with and the things you give your attention to will influence the person you become.

So it's worth paying attention to them.

You don't have to fit in with everyone. It's more important to become comfortable with who you are and wise about what you allow to shape you.

THIS WEEK

One thing I like about myself is:

Someone who brings out the best in me is:

One influence I want to think more carefully about is:

One choice I'm going to make this week is:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You're going to change a lot as you grow up. Some of the things you care about now will probably seem less important in a few years, while other things will become much more important.

That's normal.

You don't need to have your identity completely worked out at 15.

But it is worth asking yourself some good questions along the way:

Who am I? What matters to me? Who do I want to become? And who and what is helping me get there?

Being different is part of what makes you who you are. Choose wisely what you allow to shape you.

Session 3 | INFLUENCE

You probably influence more people than you realise

START HERE

When you hear the word influence, you might think about someone famous.

A footballer with millions of followers. A YouTuber whose videos get watched by thousands of people. A musician or actor whose clothes, opinions or behaviour are copied by other people.

But influence isn't only about being famous.

You have influence too.

The way you talk to people, the things you laugh at, what you post online and the way you behave when you're with your mates all have an effect on the people around you.

You might not think anyone is paying attention.

But people notice more than you think.

WHO INFLUENCES YOU?

Think about someone who has had a big influence on the person you are becoming.

It could be someone in your family, a friend, a teacher, coach or someone you follow online.

Who came to mind?

What is it about that person that has influenced you?

Maybe it's their confidence, their attitude, their sense of humour, the way they treat people or simply the things they have achieved.

YOU ARE ALREADY AN INFLUENCE

Imagine you're with a group of friends and someone starts making fun of another boy.

Everyone laughs.

You laugh too, even though you know it has gone too far.

Now imagine that one person in the group says:

> *"That's not really funny. Leave it."*

Another person stops laughing.

Then someone else says:

> *"Yeah, let's just leave it."*

What happened?

Nobody was officially in charge.

Nobody gave a speech.

One person simply made a **different choice**, and it affected the others.

That's influence.

THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN LIFE

You might influence your:

- Friends
- Brothers or sisters
- People in your class
- Teammates
- Younger pupils
- People you know online

You might influence them without even realising it.

Sometimes people copy what we do. Sometimes they feel more confident because of us. Sometimes they decide to join in because we did.

Who do you think you might influence?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 5:13–16

> ***"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.***
>
> ***"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."***

Jesus describes his followers as **salt and light**.

Salt changes things. Light helps people see.

Neither one has to shout to have an effect. They simply make a difference wherever they are.

Jesus then says:

> ***"Let your good deeds shine out for all to see."***

He isn't saying that we need to become famous or important.

He's saying that the way we live should make a positive difference to the people around us.

YOUR ACTIONS MATTER

You influence people through what you say, but you also influence them through what you do.

People notice what you laugh at and what you don't laugh at. They notice whether you include people or leave them out. They notice whether you stand up for someone or join in when they're being picked on.

They also notice what you do when nobody is making you do anything.

What do you think tells people the most about someone?

- What they say?
- What they do?
- How they treat people?
- What they do when nobody is watching?

Why?

WHAT KIND OF INFLUENCE DO YOU WANT TO HAVE?

Imagine that some of the people you spend time with became more like you.

Would that be a good thing?

Think about the way you treat people, the way you deal with pressure and the choices you make.

What would you be happy for someone else to copy from you?

Maybe it's your sense of humour, loyalty, determination, kindness, confidence or something else.

Is there anything you do that you wouldn't want someone younger to copy?

You don't have to share your answer if you don't want to.

DISCUSS

Talk about these questions together.

