Character Matters: Week 2, Integrity

**Series Overview:** We build our lives by the choices we make. We build good character brick by brick, thought by thought, action by action, habit by habit, through daily exercising of courage and determination (Merritt). As followers of Jesus, we are called to live a life that honors him and shows his love to others. We cannot do that without good character. We must do the right thing, no matter the cost. Character still counts. It always has, and always will.

**Week Overview:** Character Matters, Week 2 - Integrity

* It isn’t easy to have integrity. The choice to live with integrity will cost us, but to live without it will cost us everything in the end. Each day we need to wake up and ask the question: will I be a person of integrity? Doing the right thing when no one is looking is hard, but it leads to a huge reward.

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Personal story where you showed integrity/story of Bobby Jones

**Tension (What’s the Struggle):** We can’t pick and choose when and where to have integrity. It’s all or nothing

**Text (+ Supporting Text):** Titus 2:6-8, Titus 3:1-8

**THP:** Integrity is worth the cost, because Jesus is worth everything

**Supporting Points (Not Required):** Integrity is always doing the right thing, no matter the cost

**Application (Call to Action):** Pay the price of integrity

About 100 years ago, there was a famous golfer named Bobby Jones. Not only did this man have one of the all-time classic names in history, he is also one of the world’s greatest golfers, ever. He was the Charli D’Amelio of the golf course (trust me, your students will get that reference even if you don’t). Bobby was so great at golf that he actually won 13 major championships in his 15-year career.

In 1925, he was playing in the US Open Championship, which is sort of like the golf version of the Super Bowl. Towards the end of the tournament, he was neck and neck with this guy named Willie. Pretty creative names 100 years ago. Well, Bobby hit the ball into the tall grass, making his next shot really difficult. As he was getting ready to swing, he accidentally knocked the ball off of its spot. When that happens, it is a one-shot penalty.

No one in the crowd, or any of the officials saw the ball move, so Bobby could have gone about his business like nothing happened. But Bobby admitted to the penalty shot anyway. The officials asked his opponent, everyone standing in the crowd if they saw anything, and no one did. They even tried to talk him out of it. By all accounts, Bobby was crazy to admit to a one stroke penalty shot that no one saw! This is the best golfer in the world, he is on the verge of winning another massive championship while the score is tied, and he still admits to a penalty! It was absolutely insane what he was doing.

You probably think hey, since he admitted to it, God probably like stepped in and helped him win right? Wrong. He ended up losing the championship to Willie by 1 point. Bobby was a man of integrity. Nothing, not even the greatest golf tournament in the world could compromise that integrity. It cost Bobby a championship, but he gained a legendary reputation that day, because of his integrity.

We can’t pick and choose when and where we want to have integrity. It’s easy for us to do the right thing in public for everyone to see us and say, “Wow, I am so impressed by insert name here they must really live with integrity, I want to be more like them.” Ok maybe people don’t always say that, but you can probably get the picture. We want the public recognition of doing something really good, doing the right thing on our Instagram posts, or to get a shout by our teachers and coaches in front of everyone. It feels good! There is a reaction that goes off in our brain that feeds into the affirmation lobe (not a real thing but it sounds like science)

But we don’t want to do the right thing when no one is looking. It seems so hard for us to have integrity when we have an audience of “one.” Or, it seems so hard for us to have integrity when all of our friends, teammates, etc. are doing something that we know does not honor God. Integrity comes down to affirmation. Who/what are we seeking affirmation from?

When we follow the crowd and participate in something dishonoring to God, or we do the right thing in plain view of everyone for the sole purpose of them thinking more highly of us, we are seeking affirmation from the rest of the world. When we do that, we compromise our integrity. Suddenly our beliefs and values are dictated not by the person that created us, but rather the people he created. So, in order to live a life of integrity, we need to understand what it is and why it is important.

The apostle Paul writes to a man in the early church named Titus, and in his letter he instructs Titus on how Christians should live a life of integrity, and why they should do it:

Titus 2:6-8, 11-4: Similarly, encourage the young men and women to be self-controlled. In everything, set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Integrity is defined by the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, or moral uprightness. That definition is spelt out for us right here in God’s Word! What is integrity?

