

Session 6



Integrity

THE POINT

Be the same Christ-centered person at all times.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Before there was a Tiger Woods was Bobby Jones. In the 1920s, he ruled the golf course. Jones was an amateur golfer who won tournament after tournament.

In the 1925 U.S. Open, Jones was lining up for his next shot when the head of his club brushed the grass and caused a slight movement of the ball. That's a one-stroke penalty. But no one saw it, and no one called him out on it.

Jones called a foul on himself. The judges argued with him. They hadn't seen anything, so they weren't going to call a foul. But Jones insisted, pointing to Rule 18 about moving a ball at rest. The judges relented and gave him the penalty. Bobby Jones lost the game by one stroke.

Sportswriters heaped praise for his integrity. Supposedly, Jones responded, "You might as well praise a man for not robbing a bank."

For the follower of Christ, integrity isn't an option—not just in golf but in every aspect of life. Integrity comes from the same root word for *integer*: a whole and complete number. A person of integrity is one person; he or she is the same through and through.

QUESTION 1:

What athlete or celebrity do you admire for their character?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 PETER 3:8-12

⁸ Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, ⁹ not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, ¹¹ and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it, ¹² because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

The setting for Peter's words to believers living in Asia Minor was one of suffering. Followers of Christ were often subject to various levels of abuse, from discrimination all the way to sporadic harassment. Persecution sanctioned by the governing authorities was not occurring at the time of this writing, but Peter seemed to anticipate that it was right around the corner.

One of the times in which believers exercise integrity is during unwarranted harassment on account of their Christian faith. It comes in different forms, varying from mockery and insults to loss of employment opportunities. In any situation, integrity calls for a positive testimony of behavior. Our response to others should be just as Christlike at work and school as it is at home and in the fellowship of other Christians.

Peter painted a winsome picture of behavior in verses 8 and 9. Living with humility and compassion, expressed in an attitude of non-retaliation, is a positive witness to the gospel. Speaking a blessing even after being insulted is

the life to which God has called us. Some of our best evangelism is through our lifestyle, especially when it is consistent in hard situations.

This entire study on how character really matters is illustrated in this passage. To have a positive influence on others, there must be a correlation of behavior in all areas of life. We can't act nice and sweet at church while being rude to people at work and expect our lives to have eternal impact.

Compartmentalizing describes how we divide our lives into sections or by categories. Nearly every person lives out of different compartments. There's a work compartment, a family one, a church one, and so on. The list for each person may vary a little bit, with leisure, entertainment, and friends as other compartment possibilities. You get the general idea.

Certainly, there's nothing wrong with having some boundaries between these different areas, such as our work life and our family life.

We limit time spent in one arena to make sure all are receiving the right amount of attention. The problem comes when our behavior changes as we move from one area to another. We act differently around different people. Onlookers should be able to see consistency of behavior between the different parts of our lives.

There's an incentive to live in pursuit of goodness and righteousness. A life of integrity is given this promise: "so that you may inherit a blessing" (v. 9). Of course, ultimately that refers to our heavenly inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-4). Yet, there's also a temporal blessing from God to be experienced in integrity. It's the peace of mind that doesn't worry about being exposed as a hypocrite. It's the satisfaction that our behavior isn't keeping anyone from coming to Christ.

One other admonition is added to the formula for a good life. "Seek peace and pursue it" (3:11). The word "peace" has a rich tradition and meaning in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. Peter surely had been thinking about it when he wrote these words.

We typically think peace is the absence of conflict. Ancient Hebrews had a much richer understanding. To them, peace was an integration of all areas of life. Think of a piece of fabric. There are millions of threads perfectly woven together. That's a picture of peace and integrity.

We might be tempted to think we've fooled people when we compartmentalize our lives. Maybe your group doesn't know how cutting your words are on the job or at home. But God does and "the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil" (v. 12). For God to turn His face away means that first He saw it and then distanced Himself from it. That's the worst possible place any of us could find ourselves in.

QUESTION 2:

What are the rewards of living a life of integrity?

1 PETER 3:13-15

¹³ Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

One of the marks of adulthood is the capacity to distinguish between hurt and harm. When children experience pain, their reaction isn't always in line with the source of their pain. The reason is they believe the pain will last forever. A mature person understands being hurt isn't always the same as being harmed.

While verse 13 may be a statement about how typically good behavior is rewarded, it's more likely Peter wanted to affirm that since God is against evil, we can claim a promise. Here is the gist of it: If you live life before God in integrity, no ultimate "harm" will come to you. There will be an eternal reward for your goodness.

