INTEGRITY: STANDING FIRM IN TOUGH TIMES
Week 1: Develop Discipline and a Work Ethic

This includes:
1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW
News headlines are filled with stories about noteworthy people who have failed to maintain personal integrity. But our teenagers don’t have to make choices that lead them down the wrong path; they can make a commitment to pursue, develop, and maintain personal integrity. God teaches us in Scripture that as Christians, our lives can be defined by integrity. As we see in this week’s lesson, Daniel offers a clear example of what God can do with an honest, faithful, consistent life.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: Integrity is something you build every day through your choices and habits.
2. WHY: Your integrity is a measure of your spiritual maturity in Christ; integrity and intimacy with God are connected.
3. HOW: Students will be encouraged to protect their integrity and look for ways they can honor God by developing and displaying integrity in all areas of life.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
Daniel 6:1-5

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE
Matthew 5:13-16

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you’ll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

Daniel was a young Hebrew who had been a slave to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. As we learn in Daniel 2, he became known for his interpretation of a dream and gained the king’s favor. This young man served in the government under several leaders, and by the time we see him in Daniel 6, he was probably an older man. King Nebuchadnezzar had been succeeded by King Belshazzar—who was killed at the end of chapter 5 and succeeded by King Darius the Mede. Daniel devoted his entire life to serving God and building personal integrity; because of this devotion, God was able to work through Daniel’s life in incredible ways.

Read Daniel 6:1-5.

We see here that King Darius had placed Daniel in an important position of responsibility. Daniel and two other men oversaw all the princes of the kingdom, and these three administrators reported directly to the king. Daniel’s continual favor with Darius and the previous kings displays how God can bless people who display godly character through their choices and actions.
Daniel demonstrated the value of working hard. Darius was so impressed by Daniel’s hard work that the king planned to reward him with a promotion, making him higher than all of his co-workers.

In verse 4, we learn that Daniel’s co-workers weren’t happy that he would soon be promoted over them. They unsuccessfully tried to find some fault with his work to prove that he didn’t deserve the promotion. Daniel had chosen to live a life of integrity, and he did what he knew was right. He had proven that his work was above accusation, so his co-workers attempted to get him to compromise his devotion to God.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions

We’ve provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Are you known for your integrity? Come talk about it tonight at small group.
- Any idea how deeply Daniel from the Bible loved and obeyed God? Tonight at small group we’re going to get some answers.

Parent Email

We’ve provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

This week we started a three-week study in our small groups examining the topic of integrity. News headlines are filled with stories about noteworthy people who have failed to maintain personal integrity. But our teenagers don’t have to make choices that lead them down the wrong path; they can make a commitment to pursue, develop, and maintain personal integrity.

In this first week, our teenagers saw how Daniel 6:1-5 offers a roadmap for becoming people of integrity. We discovered that because of Daniel’s work ethic he was promoted and found favor with the king. We encouraged students to realize that they too can make choices and live with the same integrity that Daniel demonstrated. But it isn’t always easy to live with integrity; Daniel’s co-workers conspired against him and even attacked his faith.

During the week, as the opportunity arises, discuss with your teenager what it might have been like to have been Daniel. Here are some questions that could help launch your discussion:

- In what areas of your life do you struggle the most in maintaining your integrity?
- What are some ways you’ve grown in integrity? What choices or decisions or habits have helped you?
- What’s something you could start doing differently at your job, on a sports team, or at school that would communicate your integrity?

Talk with your teenager about how making a decision to be a person of integrity now will have a huge impact for a lifetime. Have a blessed week!
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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
Before your small group meets, conduct some research online or in your local newspaper. Find four or five examples of people who have shown a lack of integrity: business leaders, politicians, celebrities, ordinary people, and so on. Print out or cut out the articles about these individuals, and bring this information to your small group.

As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

I've brought along some news articles, and I'd like you to take a few minutes to read about these individuals.