1. **Who do you think has the most influence over teenagers today: friends, parents, social media, celebrities, teachers or someone else?**
   Why?
2. **What's the difference between influencing someone and pressuring someone?**
3. **Have you ever done something because everyone else was doing it, even though you weren't sure it was a good idea?**
   Why was it difficult to say no?
4. **Have you ever seen someone do the right thing when everyone else was doing something different?**
   What effect did it have?
5. **What sort of person would you like people to see when they look at your life?**

A SIMPLE TEST

The next time you're about to do something when you're with other people, ask yourself:

Would I still do this if nobody else was doing it?

That doesn't mean you should always go against the crowd.

Sometimes the crowd is right.

But it is worth knowing whether you're making your own decision or simply following everyone else. And when you see someone else making a good choice, don't be afraid to follow them either.

Influence works both ways.

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

This week, deliberately do something that could make a positive difference to someone else.

You might encourage someone who's having a difficult day, include someone who's being left out, help someone without being asked, give someone credit or stand up for someone who is being treated badly.

You don't need anyone to notice that you did it.

In fact, that's part of the challenge.

Do something good simply because it's the right thing to do.

Then think about what happened.

REMEMBER

You don't need to be famous to have influence.

You don't need thousands of followers and you don't have to be the loudest person in the room.

The way you live already affects the people around you.

That means your choices matter.

You can encourage people or put them down. You can make it easier for someone to do the right thing or make it harder. You can join in when everyone else is doing something, or you can be the person who has the courage to say, "I'm not doing that."

You already have influence.
The question is what you are going to do with it.

THIS WEEK

Someone I could encourage this week is:

One quality I'd like people to see in me is:

One way I could be a better influence is:

Something I want to remember when I'm with my mates is:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You may not think of yourself as a leader, but leadership isn't always about being in charge.

Sometimes it's simply about the effect you have on the people around you.

You don't have to be perfect to have a positive influence. You just need to think about the example you're setting and be prepared to make good choices, even when they aren't the easiest ones.

> ***"Let your good deeds shine out for all to see." – Matthew 5:16***

The person you become won't just affect your own life. ***It will affect other people too.***

Session 4 | STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL

Real strength is having the power to choose your response

START HERE

What comes to mind when you think of someone who is strong?

You might think about someone who is good at sport, can lift a lot of weight or isn't afraid of anyone.

But strength isn't only about what your body can do.

You can be physically strong and still struggle to control your temper. You can be confident but make stupid decisions when you're angry. You can be tough on the outside but find it difficult to deal with what you're feeling.

Real strength is about more than being able to do something.

It's also about being able to **control yourself.**

WHEN THINGS GET TO YOU

Everyone gets annoyed.

- Someone winds you up.
- Your parents tell you to do something when you're in the middle of something else.
- A teacher gives you a detention.
- Your mate says something that gets under your skin.
- Someone beats you at something you really wanted to win.
- Someone sends you a message that makes you angry.

Sometimes you can feel the reaction building before you've even decided what you're going to do.

What happens when you get really angry?

Do you tend to:

- ☐ Shout or swear?
- ☐ Say things you regret?
- ☐ Walk away?
- ☐ Go quiet and refuse to talk?
- ☐ Take it out on someone else?
- ☐ Try to stay calm?
- ☐ Something else?

ANGER ISN'T THE PROBLEM

Getting angry doesn't make you a bad person. Anger is a normal human emotion. Sometimes it can even tell you that something isn't right.

The problem comes when **anger starts making your decisions for you.**

You might say something you don't really mean. You might hurt someone. You might break something. You might send a message that you wish you could take back.

And once you've reacted, you can't always undo what happened.

Have you ever reacted in anger and then wished you'd handled it differently?

You don't have to describe the situation if you'd rather not.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Micah 6:8

> ***"The Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."***

There are three ideas here that are worth thinking about:

Doing what is right means making good choices, even when they aren't the easiest ones.

Loving mercy means treating people with kindness rather than always looking for a chance to get even.

Walking humbly means recognising that you don't always have to prove yourself or win every argument.

That is a very different picture of strength from simply being the toughest person in the room.

ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT STRENGTH

Proverbs 16:32

> ***"Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city."***

That's quite a statement.