Of course, we know from the testimony of Scripture that the righteous do suffer and that living a godly life is no ironclad protection from adversity. The clearest example of this is found in the life of Job, who serves as an example of integrity for us, even in severe physical and emotional pain. Here's what we know about his story:

- **He was a man who honored God and shunned evil (Job 1:1).** First and foremost, Job was committed to the Lord. He knew that there was no pleasure to be found in life that could outweigh a relationship with God.
- **He remained true to God, even in the worst circumstances (vv. 20-22).** Job's convictions about life were tested. His loyalty to God while in pain demonstrated his integrity.
- **He paid a personal price for his integrity (2:6-10).** Even his wife criticized his refusal to blame and curse God for all his troubles. Nevertheless, Job remained true to God.

How does this happen? How can a person believe that even while suffering they are "blessed"? What can deliver us from the fear and intimidation of the prospect of painful hardship?

How we regard Christ is the determining factor in responding to suffering with integrity. Seeing Him as truly Lord over all things assures us that we can endure hardship without compromise. He is in control, even when it seems otherwise.

The prospect of suffering often brings a sense of anxiety and fear. This is where the battle is fought, in our hearts. If Christ really is holy—unique and unrivaled—then we can rest assured that there's no need to fear what any

individual can do to us or what any adverse circumstance may come our way.

However, this requires us to be in a state of readiness, prepared for whatever might come. Peter advised his readers to be "ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you" (1 Pet. 3:15) about your relationship with Jesus. Of course, he spoke of his own personal and painful experience.

When Jesus was being examined by the religious leaders who wanted Him to be put to death, Peter stood outside the place of interrogation. When asked if he was a follower of Jesus, Peter wasn't ready to give a courageous response, which integrity required him to do. Instead, Peter denied knowing Jesus on three occasions, just as Jesus had warned him he would do (Luke 22:54-62).

As Peter sat warming his hands around a fire and acting as if he didn't know who Jesus was, he was living a lie. His lack of integrity and unwillingness to live under the lordship of Christ brought the gaze of Christ upon him, and it also brought bitter regret.

Failing to be the same person in all of life's situations and circumstances will eventually break your heart, as well as the hearts of those closest to you.

QUESTION 3:

How can we tell people about the hope that is in us?

Engage

CONSISTENT OR COMPARTMENTALIZED?

Indicate whether your behavior is consistent or compartmentalized in the following areas. Then spend some time praying about your responses.

Giving a blessing to all people	Consistent	Compartmentalized
Do what is good	Consistent	Compartmentalized
Seek peace and pursue it	Consistent	Compartmentalized
Do not fear or be intimidated	Consistent	Compartmentalized
Regard Christ the Lord as holy	Consistent	Compartmentalized
Do this with gentleness and reverence	Consistent	Compartmentalized
Suffer for doing good rather than evil	Consistent	Compartmentalized

1 PETER 3:16-17

¹⁶ Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

There's a form of integrity that fails to be winsome in its expression. Imagine for a moment that, instead of denying Christ, Peter had responded with courage, not cowardice. Part of living a life above reproach and keeping a clear conscience means we live lives able to stand up to examination and critique, both in attitude and action.

QUESTION 4:

What are some guardrails to help you live a life of integrity?

In this cultural moment, it seems that everyone is watching. The technology of surveillance has grown so sophisticated that every single action runs the risk of being broadcast or posted to the world. This shouldn't be intimidating to followers of Christ who seek to live transparently and with integrity. We know that God sees everything, which is both a comfort and a challenge.

A clear conscience must be kept and maintained; this is why Peter previously stressed the importance of readiness and preparation. Living on autopilot, without on-going self-examination, leaves us vulnerable to compromising our testimony. No one ever sets out with the deliberate intention of soiling his or her reputation, but it happens, nonetheless.

Living with integrity involves the kind of behavior that's above reproach. Of course, this doesn't mean your good behavior will immunize you from ever being criticized. Frivolous and unjustified accusations were lodged against the early believers, such as Peter's audience. The ancient church was accused of ridiculous things, such as cannibalism (because of references to Christ's blood and body in the Memorial Supper) and atheism (because they refused to offer sacrifice to other gods).

Notice that Peter didn't say *if* you will be accused but *when* you are accused. The only way to avoid criticism is to never take a stand, never step out in faith, and basically never do anything worthwhile at all.

There are two kinds of suffering. First, we may suffer for "doing evil" (v. 17), and God doesn't promise blessings for that. Of course, every believer makes mistakes and may have to experience the consequences. God doesn't forsake us during those times. Second, we may suffer for "doing good" (v. 17). That has value to God and influences those who observe you.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another maintain lives of integrity?

