

LEADER GUIDE

CHARACTER COUNTS

INTEGRITY

BIG IDEA: Be the same Christ-centered person at all times.

DATE: Sunday, September 27, 2026

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 3:8-17

OPENING QUESTION

Before there was a Tiger Woods there was a 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."*

What do you think you would have done?

What athlete or celebrity do you admire for their character?

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.

Call attention to THE BIG IDEA of today's lesson: *Be the same Christ-centered person at all times.*

SETTING THE STAGE

1 Peter. Simon Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote this letter to various churches scattered across Asia Minor—modern-day Turkey.. Peter's purpose was to encourage these believers to stand strong in their faith, even though they endured suffering and persecution for Christ.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Peter 3:8-17 (CSB)

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.

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.

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.

DISCUSSION

How would you define integrity?

INTEGRITY: Faithful support of a standard of values; encompasses wholeness, truthfulness, and moral uprightness. Terms that occur in parallel with integrity suggest its shades of meaning: righteousness; uprightness; without wavering; blameless. Several Old Testament characters are designated people of integrity: Noah; Abraham; Jacob; Job; and David. Integrity **involves moral and ethical consistency.** It means being whole and undivided in one's values and actions, embodying sincerity and honesty. Integrity requires consistency between what one believes and how one acts. It means living according to one's values and principles, even when challenging. Integrity reflects the character of God and is crucial for living a life that aligns with His standards.

READ: 1 Peter 3:8-12

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses to give some background for the book of 1 Peter.

Recap: 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.

Have you ever been looked down on, excluded or treated differently because of your faith or your morals? Share what that was like with your group.

Have you ever compartmentalized your life – acting or speaking one way with co-workers vs. church friends vs. at home? Why do you think you did that?

Recap: We might be tempted to think we've fooled people when we compartmentalize our lives. Maybe we don't realize how cutting our 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.

What are the rewards of living a life of integrity?

What are some ways we can pursue or chase after goodness and righteousness?

Transition: A life of integrity pursues goodness and righteousness. In the next verses, we see that a life of integrity is centered in the lordship of Christ.

READ: 1 Peter 3:13-15

ASK: What happens when a child bumps his head or falls off her bike? (they will scream or cry no matter the severity of the injury; or they will look to their parents to see how they should react and if they sense fear they will start crying)

Recap: 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 bump or scrape, the source of their pain. The reason is they believe they've been harmed and that the pain will last forever. **They are afraid this pain will not go away, and the crying is out of fear as much as pain.** *A mature person understands being hurt isn't always the same as being harmed.*

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses to further explain how we can live **free of fear** as we do the right thing.

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

Who do you know of who has experienced suffering yet held on to hope and faith?

Who do you know of who has faced opposition for their faith? Did they remain faithful and full of integrity?

Consistent or Compartmentalized? Indicate whether your behavior is consistent or compartmentalized in the following areas to consider your own integrity. Are you the same person no matter what the setting?

In your words	Consistent	Compartmentalized
In your actions	Consistent	Compartmentalized
In your relationships	Consistent	Compartmentalized
In your witness	Consistent	Compartmentalized
In your attitude	Consistent	Compartmentalized
In how you treat others	Consistent	Compartmentalized
In difficulties you face	Consistent	Compartmentalized

Transition: In the next verses, we see that living a life of integrity can withstand any scrutiny or criticism.

READ: 1 Peter 3:16-17

Recap: 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.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses to further explain the character traits of a person with integrity.

Think of your integrity as a bridge. A bridge should be able to carry the weight of the cars that pass over it. And our integrity should be able to carry the weight of any persecution or suffering we may face. And just as a bridge needs guardrails, we need guardrails to help keep us on the straight and narrow.

What are some guardrails you have put in place to help you live a life of integrity?

Have you ever had to have a talk with a Christian brother or sister who was failing to live a life of integrity? What was that like? How did they take it?

Do you have a relationship in your life that is open to accountability? Why or why not? (**Challenge your group to find 1-2 people, perhaps in this group, to form an accountability triad with.**)

It isn't easy to open up our lives to criticism, but accountability is a key component of being a person of integrity and protecting our witness.

RECAP: 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.

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

What does a life of gentleness and reverence look like?

RESPONSE

Integrity means always being the same Christ-centered person. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine the different areas of your life. Is your character consistent across each area? Why or why not? Is there anything you have compartmentalized that needs to come out into the light? Confess before God, seek accountability and with the Holy Spirit’s help, develop the character trait of integrity.

RECAP: in this series Character Counts we have looked at the importance of deepening your character as a follower of Jesus and the importance of godliness, humility, contentment, generosity and integrity. Which trait is God calling you to develop? Commit to pray for one another.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

COMMENTARY

1 PETER 3:8-12

Connection to The Big Idea: We are to pursue goodness and righteousness rather than evil and deceit.