The writer is saying that controlling yourself can be a greater achievement than controlling other people. Think about that for a moment.

It takes strength to hit something. It can take much more strength to **walk away**. It can be easy to shout back. It can be much harder to stop yourself and **choose** what to say.

Anyone can react.

Learning to control your reaction takes practice.

WHAT ABOUT JESUS?

The Christian idea of strength isn't about becoming weak or passive.

Jesus was strong.

He stood up for people. He challenged injustice. He wasn't afraid to say difficult things.

But he **didn't need to prove** his strength by dominating everyone around him.

He could be compassionate without being weak. He could be confident without being arrogant. He could disagree with people without treating them badly.

The adult Forge describes this as **"strength with restraint"** and **"courage with humility."**

That is a useful picture of the kind of man you can become.

THINK ABOUT IT

Imagine someone says something insulting to you in front of your friends.

You immediately feel angry.

You have about **five seconds** before you respond.

What could happen next?

Option 1

You fire back with something even worse.

What might happen?

Option 2

You say nothing and walk away.

What might happen?

Option 3

You take a moment, calm down and decide what you actually want to say.
What might happen?

.....

.....

Which response takes the most self-control?

STRENGTH ISN'T ABOUT NEVER GETTING ANGRY

Sometimes people think that being self-controlled means never showing emotion.

It doesn't.

- You can be angry and still be in control.
- You can be disappointed and still behave well.
- You can be upset and still talk about it.
- You can feel hurt without trying to hurt someone else.

Being strong doesn't mean pretending that you don't have emotions.

It means learning what to do with them.

DISCUSS

Talk about these questions together.

1. **Why do you think people sometimes say things when they're angry that they wouldn't normally say?**
2. **Why can it be difficult to walk away from an argument?**
3. **Do you think walking away is sometimes a sign of weakness or a sign of strength? Why?**
4. **What situations are most likely to make teenagers lose their temper?**
5. **Is there a difference between standing up for yourself and overreacting?**
   What is it?
6. **Who do you think is stronger: someone who can control other people, or someone who can control themselves?**
   Why?

THE FIVE-SECOND PAUSE

- You can't always control what happens to you.
- You can't control what someone says.
- You can't control whether someone annoys you.
- You can't control whether you win or lose.

But you usually have at least **a few seconds i**n which you can decide what you do next. That's where self-control starts.

When you feel yourself getting wound up, try this:

Stop.

Don't immediately speak or send the message.

Breathe.

Take one slow breath and give yourself a moment.

Think.

Ask yourself:
"If I react right now, will I make this better or worse?"

Then **choose** your response.

It sounds simple. But like anything else, **it takes practice**.

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

TRY THE PAUSE

This week, notice one moment when you feel yourself getting angry or frustrated.

Before you react, try to pause for **five seconds**.

You don't have to pretend you're not annoyed. Just give yourself enough time to decide what you want to do with that feeling.

If you get it wrong, **don't beat yourself up**. Think about what happened and what you could try differently next time.

The aim isn't to become someone who never gets angry. The aim is to become someone who **doesn't let anger make every decision for them**.

REMEMBER

Being strong isn't about always getting your own way.

It isn't about being the loudest person, winning every argument or making people afraid of you.

As you grow up, one of the most useful things you can learn is how to stay in control when your emotions are running high.

You won't always get it right. **None of us do**. But you can get better at recognising what you're feeling and choosing how you respond.

Real strength isn't about controlling everyone else. It's about learning to control yourself.

THIS WEEK

Something that tends to make me angry or frustrated is:

.....

When I'm angry, I usually:

.....

One thing I could do differently is:

.....

Someone I think handles difficult situations well is:

.....

What do I admire about the way they respond?

.....

A FINAL THOUGHT

As you get older, you'll have more freedom and more responsibility. You'll have to make more decisions for yourself, and there will be plenty of situations where nobody else can tell you what to do.

Learning to control yourself will become increasingly important.

