

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 8: COURAGE AND INTEGRITY

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Character Development. When Christians fail and ministries fall apart, it is often due to a lack of character development in the leader. A Christian leader must take character development seriously, because discipleship requires that we grow in Christ-like character. This module examines a number of Christian character traits that are necessary for developing servant leadership. We will look at what the Bible teaches about these traits, and examples of Jesus and others displaying them. Godly character should be evident in the life of every follower of Christ, especially those who are leading others.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 8: COURAGE AND INTEGRITY

PURPOSE

This lesson explores the Christian character traits of courage and integrity, how Jesus and others in the Bible exhibited them, and how we can develop them in our own lives.

LEADER'S NOTE

Courage can come in many forms. Sometimes it means enduring a difficulty while trusting in God's promises. Sometimes courage is quiet; other times it is bold and impacts the lives of other people in a positive way. Consider your community and its history. Are there any examples of Christian courage that you could share with your participants? Are there stories of saints who exercised courage and integrity? When we know that God has enabled others to face fears and be courageous, we can also find courage in Him. You could assign reading about Christian martyrs, or discuss current believers who are standing strong in their faith. What is the source of their courage, and how is it displayed in their character? Having integrity also requires courage. Being truthful, dependable, and upright, whether or not people are watching, requires both courage and integrity.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What does it mean to be courageous? Is it possible to act courageously and still be afraid?
- ❖ Why are some people able to have courage in the face of danger, and others run away or cower? How is courage developed?
- ❖ What does the word 'integrity' mean to you? What is the result in your life and ministry when you don't keep your word, or don't live the message you preach?
- ❖ How can we regularly evaluate our character and avoid deception?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **The Virtues of Courage and Integrity:** In the previous lessons, we have learned that right beliefs lead to right action, and if we want to be like Jesus, we must believe and obey His Word. Our integrity is rooted in the truth of God. No one lays down their life or puts themselves in a position of difficulty without courage. Jesus said that the way to follow Him is narrow, and that there would be counterfeit disciples along the way. It takes both courage and integrity to be a faithful disciple of Jesus.
- ❖ **Courage:** There are professions that by their nature employ people of courage – soldiers, fire-fighters, rescue crews and even professional athletes. We might say that someone is courageous when they seem to ignore the dangers or difficulties before them, and are single minded in their task. Saving the lives of others is an act of heroism, for which we celebrate people. But how is Christian courage cultivated, and what motivates it?
 - **Courage is Not Cowardice:** When we act in a cowardly manner, we run from the first sign of danger or conflict. We may hope someone else will act in our place. These cowardly acts might include denying our faith when our identity as a Christian won't be received well, not telling the truth in order to avoid difficult consequences, not owning up to a mistake we have made, not accepting responsibility for our actions, or not standing up for what is right and true. When we observe something evil and dismiss God's call to act on it with justice and mercy, we are not being courageous.
 - **Courage is Not Rashness:** At the opposite extreme, courage is not rushing into danger without careful understanding of the issue, or denying any potential risk. When we are rash, we act without due consideration. God's Word advises us to be alert and watchful, especially regarding spiritual enemies (1 Peter 5:8, 2 Timothy 4:17). Being courageous doesn't deny fear, but puts it in perspective.
 - **Courage is the Ability to Act in the Face of Danger:** We are able to act courageously, even when faced with obstacles and difficulties, because of our trust in God and our love for others. It is assessing the obstacle and knowing that God is greater. It is acting in ways that may bring discomfort, inconvenience, even disgrace or harm to ourselves, so that someone else may benefit. John 15:13 indicates that the ultimate courageous act of love is giving one's life for another as Jesus did. Consider God's call to be courageous, and what He promises alongside this call:
 - o Joshua 1:9
 - o Deuteronomy 31:6
 - o 2 Timothy 1:7
 - o Proverbs 28:1
 - o John 16:33
 - o 1 Corinthians 10:13
 - o Ephesians 6:10-18
 - o Isaiah 41:10



ASK:

What acts of courage have you seen others perform?

How big a role does fear play in the decisions you make in your life? What specifically are you afraid of? What would happen if you chose to believe that God is with you?

How does Satan use fear to turn us away from God? How can we stand firm against his lies?

How can our faith put fear in its proper place?