Integrity is:

* Being self-controlled
* Doing what is good
* Living life above reproach (disappointment/disapproval)
* Righteousness

As Christians, we aren’t called to live a life of integrity because of the societal morals and values that have been passed down to us through the generations. We are called to live a life of integrity, a life of righteousness because of the grace of God. We have been saved by Jesus from an eternal life of death. The minute we declare that he is Lord and Savior of our lives, and we decide that we are going to live for him, that is the moment that he begins to change our lives.

None of us suddenly wake up one day and say: “You know, I can’t wait to live a self-controlled life today. I am so excited to do good for everyone around me! I have never been more eager to live a life above reproach.” No one just wakes up and says that! Why? Because we as humans have a sin nature in us, that naturally inclines us to not have self-control. It is a human nature that drives us to do and say evil things, and to hurt other people.

It is not until we put our hope and trust in Jesus and say “I am going to surrender my life to you. I know that you are calling me to a life that is far better and greater than the one I am living now.” When we do that, the grace that Jesus offers us freely changes our nature, and we become the people he created us to be. A life of integrity begins when we say no to our human nature and yes to life that way God intended it to be.

Sounds simple right? It is so simple. But it is so costly at the same time. When we say something is costly, we are weighing the value of something. It may be money, time, friendships, material possessions, etc, etc. So when we weigh the decision of choosing integrity or a different decision all together, we are deciding what we value in life.

**Integrity is worth the cost, because Jesus is worth everything.** When we come to decision making moments in life that we have every single day, we need to ask ourselves the question am I going to choose a life of integrity today, even if it costs me a friend? Am I going to make the right decision in this situation, even if people hate me for it? Am I going to be a person of action in this moment and do the right thing, even though no one is looking, and I can just ignore it?

These are the questions that we face ourselves with on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. And if we are followers of Christ, we are called to make the decision of integrity. We are called to have self-control in situations when all of our friends seem to be indulging in substances, gossip, slander, lies, cheating, etc. We are called to say no to our human desires and say looking at this is not honoring to my God, to myself, or others around me. We are called to be far away from those things and eager to do what is good!

*\*\*\*Editing note for the above paragraphs when reading this for feedback: need help with some more specific examples in these two paragraphs? Or maybe these examples are sufficient, I am not sure. This is the crux of the message right here, so I want to make sure the examples are clear\*\*\**

We are called to this because Christ has saved us from death and given us life. In turn, he is our savior and Lord, and we no longer love and serve ourselves, but rather, we love and serve God and the people he created. And that will cost us things in this life that we once held dear, or still have in our lives. That will force us to say no to things that lead to death in this life, and yes to things that lead to life, here now and forever. Our view of who Jesus is will determine whether or not we live with integrity.

And when we begin to make those decisions of integrity, **we realize what is valuable and what isn’t.** We begin to see that we can actually live life to the full, and have an amazing, fulfilling life here on earth and in eternity because we realized that the way of this world leads to death, and the way of integrity, the way of righteousness leads to life.

So yes, integrity will be costly in this life here and now. Because this world doesn’t value righteousness. It doesn’t value self-control. It doesn’t value doing the right thing when no one is looking. It doesn’t value things that are honoring to God and loving to others. But if we can understand that what Jesus values and what the world values aren’t even comparable, we realize that integrity really isn’t that costly when we are living for an audience of one, with an eternal perspective that we can have life to the fullest now and forever.

*Optional ending with a personal story of where you paid the price of integrity, and it made all the difference in a positive way. Or you made a decision that lacked integrity and you had to suffer the consequences because of that decision.*

So pay the price of integrity. As Paul says, live a life of integrity, righteousness, and self-control because we have an eternal hope. And when we do, we realize what is valuable in this life and what is not. In your conversations, in your daily actions, when you are surrounded by your peers or all by yourself, what will you choose to value? Will you choose to value what the world does, or what our creator does? How will you live a life of integrity?

