



The Virtues and Character Development Project

The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

I Thessalonians 5:24

Integrity – Pre-Activity Curriculum

Note – before reading the content in this module, it is important that *Step 1* has been completed (reading *Overview – a background perspective for parents to get started*). This provides the context on which each virtue module is based. As pointed out in that document, the instructions are written to parents, but they apply to any leader who is working with youth (ages 5 to 25). Since the family unit is the foundational one, the focus of the materials lies here. Previous completion of the modules on *Humility, Gratitude, Generosity, and Charity* also is helpful.

Virtues are foundational to character development. As we have learned, each one plays a vital role in the journey for an individual. While it is necessary for the formation of each virtue to reach the point where it becomes second nature, i.e., a part of the person's character, there is more that needs to be understood before one gets to that point. If the virtues are viewed as tools that are available to an individual when living out one's life, it is the learning of how each tool functions and when each tool is needed. Consider a worker who has a toolbelt that includes the following four tools. First, there is a hammer, which is used to drive nails into a board. Next, there is a saw, which is for cutting boards to a smaller length. In addition, there is a wrench, which enables the worker to tighten a nut onto a bolt. Finally, there is a screwdriver, which is used to turn screws into a bracket. Of course, there are many other tools that might be present, each with its own specific function. The worker not only has each tool, but it is important that knowledge of how to use each one also is needed. If the hammer is used for cutting a board, the outcome is not very good. However, if used at the right time and in the right way, the job is finished well.

In a similar way, each virtue has its own purpose. While a person may have many virtues, each one is needed in unique situations. So far, four different virtues have been learned and become second nature. The person knows what it means to be *humble* and how that appears. The same is true for *gratitude, generosity, and charity*. However, it also is essential that the individual knows how to utilize each virtue. When a person encounters someone who is taking advantage of a child, how is *humility* brought into the situation? Or, suppose an individual finds a person in financial need? Should this individual always give the money that is needed? What if the person in need has not learned how to use money wisely? We could continue to give more examples to show there is more that is involved than simply having a specific virtue.

This is where *integrity* comes into play. (We will learn in later modules that the virtue of *wisdom* also becomes vital.) We needed to work through the previous 4 virtues to see the relationships. *Integrity* now enables us to see the connections. *Integrity* also will allow us to see how to include the next virtue as each one is added. *Integrity* works to intertwine or integrate all the virtues. It is how the other virtues relate to each other. Picture a bouquet of flowers. Each flower is chosen to be part of the whole. A wire then is used to wrap around each stem to enable the collection to be held together as a whole. Similarly, *integrity* winds through the other virtues to enable them to work together. It is common to read about one virtue and find reference to another. Here is another illustration. Picture a bag of golf clubs. There is a skill in using each type (woods, irons, wedge, putters). *Integrity* would be having all these skills. (*Wisdom* would be knowing when to use each one.)

Many people have a general understanding of the meaning of *integrity* as a virtue, but this view is often limited to a list of actions that one does not do. A common expression is, *integrity is what someone does when no one is looking*. However, a biblical view of the virtue is much deeper. It involves the very personhood of the individual. The word for *integrity* comes from Latin, *integer*, which refers to whole, wholeness, one, unity, or undivided. There is a consistency between what one believes and how one acts, even in situations where it is challenging to remain true to one's foundational moral principles. Jeremy Kingsley stated, *integrity knows the right thing, says the right thing, and does the right thing*. Sometimes, *integrity* is viewed as who a person actually is when examining beneath outward appearances. This includes how someone lives over time, i.e., being a person of *integrity* is more than how one might act in a particular moment. It reflects the consistency of how a person will act at all times under all circumstances. This person keeps promises, tells the truth, and refuses to compromise, even when it might be temporarily beneficial to do so. This is a wholeness in one's character, which is why it is important to recognize that the other virtues are integrated into the whole person. *Partial integrity* is not possible, although growth toward a more mature *integrity* is necessary. Therefore, *integrity* is an attitude and a way of life that one chooses to cultivate.

Paul writes about the various ways that the Christian will grow in Christlike character. This is especially true for *integrity*. The Hebrew word for *integrity* that is closest to the understanding mentioned above is *tom*. This is the perspective that a person in right relationship with God will be undivided in the heart and life. This person is whole and sincere before God. We see several examples in the Old Testament, but the story of Daniel in chapter 6 might be the best one to consider for our purposes. Daniel has been faithfully serving God in Babylon since he was in his late teens, and now is probably in his early 80s when this story occurs. He has developed *integrity* through all his life experiences. We read,

...the administrators and satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.
(Daniel 6:4-5).

So, these leaders tricked King Darius into issuing a decree that everyone must worship him or be thrown into a den of lions.

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before
(Daniel 6:10).

Daniel literally faced a life-threatening situation. Because of his *integrity*, he continued to do the same things he always did, not changing due to the edict. He did not suddenly make a decision to continuing worshipping God; he had established the habit many years beforehand.

Another example regarding *integrity* is more contemporary. A few years ago, there was an 8-year-old boy whose father arranged for him to distribute leaflets announcing a sale for a local merchant in his town. This 8-year-old joined another boy, who was a few years older, in the task. After some time distributing the leaflets, the two boys became tired of the work of walking from house to house throughout the town. The older boy suggested that they just discard the remainder into a trash container, which they did. When the father of the 8-year-old found out, he confronted his son. The son was old enough to know that what he did was wrong. His actions showed a lack of *integrity*. This became a life lesson that maintaining one's *integrity* sometimes means completing work, even if the work is not desirable.