The strongest person isn't always the one who can make the biggest noise or win the fight.

Sometimes it's the person who is angry, has every reason to react, and still manages to choose the right response.

Strength isn't about having no emotions. It's about learning how to handle them well.

Session 5 | THE BATTLE IN YOUR HEAD

Not everything you think, is true.

START HERE

We all have thoughts running through our heads all the time.

Some are helpful:

"I can do this."

"I need to sort that out."

"I should probably apologise."

Others aren't so helpful:

"Everyone else is better than me."

"Nobody likes me."

"I'm rubbish at this."

"I need people to think I'm cool."

Sometimes a thought can appear in your head so often that you start to believe it must be true.

But here's something worth remembering:

Just because you think something doesn't mean it's true.

THE COMPARISON TRAP

It's very easy to compare yourself with other people.

- You see someone who's better at football.
- Someone who's more confident.
- Someone who seems to have loads of friends.
- Someone who looks better.
- Someone who gets better grades.
- Someone whose life on social media seems much more exciting than yours.

The problem is that you're usually comparing **your whole life** with the small part of someone else's life that they choose to show you.

You know your own worries, failures and insecurities. You don't see all of theirs.

What do teenagers tend to compare themselves about?

What happens when you compare yourself too much with other people?

WHAT ARE YOU FEEDING YOUR MIND?

Think about how much information comes into your head every day.

- Videos.
- Messages.
- Music.
- Social media.
- Gaming.
- News.
- Advertising.
- Comments from other people.

It's worth asking what effect all of this is having on you.

If you spend hours looking at images of people who look perfect, what might you start believing about yourself?

If you're constantly watching people who make money look easy, what might you start believing about success?

If everyone you follow seems to be having an amazing time, what might you start thinking about your own life?

What do you think has the biggest influence on the way teenagers think about themselves?

WHAT ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY?

Pornography is easy to find online, and many teenagers will come across it whether they are looking for it or not.

It can give you unrealistic ideas about sex, relationships, bodies and what other people expect from you.

It can also become something that is difficult to stop watching once it becomes a habit.

This isn't about pretending that curiosity doesn't exist.

It's about recognising that **what you repeatedly put into your mind can affect the way you think**.

If you ever find yourself struggling with something like this, talking to a trusted adult is a much better option than keeping it secret.

You don't have to deal with everything on your own.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Philippians 4:8

> ***"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable."***

The Bible recognises that what we focus on matters.

That doesn't mean you can simply decide never to have a negative thought. It means you can learn to notice your thoughts and decide which ones deserve your attention.

If you keep telling yourself that you're useless, eventually you may start believing it. If you constantly compare yourself with other people, you may never feel good enough.

But you can learn to **challenge those thoughts** rather than simply accepting them.

TRY THIS

When you notice a negative thought, ask yourself:

Is it true?
Is there actually evidence for it?

Is it helpful?
Even if there's some truth in it, is thinking about it this way going to help?

Would I say this to a friend?
If your best mate made a mistake, would you speak to him the way you're speaking to yourself?

DISCUSS

1. **Why do you think we are so quick to believe negative things about ourselves?**
2. **Does social media make comparison better or worse? Why?**
3. **How can you tell when something online is affecting the way you think?**
4. **Why can it be difficult to talk to someone when you're struggling with something in your head?**
5. **Who is someone you could talk to if you were really struggling?**

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

NOTICE WHAT YOU'RE FEEDING

For one week, pay attention to the things you're putting into your mind.

You don't need to stop using your phone or social media.

Just notice how certain things make you feel.

Do you feel encouraged?

Jealous?

Insecure?

Angry?

Motivated?

Anxious?

Then think about whether you need to change anything.

You can't always control what thought enters your head, but you can choose what you do with it.

THIS WEEK

One thought I sometimes have about myself that isn't helpful:

Something that makes me feel positive about myself:

Something online that I think affects me more than I'd like:

Someone I could talk to if I'm struggling:

A FINAL THOUGHT

Your mind is one of the most important things you have.

