

What the Bible Says about Honesty & Integrity

Begin by reading and discussing a case study.

How would you define integrity?

What would integrity in a person's life look like?

What does the world say about the importance of integrity?

What does the Bible say about integrity? What are the benefits of integrity?

What are the consequences of lacking integrity?

- Proverbs 10:9, 11:3, 12:22, 14:2, & 20:23
- Exodus 23:1-8
- 1 Peter 1:15-16
- Daniel 6:1-24
- Psalm 15:1-5
- Genesis 39:1-20 (the story of Joseph reminds us that sometimes integrity can be costly, but it fulfills God's ultimate purpose)

What did you learn about honesty and integrity from these passages?

What did you not understand? What questions do YOU have about these passages?

What do you need to do or change as a result of what you learned?

Leader's Guide

Definition: "truth or state of being true"; "being the same in the dark as in the light"; Greek word for integrity means "wholeness"

- Characterized by fairness and straight/forwardness in conduct, thought, speech, etc.
- Upright; just; equitable; trustworthy; truthful; sincere
- Free from fraud, guile, or duplicity; not false
- Not double-minded with contradictory thoughts, words, or actions
- Not pretending to have virtues or qualities that are really not present in the heart
- Not focusing on temporal gain but on growing in godly character

Case Study:

- Last July you graduated from your university and now live in your hometown working for a company. During the October holiday you are visiting your old classmates, who are now graduate students. You all decide to go to a soccer match being held this weekend. As you are standing in line to buy tickets, all of your friends pull out their student ID cards. One of your friends, who is a student forgot his but manages to persuade the ticket seller to give him the student price anyway. As you step up to the counter, the seller asks if you are a student too. The student price is half of the regular ticket price and you would love to use that money for the train trip home on Monday. What are your choices? What do you tell the ticket seller?

Bribes

- A bribe is defined as anything given to a person to influence him or her to do something illegal or wrong.
- Bribes can often be disguised as "gifts" or "fines".

"Honest behavior is an issue of faith. An honest decision may look foolish in light of circumstances we can observe. However, a godly person has mastered the art of considering another factor which is valid, even though invisible: the person of Jesus Christ. Every honest decision strengthens our faith in the living God."

Why does God demand absolute honesty?

1. We cannot practice dishonesty and love God.
 - a. What we say when we make a decision to be dishonest:
 - i. God is not able to provide exactly what I need – I will take things into my own hands and do them my own way.
 - ii. God is incapable of discovering my dishonesty.
 - iii. God is powerless to discipline me.
2. We cannot practice dishonesty and love our neighbor.

- a. When we act dishonestly we are stealing from another person, whether or not it is obvious on the surface or we know that person personally.
- 3. Honesty creates credibility for evangelism.
 - a. Philippians 2:15
- 4. Honesty confirms God's direction.
 - a. Proverbs 4:24-26
- 5. Even the small act of dishonesty is devastating.
 - a. Luke 16:10

Blessings Promised for the Honest:

- Intimacy with the Lord: Proverbs 3:32
- A Blessed Family: Proverbs 20:7
- Long life: Proverbs 12:19
- Prosperity: Proverbs 15:6

Curses Reserved for the Dishonest:

- Alienation from God: Proverbs 3:32
- Family Problems: Proverbs 15:27
- Death: Proverbs 21:6
- Poverty: Proverbs 13:11

A person of moral integrity is one who...

- Does what is righteous
- Speaks the truth in love
- Does not falsely accuse another
- Does not harm a neighbor
- Does not gossip
- Despises evil men
- Honors those who love the Lord
- Keeps his or her word
- Leads money without gain
- Does not accept bribes

Integrity: Psalm 101

- ...loves the Lord and His justice
- ...lives a blameless life
- ...keeps its eyes from evil
- ...protects itself from the perverse
- ...silences gossip and slander
- ...seeks fellowship with God's faithful and wisdom from the wise
- ...denounces deceit and dishonesty
- ...confronts those who compromise

Ethics Exam

Before you make a decision over an ethical issue of right and wrong, ask yourself these questions:

- Is there a principle about it in God's word? (2 Corinthians 4:1-2)

- Is it beneficial? (1 Corinthians 10:23)
- Is it self-serving at someone else's expense? (1 Corinthians 10:24)
- Is it setting an example you would want everyone else to follow? (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Integrity Interrogation

Before you act on your decisions, check your motives by asking yourself these questions:

- Am I choosing to do this in order to look good in the eyes of others? (Galatians 1:10)
- Am I doing this only to receive financial gain? (Proverbs 15:16)
- Am I willing to do this even if I don't get the credit? (Luke 14:11)
- Am I doing something unethical because I know I will not be found out? (Hebrews 4:13)

What should we do when we have been dishonest or failed to have integrity?