What is the danger of ignoring difficulties, dangers and obstacles, or pretending they are not there? Why is this not true courage?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Courage in the Life of Jesus:** Not only did Jesus know what was going on around Him every moment, He was aware of why He had come and what He would have to deal with along the way. Imagine knowing all the difficult things you would ever face!
 - **Jesus Faced a Future of Difficulty:** When Jesus explained what was going to happen to Him, even His disciples were filled with fear. However, Jesus was calm and acted with courage. He knew of the death, shame, and torture He would endure, yet He did not hesitate (John 19:10-12, Matthew 26:50-53, Mark 10:32-34).
 - **Jesus Spoke the Truth Courageously:** Much of what Jesus said was not popular with authorities. Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God which angered earthly rulers. When He talked about sacrifice and the cost of being His disciple, people found it hard to understand. Jesus did not hide the truth, even if His words brought Him scorn and ridicule. Jesus even claimed that He was God, which clearly resulted in punishment (John 8:58-59, John 10:30-33).
 - **Jesus Warned Us that We would Face Trouble:** Jesus did not pretend that following Him would be a life of ease or luxury, but rather warned His followers about the troubles they would face. He taught that people should follow Him anyway, be courageous, and place their trust in God, not in themselves (John 16:33, John 14:1).
- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Courage:** Many men and women in the Bible are remembered for their courage. They faced opposition from enemies, persecution for their faith and physical danger. They put others before themselves and demonstrated a trust in God through their actions, believing that God's Word was true.
 - **Esther:** When Esther became queen at just the right time to save God's people, she did not put her personal welfare first. God had placed her in a unique situation. However, she still did not have the right to approach the king uninvited. When she learned from her cousin, Mordecai, of a plot to kill every Jew, she acted with courage and approached the king. She also revealed her identity as a Jew. These actions would



have put her life in great danger. She acted out of love for her people, and trusted in God's plan for her life (Esther 4:14, Esther 5:6, Esther 7).

- **Caleb:** After the Israelites left Egypt, they sent spies into the land of Canaan to see what they would face when they entered the land promised to them. Of the twelve men who were sent, only two (Joshua and Caleb) returned with a favourable report. The others acknowledged the land was rich in resources, but they were afraid of the inhabitants. Caleb, conversely, had faith in God to give them the land. This faith translated into courage. He was unaffected by the obstacles, and did not let fear or danger stop him from following God. The Israelites did not have the courage of Caleb, and were sentenced to forty years in the wilderness. But they did eventually possess the land promised to them (Numbers 13:30-33, Numbers 14:24, Numbers 14:38).
- ❖ **Integrity:** Some teachers have said that integrity is what you do when no one is watching. A person of integrity will consistently keep promises, tell the truth, act ethically, be reliable, and do their very best even when there is no reward. It is an internal virtue which is developed by repetition (rather than one-time events), and is at the heart of all other virtues.
 - **Integrity is Not Hypocrisy:** When we tell others to do something but do not do it ourselves, we are hypocrites. When we say that we are Christians but then allow conscious sin in our private lives, we are liars and need to repent. Jesus condemned hypocrites, and commanded us to be consistent in our public and private lives.
 - **Integrity is Not Pleasing People:** Our motivation for good behaviour may be varied, but when we display good character only to impress or please others, we are not acting with integrity. If our only motivation is to please people, we might aim to meet their expectations instead of upholding our moral values and beliefs. Integrity is acting in accordance with Christ's character and values, and without personal benefit. We believe that God has standards of behaviour for us that we should aspire to, rather than the standards commonly adopted by others. When we are people of integrity, we act on our values and principles and are consistent. Integrity is vital to the application of other virtues. A person of integrity places character above ambition, personal reputation, convenience, and comfort. Consider these verses on the virtue of integrity:
 - o Proverbs 10:9
 - o Proverbs 11:3
 - o Proverbs 12:22
 - o Colossians 3:23
 - o 1 Peter 3:16
 - o Proverbs 4:25-27

ASK:

How is our character proven?

What part does integrity play in our relationships with others?

What is the cost to our Christian testimony and witness if we do not keep our word, or live what we preach to others?