Look after it.

Be careful about what you allow to fill it, and don't automatically believe every negative thought that comes along.

You don't need to pretend everything is fine when it isn't. Sometimes the strongest thing you can do is tell someone that you're struggling.

You are not every thought that passes through your head.
You get to decide which thoughts you listen to.

Session 6 | CHOICES HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Think before you choose.

START HERE

You make hundreds of choices every day. Some are so small you barely notice them.

- What to eat.
- What to wear.
- Whether to get out of bed.
- What game to play.
- What to watch.

Other choices can have much bigger consequences.

- Who you spend time with.
- What you do when your friends pressure you.
- How you respond when you're angry.
- Whether you tell the truth.
- Whether you take responsibility when you've done something wrong.

As you get older, you'll have more freedom to make your own decisions.

That sounds great.

But there's something that comes with freedom:

Responsibility.

THE MOMENT BEFORE THE CHOICE

Most bad decisions don't begin with someone thinking:

"I'm going to make a terrible decision today."

Usually there's a moment when you know something isn't quite right.

You might hear:

"Come on, it'll be fine."

"Nobody will know."

"Everyone else is doing it."

"It's only a joke."

"You can delete it afterwards."

That's the moment when you have a choice.

Have you ever known something was probably a bad idea but done it anyway?

Why?

THINK AHEAD

Before making an important decision, try asking yourself four questions.

What could happen?
Think beyond the next five minutes.

Who could this affect?
Remember that your choices don't always affect just you.

How will I feel about this tomorrow?
Something can seem like a good idea at 10pm and a terrible idea at 8am.

Is this the sort of person I want to become?
This might be the biggest question of all.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Galatians 6:7

> ***"You will always harvest what you plant."***

It's a simple picture.

If you plant good seeds, you shouldn't be surprised when something good eventually grows.

If you keep making choices that cause problems, you shouldn't be surprised when those choices eventually have consequences.

Not every consequence happens immediately. That's what can make some decisions difficult.

The choice you make today can affect the person you become tomorrow.

OWN YOUR CHOICES

Sometimes things go wrong and our first instinct is to blame someone else.

> *"He made me do it."*
>
> *"Everyone else was doing it."*
>
> *"They started it."*
>
> *"I didn't think it would matter."*

Sometimes other people genuinely do influence what happens.

But eventually you have to ask:

"What was my part in it?"

Taking responsibility doesn't mean blaming yourself for everything. It means being honest about the choices **that were yours**.

DISCUSS

1. **Why do people sometimes make choices they already know are probably not wise?**
2. **Why is it easier to blame someone else than admit you've made a poor choice?**
3. **Do you think some decisions are more difficult to undo than others?**
   Can you think of examples?
4. **How much should you think about the possible consequences before making a decision?**
5. **What's the difference between making a mistake and refusing to take responsibility for it?**

A REAL-LIFE TEST

Imagine your friends have found a way to get around a school rule.

They tell you:

> *"Don't worry. Nobody's going to find out."*

Before deciding whether to join in, ask yourself:

- What could happen?
- Who could it affect?
- Would I be happy telling my parents what I'd done?
- Would I make the same choice if nobody else was doing it?

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

THINK AHEAD

This week, when you're faced with a decision that could have consequences, don't rush.

Take a few seconds to think about what might happen next.

You don't need to become someone who never makes mistakes.

The aim is to become someone who **thinks before acting and takes responsibility afterwards**.

THIS WEEK

A decision I need to think carefully about is:

One consequence I need to consider is:

Someone who gives me good advice is:

One area where I could take more responsibility is:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You won't always make the right choice.

That's part of being human.

What matters is learning to think things through, taking responsibility when you get things wrong and becoming wiser through experience.

As you get older, nobody else will be able to make every decision for you.

The choices you make today are helping shape the man you'll become.

Session 7 | WHAT DO I STAND FOR?

Character matters when nobody is watching.