Be like-minded and sympathetic (v. 8). Christians who possess integrity live the same way no matter what the present circumstances of their lives. Peter called his audience to demonstrate and cultivate certain attitudes, as believers even in the midst of suffering and persecution. They were to live in harmony. To be *like-minded* is to share a common heritage of faith and ethical values. The Greco-Roman society valued this attribute as it bound people together as a cohesive community. These Christians were to be like-minded in their beliefs about Jesus. Paul challenged the believers in Rome (Rom. 12:16) and Philippi (Phil. 1:27; 2:2) to live in harmony, having a common connection through the gospel. Being like-minded did not mean that these believers would never have any differences. They had various backgrounds, spiritual gifts, and personalities. However, even with those differences they needed to promote unity, not division, in the church.

Love one another (v. 8) translates the Greek word for “brotherly love” and challenged these believers to treat one another as respected family members. This was an important emphasis in Peter’s letter (1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 5:9). The theme of loving fellow believers is also emphasized in John’s Gospel (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17), Paul’s writings (Rom. 12:10; 13:8), and John’s letters (1 John 3:11; 2 John 1:5). Jesus said that loving one’s Christian brothers and sisters is the mark of true discipleship (John 13:34-35).

Compassionate (v. 8). The experience of the believer in having been forgiven by God at the cross should lead him or her to be merciful or tenderhearted (Eph. 4:32). Paul and John also emphasized the need for believers to be compassionate (Col. 3:12; 1 John 3:17).

Humble (v. 8). Humility motivates people to place the needs of others above their own (Phil. 2:3-4). While humility was a characteristic looked down upon in the first-century Greco-Roman world, Peter elevated it as a vital trait for Christians to have. Philippians 2:7-8 states Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death on the cross. Christians who walk with Jesus are to display this same attitude of sacrificial love toward others.

Evil for evil (v. 9). The Old Testament limited the extent to which persons could seek retribution upon offenders for wrongs done (Lev. 24:19-20). As tempting as it might be to strike out when experiencing evil and hatred, Jesus taught His disciples not to repay evil with evil. He commanded His followers to respond to evil, insults, and hatred with love and blessings (Luke 6:27-36).

Blessing (v. 9) means to speak well of someone. In the New Testament, the act of blessing someone meant providing benefits or gifts to the person blessed and/or asking God to bless the individual as well. It's very easy to respond to gossip, hurt, and/or slander in kind. However, Jesus called His followers as people of integrity to respond by blessing and doing good to their enemies (Luke 6:35-36). He set the example when He asked His Father to forgive those who nailed Him to the cross (23:33-34).

Called for this (v. 9). The Greek term for *called* has the meaning of to summon or invite, and by extension being called to receive certain benefits or experiences. The invitation of believers to receive salvation with all its benefits by grace through faith in Christ should lead them to be gracious and merciful toward others.

For the one who wants to love life (v. 10). In verses 10-12, Peter quoted from Psalm 34:12-16. Psalm 34 speaks of how God delivers those in the midst of suffering and affliction. King David wrote the psalm, and its background is when David fled from King Saul to the Philistine city of Gath. However, fearing King Achish of Gath, David faked insanity to prevent the Philistines from attacking him (1 Sam. 21:10-15). Just as God delivered David, He will deliver believers who trust in Him.

1 PETER 3:13-15

Connection to The Big Idea: Rather than fear, we are to live under the lordship of Christ.

Harm you (v. 13). Peter made a general statement by asking a rhetorical question. *Harm* is not the normal expectation for those who do good. However, sadly, in this life that is not always the case. With the "living hope" believers have in Christ in mind (1:3-9), "Peter assured believers that nothing can ultimately harm them if they continue to walk in God's paths, that the pain inflicted on them now is only temporary, and that they will be vindicated by God on the last day"¹ (see Rom. 8:31-39).

Devoted (v. 13). This term refers to zeal, specifically to a person who is completely committed to a cause. In this context, it describes a zealous pursuit of virtue, even when faced with persecution for doing the right things. Those who steadfastly follow the ways of the Lord soon find themselves paddling upstream in relation to society, and it can lead to persecution in this life but not harm in the eternal sense.

Suffer for righteousness (v. 14). While people suffer for many reasons—poor choices, unfortunate circumstances, and the evil of some around them—this specific kind of suffering is for one's faith in Christ. Staying true to Jesus and His ways sometimes places the believer in the crosshairs of evil. God promises believers who suffer persecution and mistreatment because of their faith will be

blessed with great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23).

Do not fear them or be intimidated (v. 14) is a reference to Isaiah 8:12, in which the prophet encouraged the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah not to fear the Northern Kingdom of Samaria and the nation of Aram who were threatening them. God promised both those kingdoms would be conquered by the Assyrians, but Judah would be safe. Isaiah encouraged, "You are to regard only the LORD of Armies as holy. Only he should be feared" (Isa. 8:13).