What must we believe in order to have integrity? What must we be willing to give up?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Integrity in the Life of Jesus:** Jesus was the ultimate example of someone who lived their life with integrity. He lived what He preached, and His private life was consistent with His public life. He never sinned.
 - **Jesus did not yield to Satan's temptations:** As we have discussed in an earlier lesson, Jesus did not give in to Satan's temptations in the wilderness. He could have eaten the bread that Satan offered Him – after all, no one was watching! But Jesus demonstrated His true character before His ministry even began (Matthew 4:1-11).
 - **Jesus was faultless:** The religious leaders of His day did not like the power Jesus had, and looked for ways to end His ministry. It is remarkable that they could not find a single fault with Jesus! He always acted in accordance with the law, and lived what He preached (Luke 11:53-54, John 18:38).
 - **Jesus was Consistent:** Those who knew Jesus and walked with Him during His ministry on earth knew that He was consistent. They could expect the same behaviour and teaching from Him from one day to the next. His private life matched His public life. What He promised came true, and what He set out to do He accomplished (Hebrews 13:8).
- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Integrity:** Many men and women mentioned in previous lessons were also people of integrity. They were consistent in their character regardless of their circumstances.
 - **Samuel:** Israel had some successful leaders, and others who failed. People look for leaders who are reliable and can be trusted. Samuel was such a leader. He was accountable, and demonstrated a trust in God and a love for people. In return, he was well respected and loved (1 Samuel 12:1-4).
 - **Pharisees:** An opposite trait of integrity is hypocrisy, which was prevalent in the lives of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They angered Jesus and He spoke clearly and powerfully against what they were doing, which was teaching specific religious practices, traditions and outward demonstrations of faith while neglecting the truth of the law themselves. The Pharisees did not live up to what they taught, but they burdened others with these external man-made rules. We must be careful to practise what we teach; otherwise we become as detestable and fruitless as the Pharisees (Matthew 23).
- ❖ **Evaluate your own Courage and Integrity:** Like other virtues, courage is not developed overnight. A courageous person makes wise decisions in small matters day after day. They seek God's will and do it until it becomes natural to do so. Developing integrity can be compared to learning a new language; at first we speak it with difficulty, but eventually we become fluent in it. Integrity defines who we really are. How is it displayed in your life?



- Consider the difficulties you might have in developing these virtues. Our actions are a direct result of our beliefs. Are your beliefs based on the Word of God? Do you choose to trust and have faith in Him rather than in yourself? Do you practise meditating on God? Read these verses:
 - o [2 Timothy 1:7](#)
 - o [Isaiah 43:1-3](#)
 - o [Psalms 111:10](#)
 - o [Matthew 6:3-4](#)

- Consider these attitudes and behaviours that represent fear and hypocrisy. Are any of these evident in your life? Are you making choices based on what you think will make you feel happy and safe, or on the truth of God? Are you choosing to trust yourself instead of God for your own security and identity?
 - o Never doing anything new or difficult because of fear of failure
 - o Not actively participating in evangelism
 - o Keeping quiet about your faith when opportunities to speak are given
 - o Acting differently around your church friends than others outside the faith
 - o Holding people to a standard that you yourself cannot keep
 - o Teaching others something you do not do yourself
 - o Pretending you are faultless in order to impress others
 - o Keeping secrets from others about a sinful past
 - o Not owning up to a mistake you've made in order to avoid consequences
 - o Acting differently when people are watching you and keeping you accountable
 - o Excusing small lies or less than honourable relationships
 - o Allowing private thoughts of sin, even if you don't intend to act on them
 - o Turning away when you have the opportunity to help someone in danger
 - o Letting fear control what you will and won't do



DISCUSSION

Spend time discussing the questions below, recalling what has been learned in this module and how it can be applied to our lives.

- ❖ What other Christian character traits can you think of? Since right actions come from right beliefs, what must a person truly believe in order to possess that virtue?
- ❖ Consider how the trait of integrity impacts all the other Christian character traits we have discussed so far.
- ❖ When you possess a Christian character trait, is it always evident? What will enhance its growth? What will diminish it?
- ❖ What do you need to do differently in your life in order to become more like Christ?
- ❖ What is one thing that you have learned in these lessons that you would like to share with others?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants will choose to pursue courage and integrity in their lives. Pray that they will be convicted of any weaknesses, and that they will be honest with themselves and before God about where they need to develop Christ-like character. Pray that they will not make excuses for their behaviour, but truly be controlled by God and not their fears.