START HERE

It's easy to say what you believe when everyone agrees with you.

It's much harder when standing by what you believe might cost you something.

Imagine you're with your mates and someone gets picked on.

Everyone is laughing. You know it's gone too far.

What do you do?

Or imagine you find some money that clearly belongs to someone else.

Nobody saw you find it.

What do you do?

These situations tell us something about **character**.

WHAT IS CHARACTER?

Character is about the kind of person you are, especially when there isn't anyone around to give you credit.

It's easy to look good when people are watching. Character is revealed by the choices you make when they aren't.

What qualities do you think make someone a good man?

Which three matter most to you?

WORDS ARE EASY. ACTIONS ARE HARDER.

Most people would say they value honesty.
But what happens when telling the truth gets you into trouble?

Most people would say they value kindness.
But what happens when being kind means standing up for someone nobody else likes?

Most people would say they are loyal.
But what happens when your friend is clearly in the wrong?

It's easy to say what you believe.

The difficult part is living it.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Micah 6:8

> ***"The Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."***

This verse gives us a simple picture of the kind of life God wants.

- Do what is right.
- Treat people with mercy.
- Don't think you're better than everyone else.

It isn't complicated, but it isn't always easy.

WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING

Imagine you know you'll never get caught.

Would that change what you do?

You find a way to cheat in a game.
Would you use it?

You see something online that you know you shouldn't be looking at.
Would you keep watching?

Your friend tells you something in confidence.
Would you tell someone else?

Nobody would know if you lied about something.
Would you tell the truth?

These situations aren't really about getting caught.

They're about the kind of **person you are becoming**.

DISCUSS

1. **Why is it sometimes easier to do the right thing when people are watching?**
2. **Can you think of a time when doing the right thing might make you unpopular?**
3. **Is it possible to be a good person and still make bad choices?**
4. **What does it mean to be trustworthy?**
5. **Which is more important: what people think you are like, or what you know you are really like?**
   Why?

STANDING ALONE

Sometimes doing the right thing means standing on your own.

That doesn't mean you should always disagree with everyone else.

But it does mean being prepared to say:

"I don't think that's right."

You don't have to make a big speech. You don't have to tell everyone they're wrong. Sometimes simply refusing to join in is enough.

Have you ever done something different from your friends because you thought it was the right thing?

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

ONE CHOICE

This week, look for one situation where you have the opportunity to do the right thing even though nobody is going to give you credit for it.

- Tell the truth.
- Keep a confidence.
- Include someone.
- Own up when you've made a mistake.
- Refuse to join in when something isn't right.

Then notice how it feels to make a good choice simply because **it's who you want to be**.

THIS WEEK

One quality I really value in other people is:

I would like people to describe me as:

One area where I could be more consistent with my values is:

One thing I want to stand for is:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You are going to hear a lot of advice about how to be successful.

- Get good grades.
- Get a good job.
- Make money.
- Be confident.
- Look good.
- Be popular.

Those things aren't necessarily bad, but they don't tell you what sort of person you are becoming.

At some point, you have to decide what really matters to you.

Your character is being built by the choices you make, especially when nobody is watching.

Session 8 | **PURPOSE**

What is your life going to be about?

START HERE

When someone asks what you want to do when you grow up, you might have an answer.

- Footballer.
- Doctor.
- Engineer.
- Builder.
- Teacher.
- Designer.
- YouTuber.

Something completely different?

And you might have absolutely no idea yet.

That's fine. Your job at 15 isn't to have your whole life planned out.

But there is a bigger question than **"What job do I want?"**

"What do I want my life to be about?"

SUCCESS

What does it mean to be successful?

- Is it having lots of money?
- A good job?
- A nice house?
- Being famous?
- Having lots of followers?
- Being good at what you do?
- Having a family?
- Being happy?

There isn't necessarily one right answer.

What do you think makes someone successful?

Has your idea of success changed as you've got older?

WHAT ARE YOU GOOD AT?