LIVE IT OUT

Integrity means always being the same Christ-centered person. Consider the following applications of this session.

- **Examine** the different compartments of your life and rate the consistency of behavior between each one and your Christian faith. Is there a strong connection or an emerging one? Would you have to describe it as weak or non-existent?
- **Reach** out to someone who you know has been criticized or mocked for their good behavior. Write a note or send a text of encouragement to this individual.
- **Develop** a plan for how you will deepen your character as a follower of Jesus, based on this session, as well as the whole study on character. Show it to a close friend and ask this individual to periodically check on your progress.



GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU

By Ana Ávila



Biblical productivity isn't about working all the time, having a completely checked-off to-do list by the end of the day, or creating perfect color-coded calendars. Biblical productivity is about faithfulness. True productivity is being the kind of person who uses every resource he or she has—time, energy, skills—in the best way, for the glory of God and the good of others.

How can we live like this? Embracing these principles can help us start.

TIME: YOU HAVE TIME TO DO WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING.

Read that again. No, you don't have time to do all you want to be doing. You also don't have time to do everything people ask of you. That can be frustrating, to be sure. But our first principle is freeing: We have the time to walk in the good works our sovereign God has prepared for us. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). Those are the things we should be doing.

To embrace this principle, pray. Pray with gratefulness because God hasn't only saved us, He wants to use us as He writes the amazing story of redemption. Pray with repentance because so often we merely respond to life as it comes instead of being good stewards of everything the Lord has given us. Pray with hope, asking for the wisdom you need to discern what good works God has for you in this season of your life. After you pray, walk by faith, knowing that He will grant you that wisdom from above. (See Jas. 1:5.)

LIMITS: BAD NEWS: YOU CAN'T DO IT ALL.

God has made us limited and dependent creatures; we need sleep and sustenance. We can only be in one place at a time. We live within time, 24 hours a day. We tend to want to escape our limitations to feel like we're productive, but we don't need to. To be truly productive, we must embrace

the reality of our limitedness and learn to honor God within it.

To embrace this principle, do this little exercise: Write a to-do list for tomorrow. For each task, jot down how much time you'll need to complete it. Double that time. (We tend to be too optimistic regarding how long things take.) Then open a calendar and add your big rocks to tomorrow's date: sleep hours, eating hours, and work hours. Once you have those, try to fit every task in your list, considering the time you've calculated each will take. Does everything fit? Probably not. Journal about how that makes you feel.

DECISIONS: GOOD NEWS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL.

We're just a small part of what God is doing in this world. We can rest; the weight of the world isn't on our shoulders. Just as Jesus focused His ministry on a specific time, place, and group of people—a focus that eventually impacted the whole world—we can focus our labor and trust that God will use our efforts as He pleases. This means we need to make choices; if our resources are limited, we must decide where to spend them. We do this with money all the time, but our time and energy are unfortunately rarely budgeted.

To embrace this principle, go back to the to-do list you wrote. With a prayerful heart, identify the two or three most important tasks and put them in your actual calendar. Save the rest of your list for later and resolve to stop and consciously decide what the next right thing will be (instead of merely moving reactively) after completing the first task.

FOCUS: IF YOU DON'T KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE GOAL, YOU WILL END UP GETTING LOST.

Making wise decisions is great, but it does little good if we don't set our eyes on the labor before us and complete it with excellence. We live in a culture that has trained us for distraction. Jumping

from one thing to the next, we barely start one task when our mind is already somewhere else. This makes us inefficient, and what could have been done in twenty minutes takes ninety. Even worse, this makes us unable to enjoy the good works we're supposedly doing in love. We're not present; we're (again) trying to go against our limits and be in two places at once.

To embrace this principle, practice sustaining focus without interruption. Start the next right thing and set your attention on that thing for at least ten minutes without checking your phone or starting another task. Have a notepad nearby to jot down any distractions that come up, and plan to deal with them later. Go back to your task until the timer runs out. Make this a regular practice, increasing the minutes on the timer as you feel more and more comfortable with sustaining your attention.

HABITS: EVERY STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION COUNTS.

Every day, thousands of seemingly insignificant moments are leading us somewhere, even if most of us don't know where that "somewhere" is. Wisdom requires us to be intentional with the way we ordinarily walk. Think through your day: If it were to repeat itself 4,000 times, what kind of person would you be? What kind of family would you have? If we, ten years from now, want to be godly people and have a godly family, we must have godly personal and family habits.

