INTEGRITY AND CHARACTER

Essential Qualities for Christian Leaders

LEAD LIKE JESUS
LET THE LEADER IN YOU SHOW
INTEGRITY AND CHARACTER

Essential Qualities for Christian Leaders

Reading assignment should be completed on your own time, prior to your group meeting.
INTEGRITY AND CHARACTER

Essential Qualities for Successful Leaders

Have you ever paused to think about the traits in others that impress you the most? How consequential are those traits in the life of a Christian leader? Pondering this is an exercise that’s well worth your time.

When you look at others, which of their traits do you find most appealing? Education is notable. Wealth is tempting. Eloquence is inspiring. Beauty is alluring. But none of these traits guarantee that people will do the right thing, especially when they believe no one is watching.

Here’s another question: If you could be like someone else, who would that be? Might that person have an Ivy League education or a large bank account? Or would they be a persuasive speaker or an attractive celebrity? None of these things are wrong. However, if you want to leave a lasting legacy, you must possess integrity and character.

What do you believe about these two important traits?

Let’s look at integrity first. People with integrity do what’s right even when others aren’t watching. Proverbs 20:7 says, “The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him” (NKJV).

One of the greatest examples of integrity in history is Joseph, whose Egyptian master trusted him so much that he made him overseer of his house. But time after time, whenever the master was away, his wife attempted to seduce Joseph.

ONLY 36% OF EMPLOYEES BELIEVE THEIR LEADERS ACT WITH HONESTY AND INTEGRITY.
(2005 HARRIS POLL)
Joseph’s response to her was, “There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has [my master] kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). Joseph stuck to his moral principles, even when he probably could have gotten away with doing wrong.

Now, let’s look at character. This is what you really are inside: the Jesus-like qualities that drive your decisions. Do you believe your character matters? It absolutely does. In fact, it can make or break you!

One of the most tragic character failures in the Bible involves Gehazi, servant of the prophet Elisha. Naaman, a Syrian military commander who was afflicted with leprosy, sought Elisha’s help with the disease (see 2 Kings 5). Naaman was healed, and when he tried to give Elisha a gift, the prophet refused. However, as Naaman was returning home, Gehazi pursued him and told him Elisha had changed his mind. His lie persuaded Naaman to give him two talents of silver and two changes of clothes. But as punishment, God struck Gehazi and his descendants with leprosy. Gehazi put material things before character, and the results were disastrous.

In recent times, we’ve seen other moral failures and consequent disastrous results. Enron Corporation was among one of the largest American corporations of the last century, with more than 20,000 employees and an estimated $111 billion in revenue in 2000. The company was forced to declare bankruptcy in 2001 as a result of immorality among the leadership, financial fraud, and widespread apathy toward the issues at hand. The scandal also affected Arthur Andersen, one of the “Big Five” accounting firms, which ended up surrendering its licenses to practice as Certified Public Accountants in the United States.

Character failures are destructive, and unless we place character above everything else, other things will always supplant it. Integrity and character are not traits with which we are born. They are traits we build daily as we elevate their priority by walking closely with God, and reflecting on His Word.

Making character and integrity top priorities will help us ensure that in those small, quiet moments when we think no one is watching—or don’t realize someone is actually paying attention—we will do what is right.
Q: If you could be like someone else, who would that be and why? What specifically impresses you about this person?


Q: When it comes to character, what separates you from the person you named as your role model? What are you doing right now to become more like the person you admire?


Q: The failures of Enron and Arthur Andersen did not happen overnight. They most likely started with small instances of testing the boundaries and legal loopholes and it all went down hill from there. Is there anything in your life right now where you are testing and pushing your character and integrity boundaries that could lead to unintended consequences in the future?


TWO-THIRDS OF PARENTS THINK CHEATING IS NO BIG DEAL AND SAY THAT 'ALL STUDENTS DO IT.' (NPR SURVEY)
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Answer each question honestly and share your thoughts freely with your group.

Suggested time limit: 35-40 minutes
There are many great leader role models worth studying, yet Jesus still remains the greatest leader role model to follow. As we go through this course, we will look at Jesus and the perfect standard of leadership He set and modeled for us. We will also look at less-than-perfect leaders in order to learn from their successes and failures. Knowing the standard and being aware of potential pitfalls will give us the foundation we need in order to increase our influence with those around us.

