

# INTEGRITY

Leader pages on pp. 158-161

**THE POINT:**  
BE THE SAME CHRIST-  
CENTERED PERSON AT  
ALL TIMES.

## 1 PETER 3:8-17

<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble,

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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,

<sup>11</sup> and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it,

<sup>12</sup> 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.

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<sup>13</sup> Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?

<sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated,

<sup>15</sup> **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.**

### MEMORY VERSE

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<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

### KEYWORDS

**Love one another (v. 8)**—The Greek word for “brotherly love” challenged these believers to treat one another as respected family members.

**Blessing (v. 9)**—To speak well of someone. In the New Testament, it meant providing benefits or gifts to the person blessed and/or asking God to bless the individual as well.

**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.

**Disparage your good conduct (v. 16)**—Shockingly, Peter stated that unbelievers will mistreat Christians because of their good conduct.

# HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS PURSUE CHRIST-CENTERED INTEGRITY?

Have you ever scrolled through social media and been embarrassed by what you saw another Christian post? Maybe you saw the head of the usher board at a concert in a compromising position. You may have read a church leader's post ranting and full of malice and gossip. Paul encourages men and women to live out sound teaching and Christian living. Paul writes that our works should be done with integrity (Titus 2). This means that when we look around, we should see fellow believers display integrity, consistently in every area of their lives.

For the follower of Christ, integrity is not an option—it is required 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 is the same through and through.

## Pursue Righteousness //

### 1 Peter 3:8-12

The setting for Peter's words to believers living in Asia Minor (which roughly corresponds to modern day Turkey) 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. His words here echo what he said in 1 Peter 2:12, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits." Some of our best evangelism is through our lifestyle, especially when it is consistent in hard situations.



## THE POINT: BE THE SAME CHRIST-CENTERED PERSON AT ALL TIMES.

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.

There is 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 (1Pt. 1:3-4). Yet there is also a temporal blessing from God to be experienced in integrity. It is the peace of mind that doesn't worry about being exposed as a hypocrite. It is the sense of satisfaction that our behavior is not keeping anyone from coming to know Christ.

Peter drew heavily on Psalm 34 in verses 10-12 as an expression of the blessed life. Would you like to live a good life? Don't use your words to deceive people. Would you like to see good days? Stop doing what is wrong and replace it with goodness, holiness and righteousness.

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

We typically think that peace is the absence of conflict. Ancient Hebrews had a much fuller and richer understanding of the concept. To them, peace (shalom) 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. It's also a picture of integrity.

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

### HOW DOES THIS COUNTER-CULTURAL WAY OF LIVING REFLECT THE HEART OF CHRIST TO THOSE AROUND US?

## Be Ready to Suffer // 1 Peter 3:13-15

One of the marks of adulthood is the capacity to distinguish between hurt and harm. When a child experiences pain, their reaction is not always in line with the bump or the scrape, the source of their pain. The reason is that they believe they have been harmed and that the pain will last forever.



## DIGGING DEEPER INTEGRITY IN SUFFERING

During difficult times it can be very difficult to maintain our Christian walk. We may be angry towards God. It can be a struggle to maintain a close relationship with Him during these times. In Second Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sin and told him his son would die. The baby was ill, and David fasted and pleaded with the Lord to spare his son. Once the baby died, David washed, anointed himself, and went to the Lord's house. His servants did not understand David's behavior. David told them that he chose to fast because there was still a possibility of his child's deliverance. David chose to remain close to God in his suffering. How many of us would seek the Lord in a time like this? Could we stay close to God and fast when we knew that death was likely imminent?

**How can you handle your next season of suffering with integrity and trust?**

A mature person understands that being hurt is not always the same as being harmed.

While verse 13 may be a statement about how typically good behavior is rewarded, it is more likely that Peter wanted to affirm for his readers that since God is against evil and approving of righteousness, they 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 iron clad protection from adversity. The clearest example of this is found in the life of Job. His story is legendary. The conditional phrase “even if you should suffer for righteousness” describes his season of suffering.

Job 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 the Creator.
- **He remained true to God even in the worst circumstances (Job 1:20-22).** Job’s convictions about life were sorely tested. His loyalty to God even while in pain demonstrated his faithfulness.
- **He paid a personal price for his integrity (Job 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?

The prospect of suffering often brings a sense of anxiety and fear. This is where the battle is actually fought, in our hearts. If Christ really is holy—unique and unrivaled—then we can rest assured that there is 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” about your relationship with Jesus. Of course, he spoke out 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. Three times, he was asked if he was a follower of Jesus, but he was not ready to give a courageous response, which integrity required him to do. Instead, he denied knowing Jesus on three occasions, just as Jesus had warned him he would do (Luke 22:54-62).

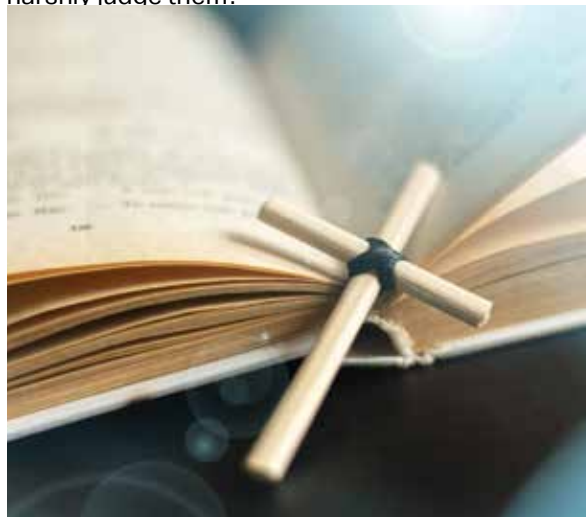
As Peter sat warming his hands around a fire and acting as if he did not know who Jesus was, he was living a lie. His lack of integrity and unwillingness to live under the lordship of Christ brought the gaze of Christ upon him and it brought bitter regret.

## HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN TO SOMEONE YOUR REASONS FOR HOPE IN JESUS?

### Put Critics to Shame //

#### 1 Peter 3:16-17

There is 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. What if he had begun to scold everyone else there around the fire? What if he began to look down his nose at them and harshly judge them?



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That would have spoiled an otherwise effective testimony to Jesus. This is why when we share our commitment to Christ with others, we need to do so with “gentleness and reverence.”

Living with integrity involves the kind of behavior that is above reproach. Of course, this doesn't mean that your good behavior will immunize you from ever being criticized. Definitely not. Frivolous and unjustified accusations were lodged against the early believers, such as Peter's audience.

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.

### HOW CAN YOUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING DEMONSTRATE YOUR HOPE IN CHRIST TO THOSE AROUND YOU?

In maintaining integrity even in the face of criticism, your steadfastness may not go unnoticed by some who are voicing the criticism. Always remaining true to Christ, especially in hardship, makes a difference, both in this life and in the next.

### DID YOU KNOW?

When we share our faith, we often tell of God's goodness. We recall Scripture that reveals God as faithful and true. We can recount Old Testament stories of the Lord's faithfulness to the children of Israel despite their rebellious nature. The prophets continue to plead with God's people to turn from their wicked ways. Jonah does not want to go to Nineveh because he knows God will forgive wickedness when the people repent (Jonah 4:1-2). Don't forget the importance of revealing the truth of our enemy during these conversations. The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). He lied in the garden. He tried to deceive Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4). In Rev. 12:9, John writes that Satan deceives the world. Be familiar with the enemy's patterns of lies and deceit and help unbelievers see the truth that the devil is the enemy of their souls.

**Biblical Truth:** “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

**How can you share the truth of the gospel with others who need to hear it?**

## LIVE IT

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

Integrity means being the same Christ-centered person at all times. Our character should be consistent regardless of where we are and what we are doing. When it comes to character, there is only one silo—life in Christ—and everything else falls into that. That is a life of integrity. Consider the following applications of this lesson:

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- **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 maybe an emerging one? Would you have to describe it as weak or non-existent?
- **Reach out** to someone whom you know has been criticized or mocked for their good behavior. Write a note or send a text of encouragement to them.
- **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 them to periodically check on your progress.



# DAILY READINGS

## 1. THE RESPONSE GOD REWARDS // 1 PETER 3:8-12

Peter and Paul call for the same response to those who do evil, insult, or persecute us—to not repay evil for evil, nor insult for insult—but to bless those who persecute us, and not curse them (Rom 12:14,17). Both echo what Jesus says in Matthew 5:44, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” There are three incentives for this type of response. We demonstrate that we are children of God (Matt. 5:45). We’ll see joyful days (1 Pet. 3:10). We leave room for God to take matters into His own hands (Rom. 12:19).

**Who is better able to handle your haters—you or God?**

## 2. STEADFAST IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING // 1 PETER 3:13-15

We will not always be rewarded for good in this life. When our good is repaid with evil, Peter says we are still blessed. He bases this statement on Jesus’ declaration “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs” (Matt. 5:10). Suffering for Jesus’ sake, far from being a sign that we are outside of God’s will or lack faith, is the sign that we are doing God’s will, and that the kingdom of God is ours. If we set aside Jesus in our hearts, God will give us what we need to say at the time we need to say it (Matt. 10:19-20).

**Does it help to know that God has not given you a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7)?**

## 3. GRUFFY DOESN'T GET THROUGH // 1 PETER 3:16-17

The call for believers to give an account for the blessed assurance that we have is predicated on Christ being set aside and sitting on the throne of our hearts (1 Pet. 3:15). It is having a heart for God that allows us to have a heart for people, so that the hope we have is communicated in love, evidenced by words of kindness and respect. When Peter says not to repay insult for insult, his

point is, what’s the use of not repaying evil for evil if your language is insulting? What’s the use of not doing evil, if your words are degrading? Our witness is not only in deeds, but in words as well.

**Let both our conduct and conversation bring honor to Christ.**

## 4. PRAISING MY WAY THROUGH // 1 PETER 4:12-16

Peter says that we should not be surprised when we are ridiculed for being Christians. The scorn we experience demonstrates that the Spirit of God that lives in us is also emanating from us. Instead of being perturbed at put downs, we ought to praise God that we have been privileged to share in Christ’s sufferings. Acts 5:41 says, “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” When we suffer for Jesus, it also shows that we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17). If suffering is a part of life, let’s not suffer as wrongdoers, but as those counted worthy because we’ve been faithful.

**But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.**

## 5. WARMHEARTED AND WISE WORDS // PROVERBS 15:1-2

Peter exhorts believers to give a defense of the faith (1 Pet. 3:15). The picture is that of a lawyer at trial. However, Peter is not calling on believers to be merely factual, but with feelings of gentleness and reverence, give a reason for the confidence we have in Christ. Proverbs 15:1 supports Peter’s approach, “A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.” Proverbs 15:2 gives us further insight. Wisdom not only teaches us how to apply knowledge, but it “makes knowledge attractive.” If we want to make the gospel as attractive as possible, we need to give not only kind and respectful answers, but also wise ones.

**“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly . . .”(Jas 1:5).**