Everyone has strengths.

Some are obvious.

You might be brilliant at sport, music, maths or technology.

Others are less obvious.

Perhaps you're good at listening to people.

Maybe you're calm when other people panic.

Maybe you're good at making people laugh.

Maybe you're reliable.

Maybe you notice when someone is struggling.

These things matter too.

What are three things you're good at?

What is something you'd like to become better at?

WHAT DO YOU CARE ABOUT?

Purpose often starts with paying attention to what matters to you.

What makes you angry?

What makes you excited?

What problems do you notice?

What kind of people do you care about?

What would you like to change?

What is something you wish was different in the world?

Why does it matter to you?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Ephesians 2:10

> ***"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."***

The Christian view is that **your life isn't an accident**.

God has given you abilities, opportunities and a life that can make a difference.

That doesn't necessarily mean you need to become famous or do something extraordinary.

Sometimes purpose is found in ordinary things: being a good friend, looking after your family, doing your work well, helping someone who needs you or using your abilities to make life better for other people.

GETTING AND GIVING

A lot of what we're taught about success is about getting.

- Get good grades.
- Get money.
- Get followers.
- Get a better job.
- Get a bigger house.
- Get more stuff.

But what if a meaningful life is also about giving?

- Giving your time.
- Giving your skills.
- Giving encouragement.
- Giving money when you can.
- Giving people a second chance.
- Giving something back.

Which do you think gives life more meaning: what you can get or what you can give?
Why?

DISCUSS

1. **Do you think everyone needs a purpose in life?**
2. **Can someone be successful but still feel like something is missing?**
   Why?
3. **How much do you think money matters to having a good life?**
4. **What would you like people to remember about you?**
5. **If you had plenty of money and didn't need to work, what would you spend your time doing?**
   What might that tell you about what matters to you?

YOUR PURPOSE

You don't need to have the answer today.

Your purpose will probably develop as you grow, learn and experience different things.

For now, start by thinking about three things:

What am I good at?

What do I care about?

How could I use those things to help other people?

What am I good at?

What do I care about?

How could I use these things to make a difference?

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

USE WHAT YOU'VE GOT

This week, look for an opportunity to use one of your strengths to help someone else.

- If you're good at sport, help someone improve.
- If you're good at school, help someone who is struggling.
- If you're good at listening, make time for someone who needs to talk.
- If you're good at making people laugh, use it to encourage rather than embarrass someone.

It doesn't need to be impressive.

Purpose often starts when we stop asking "What can I get?" and start asking "What can I give?"

THIS WEEK

Something I'm good at:

Something I care about:

Someone I could help:

One way I could use my strengths for someone else's benefit:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You don't need to know exactly what you're going to do with your life.

Give yourself time to discover what you're good at and what matters to you.

- Try things.
- Make mistakes.
- Learn from people.
- Pay attention to the opportunities that come your way.

And remember that a meaningful life isn't measured only by what you achieve for yourself.

A good life isn't just about what you can get from it. It's also about what you can give.

Session 9 | # FINISH WELL

The man you become starts today.

START HERE

Imagine meeting yourself ten years from now.

- You're twenty something.
- You've left school.
- You've made some mistakes.
- You've had some successes.
- You've made new friends.
- You've probably changed quite a lot.

Now imagine that future version of you could sit down and have a conversation with you today.

What do you think he would say?

What might he thank you for?

Is there anything he might wish you'd done differently?

LOOKING BACK

Over the last few weeks, we've talked about some pretty big questions.

- We've thought about **who you are** and who you're **becoming**.
- We've talked about the **people** and **things that influence you**.
- We've looked at how you **deal with your emotions** and what **real strength** looks like.
- We've talked about your **thoughts**, your **choices** and the importance of **taking responsibility**.
- We've thought about **character**, what you stand for and **what you might want your life to be about**.

None of these things can be sorted out in a few weeks.

They're things you'll keep thinking about **throughout your life**.