After your students have had a few minutes to look through the articles, ASK:

- What is most surprising about the alleged behavior of these individuals?
- Based on what you read, what are some specific ways these individuals didn’t display integrity?
- What are some of the ways our culture sends an inconsistent message on the importance of honesty and integrity?
- Why might some people in our culture believe the law or the rules don’t apply to them?
- How are these examples similar to the challenge we face to follow God faithfully and consistently?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Having personal integrity can seem tough to do in today’s culture. We see people in the public eye saying one thing but doing something else. While some people in our world excuse certain forms of lying and dishonesty, God expects something different. We are called to reflect God to a world that experiences spiritual separation, so we can live as God would. People need to know that they can believe you. If your integrity is compromised, others may not be willing to trust you.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Hard work is rewarded, (2) Hard work may cause jealousy, and (3) Hard work builds integrity.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Daniel 6:1-5 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.
Let’s spend a few moments taking a look at the importance of integrity and having a good work ethic.

1. Hard work is rewarded

ASK:
- What’s the difference, if any, between working hard because it’s the right thing and working hard to get a promotion or pay raise?
- How exactly does hard work honor God?
- What difference, if any, would God want to notice between someone earning $50 an hour and someone earning $8 an hour?
- In what areas of your life do you struggle the most in maintaining your integrity?

God wants us to do our best in all that we do, including our work. It’s an incredible testimony when a Christ-follower earns a reputation as a trusted and a faithful employee. When you see work as a way to honor God, your employer will see your commitment, and it will be easier to reward your effort. Your work ethic also will be a powerful testimony to non-Christians. This is really important to grasp during your teenage and young adult years, when you may be working at minimum-wage jobs. These truths also hold true for other commitments you make: to athletic teams, to musical groups, to your classes, and to other clubs and organizations.

2. Hard work may cause jealousy

ASK:
- Why might someone else become jealous if you work hard at your job? When have you seen this in your job or other commitments, or when has a friend encountered this?
- Why do you think Daniel’s co-workers decided to go after his religious beliefs? What’s your first reaction when you feel “attacked” for your faith? Explain.
- In what ways have you had to protect your integrity in life?

When you work hard because of your faith, not everyone will like it. Some co-workers or teammates may become jealous or angry when you excel. It might seem easier at times to go along with the crowd, but as a Christian, you can surpass your leader’s expectations. This means doing what you know is right—despite any criticism that you may receive.

3. Hard work builds integrity

ASK:
- How do you define the word “integrity”?
- What are some ways you’ve learned integrity at home, at school, at work, and in your other commitments?
- What hard choices have you made to grow in integrity? What hard choices must you make to grow right now in your integrity?

Being a person of integrity means living consistently and faithfully, admitting when you make mistakes, and striving to do what’s right in all areas of life. When
we do what is right, even when it is tough, we will find favor with God. We can follow Jesus’ example when it comes to making tough decisions. Jesus didn’t choose to do the easy thing or give into the temptation to slack off. He lived above reproach, just as Daniel did hundreds of years earlier.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

ASK:
- What does Daniel 6:3-4 teach you about Daniel’s character and integrity?
- Why do you think Daniel had such personal integrity with his job? Who do you know who reminds you of Daniel, and why?
- Read Matthew 5:13-16. How does this teaching relate to the idea of integrity?
- What is the significance of salt and light in this passage?
- How might Jesus have used Daniel as an example of someone who was “salt” and “light”?

APPLICATION

ASK:
- What are some unique challenges or attacks on integrity a teenager might face that an adult wouldn’t experience?
- Where are some areas in your life where you have to work hard? How well are you doing: Are you working hard or do you need to work harder? What are your biggest hurdles to working hard?
- How has your integrity, or your struggle with integrity, affected the lives of people around you? How does living with integrity help others see who God is?

Pair up with another person in the group for these questions.

ASK:
- How are you right now living like Daniel lives? How are you living differently than Daniel lived? Share with each other ways you could live in greater integrity.
- What are some ways you could demonstrate a solid work ethic and strong integrity at your job, on a sports team, or at school?

Bring the group back together for this final question.

ASK:
- When all is said and done, one of the few things that you have control of in this life is your personal integrity. How are you living this out daily?

SUMMARY

End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.
FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

*He [Daniel] was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy* (Daniel 6:4).