1. Restore our fellowship with God.
 - a. 1 John 1:9
2. Restore our fellowship with people.
 - a. James 5:16; Proverbs 28:13
3. Restore any dishonestly acquired property.
 - a. Leviticus 6:4-5
 - b. Restitution is a tangible expression of repentance and an effort to correct a wrong. If it is impossible for restitution to be made to the injured party, then the property should be given to the Lord. (Numbers 5:8)

Scenarios University Students Might Encounter that Involve Honesty/Integrity:

- Allowing classmates to copy during exams because they sympathize with him/her
- Copying others' classmates' work on an assignment or exam
- Hiding or destroying research materials others need
- Filling out university applications to go abroad (changing recommendations, having someone with better English do a phone interview, etc.)

Going Deeper:

- What's an example of a situation that's common in your everyday life where integrity and honesty are difficult to maintain?
- What's an example from your own life when you failed to be honest? How did you feel afterwards?
- What's an example from your own life when you succeeded in being honest? How did you feel afterwards?

- ❑ Do you feel you are a person who is honest and has integrity? Why or why not?
- ❑ Have your values swayed because of the belief that “everyone does it”?
- ❑ Have you ever been tempted to go along with someone to do something against your conscience that you would have never done on your own?
- ❑ Is it tempting for you to lie to protect another person’s feelings or desires?
- ❑ Have you ever permitted a bad situation to continue because you didn’t want to get involved or become unpopular by voicing an opposing opinion?
- ❑ Have you felt justified in taking something without asking permission or that didn’t belong to you because you felt you really needed it?
- ❑ Have you ever encouraged someone to do something that violates the Word of God because obedience for them would be too painful or because it seemed the most loving thing to do?
- ❑ Do you often think, “This can’t be wrong because it feels so right?” or “This must be Ok with God because everything has worked out so smoothly?”
- ❑ Have you ever excused hurting others to get ahead by rationalizing: “It’s the survival of the fittest?”
- ❑ Was there anything you felt convicted about as we learned about integrity and honesty in our study? What was it? What is God calling you to do now?

Additional Resources:

- ❑ “Speaking the Truth in Love: W-I-N Principle for handling Ethical Dilemmas”: Can help a disciple think through how to respond to an ethical situation they face in their life.

Speak the Truth in Love: 2 Chronicles 16:9

Some athletes have played their game with one primary rule: “Win no matter the cost! If you have to cheat, just don’t get caught.” In all arenas of life, people have played with that same ethic. However, at times, you will find yourself in a dilemma. Compromising your convictions seems the only way out. Whether you are asked to lie out of loyalty or kill for a cause, don’t deny your integrity. Learn to speak the truth in love by using the acronym W-I-N.

- ❑ W: Speak positively about the **WORTH** of the person or organization.
- ❑ I: Explain why you committed to **INTEGRITY** and what you must or must not do.
- ❑ N: Use encouraging words to **NURTURE** the person.

Dilemma #1 (Cultural Ethics)

You feel pressure at work to pad an expense account because that is what other co-workers typically do.

Speak the Truth in Love:

- **Worth:** "I really admire this organization and I want to help it be successful in every way possible."
- **Integrity:** "However, I have made a commitment to Christ to be a person of integrity. Therefore, I must not misrepresent the truth."
- **Nurture:** "I hope that you will know you can count on me to be honest with you at all times."

Dilemma #2 (Situation Ethics)

You feel pressure to lie on the telephone for another person at work – to say that he or she isn't there...thinking you are being loyal.

Speak the Truth in Love:

- **Worth:** "I sincerely care about your feelings and want to help you in every way possible."
- **Integrity:** "However, I have made a commitment to Christ to be a person of integrity. Therefore, I can't lie and say that you are not here."
- **Nurture-** "But I can say you are unavailable and then take a message."

Dilemma #3 (Emotive Ethics)

You feel pressure to engage in immoral sex because another person says "we all have natural desires that need to be satisfied."

Speak the Truth in Love:

- **Worth:** "I really do think a lot of you."
- **Integrity:** "However, I have made a commitment to Christ to be a person of integrity and be morally pure."
- **Nurture:** "Since you can't do a wrong thing the right way, I hope this will save both you and me from feelings of guilt that neither of us needs."