*Finish with application point on how to practice integrity.*

*-Possible application points:*

*-Start small with practicing integrity*

*-Rubber band on wrist, slap it back if you lie*

*-Don’t cheat on the tests this week just because it is online*

*-Be honest with your friends (not withholding truth, see Kylee’s comment below)*

*-Be a person of your word. When you say you will do something, do it*

*-When faced with an action you know is wrong, what will your choice be?*

*-Pray each morning that the Holy Spirit would help you make the right decision at every*  *turn in your life that day*

\*\*\*\*Feels like there needs to be a stronger end here, suggestions welcome, blanking on the ending\*\*\*\*

**Kylee:** Again, I really like that introduction story. It introduces the idea of integrity in a really tangible way. One comment, when defining integrity you use the word “morals” to clarify and define. However, I don’t know if all students will have a clear definition of the word morals. I think you should explain what “morals” are as well or don’t use it in that description if you feel like it doesn’t fit. Some examples for that section that you were asking about:

We are called to have self-control in situations when...

* You could cheat on a test for online classes just because you are at home
* You tell your friend you will hang out with them but then get invited to go do something more interesting
* When your Mom asks where you were on Saturday night (especially when you weren’t where you were supposed to be).

**Aaron:** You did a great job making this message relatable. Students will understand the tension you’re describing here. Well done. I think the THP needs work. Here is my suggestion: Integrity Clarifies Value (or What’s Valuable). At the end, you could talk about “The Pain Of Disciple” vs. “The Pain Of Regret” and how all of us need to choose one or the other (I can explain more if needed). That could be a strong close. Here are some examples of integrity you could use:

* You could keep all the inappropriate parts of TikTok from your parents since they are unaware of it, or you could tell them the truth and ask for help
* When you’re caught doing something wrong, you can admit your mistake or make excuses
* When you feel like making an inappropriate joke because you know it would make your friends laugh, you can choose the laugh or choose to make God proud

**Scott:** Dig it. Toward the beginning, you mention that it’s hard to have integrity when it’s just an audience of one. Maybe tap into that notion that we know God’s going to forgive us anyway. That could lead to an explanation of grace from Romans 6, but I think it’s a thought that a lot of us have when weighing the consequences in our minds. It’s good to remind students that we’re not trying to live a life as close to sin as we can, we want to live a life as close to Jesus as we can. It’s not necessarily about what you avoid, it’s what you pursue.

Self-control situations:

-You made plans earlier and don’t want to now. Do you lie and get out of it or follow through?

-You know your s/o’s parents won’t be home. Do you walk into temptation or stear clear?

Micah: Great script. I love the opening story. Drew me in. This script feels really short. I think it could use a lot more scripture. The THP feels more like a topic sentence than a “wow, that changed my life.” Not every THP is going to be that, but that’s what we’re shooting for in every message. A one-liner/phrase that a student can take with them that can serve as powerful reminder to \_\_\_\_\_. I also think there’s some opportunities to present some ways to grow our character/integrity. What are some practices/rhythms we can implement that allow us to grow our integrity?

Kent: THP needs work – I like Aarons suggestion – Integrirty Clarifies Value

More scripture would be helpful for support.

Personal story towards the end on how integrity helped clarify value for you in a good or bad way.

I like the examples given above to bring it home a little more... maybe there is a moment at the end of this to hammer home the importance of being full of integrity. What about students coming up to get a sharpie mark on the back of their hand... |x| is the symbol for “value” as a reminder that integrity clarifies value.... just an idea off the top of my head... I think there is an opportunity here somewhere.

Harrison: Another THP idea “integrity is worth the cost.” I think some more about the value of integrity after defining it would be helpful.

An example idea that I think would be pretty common: filling up a water cup with soda. Then say something like “your integrity is worth more than a $1 cup, its worth more than being in a gossip conversation...”

Adding in a personal story when you stuggled to choose the right thing or ended up choosing the wrong thing but changed later would be good. It could go right after the paragraphing ending in “Am I going to be a person of action in this moment and do the right thing, even though no one is looking, and I can just ignore it?” and then the next paragraph would just need a little editing.