**THIS WEEK’S READING ASSIGNMENT REVIEW: 5 MINUTES**

Ask each group participant to share his/her biggest “aha” moment from the pre-work reading and questions.

**THIS WEEK’S VIDEO: 10 MIN**

You’re about to watch a video that questions the cliché way of thinking about character and integrity. It challenges us to dig deep and evaluate ourselves, whether we have what it takes to withstand the pressures that come at us from all directions. As you watch the video, pay attention to the following and discuss with your group:

**Q:** In light of the cliché definition of character and integrity, why do you think we focus so much of our attention on building outward perceptions and not enough time on who we are inwardly?

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**Q:** Atlanta educators got away with cheating for over 10 years before they got caught. Is there something in your life you’ve been “getting away with” for a season because you’ve never been caught or exposed? How about cheating? Winging it instead of giving your best? Or maintaining two separate lives: home vs. church life, school vs. friends life or reality vs. social media life? How would your life change if you were exposed?

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**Q:** What character traits helped Jesus to stand firm in the face of temptation? How can you apply those in your own life?
Answer the following questions.
Jesus always demonstrated character above reproach. He was loving, gentle, kind, humble, selfless and forgiving. Even when correcting or rebuking others, He had the other person’s best interests in mind. Jesus had a lot to say about our character and the way we should behave toward others.

In this particular passage, what is the relational principle that Jesus wants us to follow?

Do you find it easier to demand others behave this way toward you, than for you to display this characteristic toward others?

Is there a person in your life who consistently lives out this specific principle? If so, share a few examples.

CASE STUDY: How Far Will You Go to Get Ahead?
Ask someone in your group to read the case study and discuss the following questions.

In May 2005 Andy Roddick, seated as the #1 U.S. tennis player, was playing a match in the Rome Masters against much lower seated Fernando Verdasco. Verdasco already lost his first set and was about to lose his second. As Verdasco served for what seemed his last opportunity to save the game, the umpire called his ball out, calling the entire match in favor of Andy Roddick.

Usually, a sports player who just had a favorable call made would take the victory and run with it – but not Andy Roddick. Andy, who saw that the ball had barely touched the line, refused to give into the “accepted” behavior. Instead, he challenged the umpire’s call and eventually ended up losing that match. This one split-second call tested Andy Roddick’s integrity and showed how far he was willing, or actually not willing, to go just to score another win. By making this call, Andy not only lost a match but also thousands of dollars of potential prize money. What he preserved, though, was much more valuable, his good name.

What’s the main point you took away from the Andy Roddick case study?

On a daily basis, we all face “Andy” type moments when we have to decide how far we are willing to go to get ahead. Can you recall moments in your life when your character and integrity were tested? What ended up winning? Think about moments from your school life, home life, relationships or maybe even church life.

Compromise, even though it scores us short-term gains, hurts us in the long run. Discuss dangers of compromise and what precautions we can take to protect our character and integrity. Share examples from your own life when you suffered the consequences of compromise.

SELF-EVALUATION
Discuss the following questions with your group.

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important, how important is building character and integrity in your own life right now? Explain your answer.

Which character traits would you like to exemplify more and why?

What can you do on a regular basis in order to grow in those areas?
Answer the following questions.

As you read the story of Lot and Abraham, what character qualities did both men display? How different was Abraham’s character from Lot’s?

What do you think Abraham believed about God in order to behave the way he did toward his nephew, Lot?

Do you usually make decisions based in self-interest first? Why or why not?

CASE STUDY: How Far Will You Go to Get Ahead?

You’ve always been a pretty good student, averaging A’s and B’s and occasional C’s. Your parents think you can do better and are putting more pressure on you; a C is no longer acceptable. They are threatening to withdraw their financial support if you don’t bring home all A’s and B’s the next semester.

English has never been your strong suit and you learned that there is a person in your class who writes papers for a small “fee.” She is really good at it, too, and has already helped out quite a few students. Since your schedule outside of school is pretty packed with extracurricular activates that you love, you’re facing a choice of giving up your extracurricular activities for a season or using this person’s services to help you out. You know your parents would be upset, but the chances of them finding out are slim to none.