Regard Christ the Lord as holy (v. 15). Peter's readers faced enemies also, but instead of focusing on and fearing their persecutors they were to *regard Christ the Lord as holy*. To regard Jesus as *Christ* is to acknowledge that He is the Messiah sent from God to save people from their sin. To regard Him as the *Lord* who is *holy* is to acknowledge Him as the supreme authority in one's life. As Jesus advised, "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). He then went on to say we can trust God, for He cares so much about us that He knows how many hairs we have on our heads (vv. 29-31).

Give a defense (v. 15). Christians who experience persecution should have a ready *defense* for their faith. The Greek term for *defense* was associated with the legal courts and was used in the New Testament for formal defenses before religious and governmental authorities (Acts 22:1; 25:16; Phil. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:16). Believers should be prepared to give such a defense in any and all situations (**at any time**) and to any and all people (**anyone who asks you**).

The hope that is in you (v. 15). Peter began his letter by speaking of the "living hope" that God has given to believers (1 Pet. 1:3). *Hope* is a primary characteristic of the Christian life (Eph. 2:12; 1 Cor. 13:13; Titus 2:13). This hope refers to the future aspect of salvation in the age to come, a sure and certain hope which those without Christ do not have. While persecution can make life difficult, it cannot harm the eternal life that awaits believers (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:3-9), and because of this Christians can live in joy, hope, and love even when being persecuted and suffering.

1 PETER 3:16-17

Connection to The Big Idea: A life of integrity maintains conduct that withstands any scrutiny or criticism.

Gentleness (v. 16). Even when Christians defend their faith before their persecutors, they are to do so with *gentleness*. Also sometimes translated as "meekness," the Greek word describes someone who has a true understanding of himself, who does not have an overly-developed sense of self-importance. The word carries the ideas of humility, courtesy, and considerateness. Gentleness was a primary characteristic of Jesus (2 Cor. 10:1). Paul told Titus to respond to everyone with gentleness (Titus 3:2). He also listed gentleness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and urged believers to clothe themselves with gentleness (Col. 3:12). Responding with gentleness to one's persecutors does not come naturally, but through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Reverence (v. 16). This Greek term can also be translated "fear." In 1 Peter, it is usually used in reference to God; it describes a reverential awe that believers should have toward God (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17; 3:2). Proverbs teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7). As believers respond with a ready defense of the gospel, they do so fearing God, not those who persecute them (1 Pet. 3:14).

A clear conscience (v. 16). Since believers fear God, their concern should be keeping a *clear conscience* before God. A clear conscience requires integrity. Believers must not only proclaim the gospel; they must live out their faith in their daily lives both in public and in private. Furthermore, the

presentation of the gospel must be done in such a way that if the hearer takes offense, he or she does so because of the gospel message itself, not because of something related to the presenter of the gospel. Living with a clear conscience is possible for Christians because the Spirit of God lives in us, and He convicts about sin, righteousness, and judgment, and enables us to make choices and decisions in accordance with the will and ways of God.

Disparage your good conduct (v. 16). Shockingly, Peter stated that unbelievers will mistreat Christians because of their *good conduct*. Since they cannot find any fault with Christians who are truly living out their faith in Christ, they will find fault with their good conduct and use those accusations to persecute believers. The Greek term for *conduct* was one Peter used to emphasize the believer's lifestyle, the kind of conduct that is pleasing to God (1 Pet. 1:15; 3:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:11). He also used the term in regards to the empty and depraved behavior of those without Christ (1 Pet. 1:18; 2 Pet. 2:7).

Put to shame (v. 16). This phrase is interpreted a few ways. First, some believe that the persecutors of believers will be ashamed in this life by recognizing that they have unjustly accused the people of God of wrongdoing. Others suggest that this shame will come on judgment day at the end of this age. Both perspectives may be true. This shame can lead to either new life in Christ or condemnation for one's sins depending on what a person chooses to do when confronted with the gospel. Some will experience shame when they see the conduct of believers and will turn to Christ. Others will reject the witness faithful Christians present; one day they will stand before God as guilty for having persecuted Jesus's church.

God's will (v. 17). Peter acknowledged that suffering for doing good, particularly in the service of Christ, is sometimes the will of God. Jesus said that in this world suffering is to be expected by believers (John 16:33). The Lord said that the servant is not greater than the Master, and Christians should expect to be persecuted as He was (15:20). But those who experience this suffering are blessed because the kingdom of God is theirs and their reward is great in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12). Jesus also encouraged His disciples to take heart because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). Despite these believers' circumstances of being persecuted, Christ has won the victory over the world and the ruler of this world, and believers will share in that victory (John 12:31; 1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5).

Doing evil (v. 17). While suffering is an inevitable part of living in a fallen world, some specifically suffer for doing evil, and others for doing good. Peter said it was better to suffer for doing good than doing evil. He encouraged Christians to live with integrity.