To embrace this principle, pick one simple habit to develop and start tracking it. It could be something like being in bed every evening by 10 p.m., taking a twenty-minute walk right after breakfast, or reading aloud to your children while they're eating dinner. Print a yearly calendar where you can cross off the days you complete the habit and try your best to not break the chain.

TOOLS: YOUR BRAIN WAS CREATED TO CREATE, NOT STORE.

A lot of our stress comes from trying "not to forget" things that we shouldn't be wasting energy remembering. We can make use of the tools at our disposal—planners, calendars, habit trackers, digital folders—to store all the tasks, appointments, and files that are needed to fulfill our responsibilities and then use our cognitive working memory to love and serve others instead of to keep track of random items.

To embrace this principle, get a notebook and start writing down everything that's on your mind. Whether it's a task, a date, a piece of information, or simply something annoying that your neighbor did and you can't do anything about, put it down on paper. Cross off the things that are out of your hands or that are not that important. Sort the rest of the elements of your list into tasks, appointments, and information. Set aside some time in the next few days to find a place for each category of item in your list: a task management tool, a calendar, a filing system.

Remember: Productivity is simply about faithfulness. God has given us everything in Christ so we can walk with diligence in the good works He has prepared for us. When we fail—and we will—we can run to Him for forgiveness, strength, and wisdom to move forward to live lives of love in service to God and neighbor.

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THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? LifeWay’s research reveals eight markers consistently present in the lives of believers who are growing spiritually. Each year, *Bible Studies for Life* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ..

Visit BibleStudiesforLife.com for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2026.

	FALL 2024	WINTER 2024-25	SPRING 2025	SUMMER 2025
LIVE UNASHAMED	Thrive: Living on Purpose			
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS	Navigating Family Conflict			
SHARE CHRIST		Looking Forward to Christmas		
SEEK GOD		The Heart of Worship		
ENGAGE WITH SCRIPTURE			All Signs Point to Jesus	
SERVE GOD AND OTHERS			Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work	
OBEY GOD & DENY SELF				Character Counts
EXERCISE FAITH				Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

COMING NEXT QUARTER

THE GREATEST TRUTHS OF ALL TIME

- Session 1 **The Greatest Name** • Isaiah 42:1-12
- Session 2 **The Greatest Need** • Luke 5:17-26
- Session 3 **The Greatest Sin** • Matthew 12:22-32
- Session 4 **The Greatest Gift** • Romans 5:6-11,18-21
- Session 5 **The Greatest Command** • Mark 12:28-34
- Session 6 **The Greatest Return** • 1 Thessalonians 4:16–5:8

HOW TO HANDLE LIFE'S INTERRUPTIONS

- Session 1 **When God Interrupts Your Life** • Hebrews 11:8-19
- Session 2 **When Life Goes Terribly Wrong** • Genesis 39:21-23; 40:5-8; 41:10-14
- Session 3 **When Your Actions Cause an Interruption** • Exodus 2:11-22; 3:5-10
- Session 4 **When Well-Meaning People Interrupt Your Plans** • Luke 8:40-50,54-56
- Session 5 **When a Time of Inactivity Slows You Down** • Acts 1:4-8,12-14; 2:1-4
- Session 6 **When Doing God's Work is Interrupted** • Acts 16:4-15

FROM PROBLEMS TO PRAISE

- Special Focus **From Problems to Praise** • Isaiah 38:9-20

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Bible Studies for Life is designed to help groups make disciples through comprehensive, in-depth Bible study. Each year, this series addresses the eight spiritual markers found in maturing believers to ensure that participants are getting a balanced approach to discipleship. And with resources for three different adult age ranges, the content is always relevant to your group members. If you want to dig deeper into each session, an *Advanced Bible Study* option is compatible with all three resources. Learn more online or call 800.458.2772.

**RISK-TAKERS:
THE ADVENTURE OF WALKING BY FAITH**

Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith calls us to exercise faith. Exercising faith can feel risky, but the deciding factor is in whom or what we are placing our faith. Following God by faith can feel risky, though the God we follow turns that trust into a grand adventure. This study was written by Terry Kirby, lead pastor of Pigeon Forge Baptist Church in Tennessee.

**SAFE AND SECURE:
OUR ETERNAL SECURITY IN CHRIST**

Safe and Secure: Our Eternal Security in Christ addresses the insecurity many Christians feel in their relationship with Christ. Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote this special focus study.

CHARACTER COUNTS

Character Counts looks at character traits that are critical in the life of every believer. Our character is to match the One we profess to follow. Our character does matter. This study was written by Brett Selby, the Regional Ministry Partner for Oklahoma Baptists.

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