

Rodney Smith Jr. Puts the "Care" in Lawn Care

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students...

- See how having compassion for others and implementing positive acts of kindness can make a big difference in the lives of those in need
- Recognize that they can overcome challenges if they live with perseverance
- See the value of goal setting and being determined in striving towards goals
- Become inspired by Rodney Smith's example of servant leadership and strive to be servant leaders in their communities
- Realize the importance of wisdom in the pursuit of setting and achieving goals

Highlighted Virtues and Character Traits

Caring: to help others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others with the desire to help

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent

Empathy: trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

Determination: firmness of purpose; complete commitment to achieving a goal

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, and understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right and lasting

Servant Leadership: a leader inspires others towards action and / or a belief; a servant leader inspires others by serving those he / she leads and by serving others outside of their responsibility; servant leaders inspire others to service through their own example

Leader Introduction:

For today's lesson, we explore the incredible journey of Rodney Smith Jr., a man who has dedicated his life to helping others through his nonprofit, "Raising Men and Women Lawn Care Service." Despite facing challenges as an immigrant from Jamaica, being raised by a single mother, and his own teachers telling him that he would amount to nothing because of his learning disability, Smith has turned his life into an inspiring example of selflessness and kindness. Through his initiative, Smith provides free lawn care to the elderly, single parents, and veterans and is inspiring young men and women across America to rise to the challenge and

mow lawns for free in their own communities. Let's delve into two videos, The "How We Got Started Video" from Raising Men and Women Lawn Care Service and a news segment showcasing Smith's mission.

Lesson Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHH3KmnUjTU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJ6g29KFijk>

Leader Summary:

Despite his life circumstances and the financial constraints of being a college student, Rodney's unwavering dedication to education and making a positive impact allowed him to achieve his dreams. His story not only teaches us the power of compassion and the importance of lending a helping hand, but it also showcases how one person's actions can create a ripple effect of positive change across an entire country. Let's read about and discuss the valuable life lessons from Rodney's story and how his story speaks to our lives.

Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What originally inspired Smith to start mowing lawns for free?
(Smith saw an old man who was struggling to mow his lawn, felt called to do something about it, actually did it and became inspired to continuing doing this work for others.)

Within this simple but powerful act what virtues did Smith live out?

(**Empathy** in recognizing that the old man was struggling, **Compassion** in wanting to help the man so that he wouldn't have to struggle, **Generosity** in giving up his own time to actually stop what he was doing and mow the man's lawn for him)

2. Smith said, "There are many ways to make a difference, I have simply chosen a lawn mower to make a difference with, and I encourage kids to do the same." How can we **care** for others by actually taking action in our own lives and communities, even in small ways?
3. What goals did Smith establish for himself and how did he live with **determination** in striving towards his goals?
(After Smith mowed his first lawn, he set a goal to mow 40 lawns by the end of winter and after reaching his goal so quickly he upped it to 100. Smith lived out his complete commitment to achieving his goals by mowing lawns while still being a full time student and working a regular job for money.)
4. Smith had to practice **perseverance** to overcome some of the challenges that he has faced. What are some of the obstacles that Smith has encountered in his life and while pursuing his mission?
(having to adjust to a new country's culture, being far away from his home and family, not having a lot of time, not having money, adjusting to college life)
5. Let's discuss how **determination** and **perseverance** can help us overcome our own challenges and achieve our goals, no matter how big or small. What are some challenges and goals that you have that are going to require **determination** and **perseverance** to achieve?
(This is also a journal writing option below)

6. When Smith was struggling with adjusting to college, he shared that he asked God to “use him as His vessel” to help others. Sometimes when we are having a hard time ourselves, we can find purpose and joy in helping others. Why do you think this is?

How can facing and striving to overcome challenges contribute to our self esteem and growth?

(By striving consistently to overcome challenges we can gain a sense of well-being from knowing that we have the ability to try to improve our lives and will at times succeed.)

7. After achieving his goal of mowing 100 lawns by Christmas, in what ways did Smith collaborate with others to expand his initiative?
(He first included some young people in his neighborhood to come along with him, which then led him to create his organization and challenge young people to the “50 Yard Challenge.” He offers incentives like tee shirts and lawn mowers to those who complete the challenge.)

Especially considering his limited time and money upon starting out, how does Smith’s expansion demonstrate **wisdom**?

(Smith didn’t have money but he communicated his experiences and vision to motivate many others in ways to effectively achieve the goal of helping many others in need.)

8. Let’s look closer at the character trait of **servant leadership**. What does it mean to be a leader to you? What are the key aspects of servant leadership?

Do you think Smith would have had the same impact if he was just telling them to mow lawns for others without mowing lawns himself?

9. How is Smith not only serving individuals in need by mowing their lawns for free, but also serving the young volunteers who are mowing lawns within his team?
(He is giving them opportunities to learn values that will prepare them for a lifetime of happiness through service to others – determination, perseverance, and the joy that comes from helping others.)

10. How does Smith’s program and the work of his volunteers help bring groups of people together?

(Young people are helping adults/elderly people in their communities on a consistent basis, building relationships with those people and inspiring others)

Are there any initiatives or services besides lawn mowing that you think could help similarly strengthen your community’s bonds?

Journal Writing Options

1. What aspects or virtues of Smith’s story do you find most inspiring? How has Smith’s story changed or helped grow your perspective on making a difference in your community? Include a moral or lesson from Smith’s story that you will carry forward.
2. What are some challenges and goals that you have that are going to require **determination** and **perseverance** to achieve?

Extended Activity and/or Optional Homework:

- Arrange students into groups of 3-4. Have students create a list of two to three needs in their community that may be difficult for others, but ones that they can address. Ideas could include but not be limited to helping people clean their houses, serving as tutors for younger students, etc. Have each group then choose one of their three ideas and create a plan for how they could help address that need.
- If students enjoyed this story, “An Army of Normal Folks” [An Army of Normal Folks](#) podcast recently posted a two episode interview with Rodney about his story that they can listen to on any platform that they use to listen to podcasts (Apple, Spotify, Google, Stitcher, etc.)
- Students can visit Raising Men and Women Lawn Care [Home | Raising Men Lawn Care Service \(weareraisingmen.com\)](#) for more information on how they can accept the “50 Yard Challenge” and mow 50 yards in their community and earn a free lawnmower, leaf blowing, and visit from Rodney himself.

Character Action Media

Connecting Virtues to Our World

www.characteractionmedia.com

Current Links in Education

Copyright 2016