While the Old Testament contains examples of *integrity* and uses a word that has this meaning, the New Testament does not. Instead, there are many aspects of virtue formation and character development that are described as part of the journey toward Christlikeness. For example, Paul writes *we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another* (II Corinthians 3:18). He continues in Ephesians 4:13 that we grow *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. The life of the believer can be transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit so the various virtues become evident. Whereas the Old Testament presents a more general expression of the life of a follower of God, the New Testament provides specific areas where growth is possible. Examples include being pure, being sincere, demonstrating self-control, showing courage, speaking the truth, and many others. This allows believers to see *integrity* lived out in specific ways in their lives from their hearts.

This living out of a life of *integrity* has been pictured by Henry Cloud, in his book *Integrity*, as a wake like one that follows a boat after it moves through water. There are two sides that appear. Cloud points out that one side of a person's wake relates to the nature and quality of the result of work that was done. What was accomplished? The other side relates to the relationships that were forged in the process. How did the individual deal with the various people involved? What effect did our interactions have on other people in their hearts, minds, and souls? A person of *integrity* causes others to grow in their own person, becoming more godly in their character. *Being a whole person, an integrated person, results in all of one's different parts working well and delivering the functions that they were designed to deliver*. If we compartmentalize our lives instead of integrating into a whole, the negative impact will be found in all areas of our lives. On the other hand, *connection happens when one person has a true emotional investment in the other, and the other person experiences that and it is returned*.

Integrity will meet the demands of reality. We must identify what these are and work within them. *Integrity* will enable us to move beyond wishful thinking and embrace the work necessary to grow as needed. This requires maturity that many people are not willing to seek. The connection to *humility* becomes evident as only a humble person is able to recognize the need to grow and utilize (integrate) a variety of virtues for life challenges. One realizes that growing into Christlikeness requires an individual to be transcendent in one's thinking, i.e., to realize the need to move from the stage where one is currently and onto a higher level. This is where a person can flourish, i.e., becoming all that God intended for the person to be. This is why a community is essential for the whole person to become mature. Here, one's *integrity* can be oriented and guided toward transcendence in every aspect of one's life. We surrender to God and to others as an avenue for growth. As Cloud stated, *A person with integrated character is a person who possesses the awareness that it is not all about him or her, and the ability and willingness to make the necessary adjustments to the things that transcend him or her at any given juncture*.

It is important to recall that the virtues arise from habits. They continue to grow and develop throughout one's lifetime. This is true for *integrity* as well. So, *integrity* can never be fully achieved in one's lifetime. It requires repeated attention to living out what one knows. Similarly, the best growth occurs when it involves a community. Working together to help each other gain insight into how to integrate the various virtues, and the circumstances under which this is to be done, becomes vital if one desires to continue maturing. Together, the members of the community may provide encouragement to avoid settling for temporary approval of others. Instead, each person may be reminded of the need for the control of the Holy Spirit at the center of one's life. This will lead to drawing closer to God. One outcome will be a commitment to hold firm no matter what it costs, i.e., to value our *integrity* so highly that no price is too great to pay to maintain it.

I Peter 1:14-16 reminds us that our character and behavior must match God's character and behavior. So, developing *integrity* will enable us to live with the moral purity that God demonstrates. We will be able to discern what ought to be done, and then to have the courage to live out the principles of our faith. This will be demonstrated in all areas of our lives – at home, at school, at church, at work, in the community. Every relationship will be better as we live lives of *integrity*. This also will encourage those around us to desire to have *integrity* in all they do.

Three levels of integrity are discussed by Doug Sherman and William Hendricks in their book, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*. First, ***out-of-trouble honesty*** is motivated to be honest by fear of reprisal. These people attempt to get away with whatever they can as long as they avoid reprisal. Second, people with ***selective honesty*** show obedience in some areas and disobedience in others. They compare themselves to others on the basis of their strengths. Third, ***progressive integrity*** describes people whose deep desire is to honor Christ by surrendering to God's plan, whatever the plan is and however it unfolds. For many people, there is a temptation to tell lies in some form. This is one reason that a witness swears in a court of law to *tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*. This avoids twisting the truth to make the person look better (or worse depending on the situation) than one would otherwise believe. A person of *integrity* would not need to make this affirmation. (The requirement to make this statement in a court of law remains.)

Integrity ultimately is a matter of trust. People can depend on a person with *integrity* in matters of responsibility and morality. The two sides to trustworthiness are faithfulness (keeping one's word, even when it is not convenient) and reliability (fulfilling one's responsibilities). As Sherman and Hendricks stated, *Biblical trustworthiness means that when I'm given a task or commit to doing one, I follow through on the assignment to the best of my ability, sticking with it until it's done and done right*. A person of *integrity* learns to avoid making promises that cannot be kept. Learning to live by biblical principles becomes essential for growing in integrity (Psalm 119:105).

With these thoughts as a background, you need to turn to the list of activities for the *Integrity* module. As before, these provide both general and age-specific options for families. They are intended to assist you in developing habits in your children. Use these or create your own ideas that would be better for your family. Continue repeating the activities over and over until they become *second nature*. So, repetition (daily, weekly) will be very important.

May God bless you as you work on formation of the virtue of *Integrity*.