WHO ARE YOU BECOMING?

Go back through the qualities you chose in earlier sessions.

What sort of man do you want to become?

Which of those qualities do you think you already have?

Which ones do you most need to work on?

THE SMALL CHOICES MATTER

Becoming a good man doesn't usually happen because of one massive decision.

It happens through lots of ordinary decisions.

- Whether you tell the truth.

- Whether you keep your word.
- Whether you apologise.
- Whether you stand up for someone.
- Whether you walk away from something you know isn't right.
- Whether you choose your friends carefully.
- Whether you look after your mind.
- Whether you take responsibility when you get things wrong.

These choices might not seem important at the time. But they gradually become **habits**.

And **habits help shape character**.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The apostle Paul writes to young man called Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:12

> ***"Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity."***

Timothy wasn't an old man with years of experience.

He was young. But Paul didn't tell him to wait until he was older before making a difference.

He told him to be an example now.

That's important. You don't have to wait until you're 25, 30 or 40 to start becoming the man you want to be.

It starts now.

WHAT KIND OF MAN?

Think about someone you respect.

It might be someone in your family, a teacher, coach, church leader, sportsman or someone else.

What is it about them that you respect?

Do you think they became that person overnight?

Probably not.

Their character was built over years of decisions, experiences and relationships, and same thing is happening to you.

YOUR FUTURE SELF

Imagine you're twenty something, again.

What would you want to be able to say about the way you lived your teenage years? **Maybe:**

"I looked after my friendships."
"I didn't let other people decide who I was."
"I learned to control my temper."
"I took responsibility for my mistakes."
"I treated people well."
"I didn't waste my time trying to impress everyone."
"I used what I was good at to help people."

What would you like your future self to be able to say?

DISCUSS

1. **What do you think makes someone a genuinely good man?**
2. **Can you think of someone who has qualities you would like to develop?**
3. **Which of the things we've talked about over this course do you think will be most important as you get older?**
4. **What is one thing you would like to do differently as a result of this course?**
5. **What advice would you give to a younger boy who was about to start The Forge?**

THE FORGE CHALLENGE

START TODAY

Choose one quality that you want to develop.

Not ten. Just one.

- Maybe you want to become more patient.
- More responsible.
- More courageous.
- More honest.
- More confident.
- More generous.
- Better at controlling your emotions.

Whatever you choose, think about one small thing you could do differently this week.

The aim isn't to become a completely different person overnight.

It's to start becoming the person you want to be.

THIS WEEK

The quality I want to develop is:

One thing I can do to practise it is:

Someone who could encourage me in this is:

One thing I want to remember from The Forge is:

A FINAL THOUGHT

You probably still have no idea exactly what your life is going to look like.

That's okay. You don't need to.

There will be things you get right and things you get wrong. There will be people who help you and people who disappoint you. There will be opportunities you take and opportunities you miss.

But through all of it, you'll be making choices about the person you're becoming.

So **don't wait** until you're older to start thinking about it.

The man you become starts with the boy you are today.

And remember what we started with:

You're not finished. You're still being shaped.

ABOUT THE FORGE

The Forge for Teens was developed by Our House Church, Yateley, to help young men explore what it means to grow into men of character, confidence and responsibility.

The course uses honest conversation, practical challenges and a Christian perspective to help boys think about who they are, the choices they make, the people who influence them and the kind of man they want to become.

The Forge for Teens is an adaptation of The Forge, our original adult men's discipleship and mentoring course, which is designed to help Christian men grow in character, faith and leadership. This version has been developed specifically for 13–16-year-olds, retaining its Christian foundation while making the conversations accessible and relevant to young men from a range of backgrounds.

FREE TO SHARE

We believe resources like this are most useful when they are shared.

The Forge for Teens is free to download, copy and use by churches, schools, youth groups and anyone who wants to invest in young men. It may also be adapted for your own setting, provided the original acknowledgement remains.

Find this course and other free resources developed by Our House Church at:

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