What do you think of paying someone to do your work, especially if it’s a class that you don’t think you’ll ever use out in the “real world?”

What character traits will you build if you decide to give up your extracurricular activities and do the work yourself? How would those character traits help you once you’re in the working world?

SELF-EVALUATION

Discuss the following questions with your group.

Which negative character qualities do you resent most in others and why?

How do you protect yourself from having those qualities take root inside of you?

In your own experience, how has your character helped or prevented you from achieving success, whether it’s relationally, at school or work?
BIBLICAL FOUNDATION: Read Daniel 6:1-12

Answer the following questions.

The story of Daniel demonstrates to us how conniving, deceitful and self-serving we can be. It also demonstrates to us that when our hearts are fully committed to the Lord, we will have the character and the integrity to stand under all sorts of pressures.

What positive characteristics did Daniel demonstrate? What negative character qualities did the other two administrators demonstrate?

What can we learn from Daniel and his commitment to always do what’s right in the eyes of God?

Many believe that “doing what’s right” at all times can actually prevent us from achieving success. What do you say to that?

CASE STUDY: The End Justifies the Means

According to U.S. News and World Report, between 75% and 98% of college students admit to cheating. We are told that: “Cheating no longer carries the stigma that it used to. Less social disapproval coupled with increased competition for admission into universities and graduate schools has made students more willing to do whatever it takes to get the A.” We are also told that 85% of college students believe cheating is necessary to get ahead.

Why do you think cheating has become so socially accepted among students?

Do you think that students who cheat at school will find it easier to cheat in life? Why or why not?

Do you think that at times the end justifies the means?
BIBLICAL FOUNDATION: Read Colossians 3:12-15

Answer the following questions.

Out of all the character qualities in this passage, which one would you say most challenges you? Why do you think you struggle with this particular trait?

What habits can we cultivate, on a daily basis, to help us grow in all of these character qualities?

SELF-EVALUATION

Discuss the following questions with your group.

Have you ever faked character or integrity? Was it hard or easy to do?

Do you believe that character and integrity are more important than IQ, skills or competencies? Explain your answer.
PRAYER

As you close your group study with prayer, here is a sample prayer you can use during the course of this week in order to keep character and integrity front-and-center in your day-to-day activities.

“Father, maintaining character and integrity that’s above reproach is impossible without Your power. Please help me be more aware of my shortcomings. Grant me Your wisdom and Your strength to resist the pressure to fit in and to compromise. In the strong name of Jesus, Amen.”

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This practical application section is designed to help you take one tangible step each week as you move from where you are to where you want to be as a leader and influencer. Every week you’ll be asked to focus on a single task that will help you to grow personally and to improve your marketability.

BUILD YOUR CHARACTER RÉSUMÉ

As you prepare to enter the “working world,” it’s important to showcase WHO you are and not only WHAT you can do. Even if you don’t have any work experience yet, you can start building a character résumé that will help your future employer know you and your values.

Take the time this week to connect with 3-5 individuals and ask them to write a “character” reference for you. Make sure you ask not only your peers, but maybe your teachers, professors, church leaders etc. Here are some examples of character references:

“Erin is a highly energetic, extremely competent and highly intelligent individual. Erin conducts herself with the highest of moral standards and is an excellent team player…a valuable asset to any team.”

“Matthew’s strength is his ability to think creatively and outside the box. He has an endless supply of ideas filed away and ready to use should the need arise.”

MORE PASSAGES ON CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY

In Romans 5:1-5 we are told that endurance produces character and that character produces hope. Which of your character traits do you think could use more endurance? In what ways does character produce hope?

Generosity is a character trait Jesus spoke about frequently. In Acts 20:35 we are told that it’s more blessed to give than to receive. Why do you think the trait of generosity is so important to God?

Youth and inexperience can sometimes be used as an excuse for poor choices and a weak character. In light of this, what does 1 Timothy 4:12 communicate to us regarding our youth and how we should conduct ourselves?

Psalms is full of great counsel and wisdom regarding one’s own character. Who, according to Psalm 15:1-5, will dwell in the presence of the Lord?