

A LifeGuide® Bible Study

INTEGRITY

Living the Truth

10 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS

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1

Imitate Jesus

Mark 10:32–45

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

³⁹ “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

WWJD? We see it on bracelets, headbands, socks and hair ribbons. Why? What are people asking themselves with these four letters? For some it is a mere fashion statement—soon faded. But for many it is a minute-to-minute reminder: *What Would Jesus Do?* The phrase comes from Charles Sheldon’s 1897 novel in which a small-town pastor, shaken by a dying unemployed tramp, leads his congregation to live a year based on that question. The theme of Sheldon’s novel echoes, in turn, the writing of fifteenth-century monk Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*. Imitating Jesus has been a centuries-long goal of Christians pursuing integrity. Christ himself issued the invitation.

Group Discussion. What would Jesus do? Describe one situation where someone you know followed that standard. What risks did that person take?

Personal Reflection. Take time to reflect on the character of Jesus Christ. (Page through the gospels, if this helps trigger ideas.) Make a list of several qualities that are part of his character. Note also some of his actions that reflected those qualities.

Imitating Jesus was no simple matter—even when he was here in person. *Read Mark 10:32–45.*

1. This scene includes a variety of people. What differing pictures did they hold of the future?
2. Verse 32 speaks of the followers of Jesus as being both “astonished” and “afraid.” What reasons did they have for feeling each of these emotions (vv. 32–34)?
3. If you had been there, how do you think you would have responded to Christ’s words of verses 33–34?
4. What does the request of verse 37 suggest about the values held by James and John?
5. How do people today express similar values?
6. In what ways are you like (or not like) James and John in this setting?
7. To “drink the cup I drink” meant to share a person’s fate. What did Jesus promise—and not promise (vv. 39–40)? Why?
8. Study Jesus’ words in verses 42–45. How does Jesus’ view of greatness differ from what you normally see?
9. “Not so with you,” pronounces Jesus after he has described the normal leadership styles of his day. What pressures do you face to lead in the way that Christ rejects?
10. Jesus creates his own definition of greatness in verses 43–45. In view of what you know of the life and works of Jesus, in what ways did he live out that description?
11. How would greatness, as it is described here by Jesus, look in your church?
in your family?

in your school or workplace?

12. Pick a troubling situation in your family, church, school or workplace. To the best of your understanding, what would Jesus do in that situation?

How might you imitate him there—as you pursue the goal of integrity?

Pray to Jesus, thanking him for particular actions and character qualities that serve as a guide to you. Then bring to him specific situations where you want to imitate him, and ask for his help in doing so.

Now or Later

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Picture your future as it is described here, and thank God for what you see.

“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). What are some ways that you could begin now to become more like that future person? Ask God’s help in moving that direction.

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2

Keep Commitments

Hosea 1:1–2:1; 3

^{1:1} The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:

² When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.” ³ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

⁴ Then the Lord said to Hosea, “Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵ In that day I will break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel.”

⁶ Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, “Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means “not loved”), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them. ⁷ Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the Lord their God, will save them.”

⁸ After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. ⁹ Then the Lord said, “Call him Lo-Ammi (which means “not my people”), for you are not my people, and I am not your God.

¹⁰ “Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘children of the living God.’ ¹¹ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.

^{2:1} “Say of your brothers, ‘My people,’ and of your sisters, ‘My loved one.’

³ Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst.

Commitment takes effort. We may dream of chasing the next horizon with no more hindrance than a backpack, but reality makes that vision short-term. Whether it’s the implied commitment to attend classes (because your parents paid the bills) or the lifelong struggle to stay in a difficult marriage, commitment is work. A life of integrity means commitments—some of our choosing and some just the baggage of our circumstances.

Group Discussion. What commitments are a part of your life? Each person should name one, making sure that it is different from any commitments mentioned by others in the group. On a scale of one to ten, rate yourself on how well you keep that commitment—making any explanations you wish.

Personal Reflection. Reflect on God's commitment to you—and yours to him. Consider several specific ways that God has expressed his commitment to you. Pray, thanking him for his faithfulness. Invite God to help you examine ways you can express your commitment to him in return.

God instructed the prophet Hosea to make what seemed like an absurd commitment. *Read Hosea 1:2–2:1.*

1. If you were a counselor, what chance of success would you give this marriage? Why?
2. What connections did God make between the task he assigned to Hosea and the condition of the nation Hosea represented (1:2–4)?
3. Notice the names that God gave to each of Hosea's children. What tragedy did each name symbolize? (Look for “because” and “for” in verses 4–9.)
4. In spite of the promised losses, God also offers relief. What hope do you find here (vv. 1:7, 10–11; 2:1)?
5. What do these verses suggest about God's commitment to his people?
6. What is an experience that has made you aware of God's commitment to you?
7. Hosea 2 is a litany of the sins of Gomer and Israel, and God's promise to bring them back to himself. *Read Hosea 3.* In what ways did God ask Hosea to express his marriage commitment to Gomer?
8. In view of the information in this passage, what would make Hosea's task difficult?
9. When have you made a commitment that was hard to keep?
10. What is God saying about himself in these early chapters of Hosea?
11. How might you begin to imitate God in one of your commitments?

Pray, thanking God for ways that he has shown his faithfulness to you.

Now or Later

Prayerfully reflect on your own commitments. Focus on a commitment that you have kept—and one that you did not. Pray about these, confessing sin if appropriate, asking help as needed. Ask God to begin to mold you into a person of integrity.

Meditate phrase by phrase on the psalm below. Talk to God about your thoughts.

Commit your way to the Lord;

trust in him and he will do this:

He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,

the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. (Psalm 37:5–6)

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3

Cultivate Endurance

Job 1:1–2:10

¹ In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

⁴ His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom.

⁶ One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. ⁷ The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”

Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

⁸ Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

⁹ “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. ¹⁰ “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

¹² The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

¹³ One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house,¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship²¹ and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

^{2:1} On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. ² And the Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”

Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

³ Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.”

⁴ “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. ⁵ But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

⁶ The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”

⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

⁹ His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!”

¹⁰ He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

I once climbed a mountain with a bunch of high-school kids, or tried to. It sounded like such fun. And it was for awhile. They galloped ahead while I trudged behind. We saw mountain wild flowers, amazing rocks and peaks through swirling mists. I trudged higher. We stopped to take pictures and redistribute backpacks. I crawled up a field of fallen rocks, slowly. Another staffer noticed that I was pale, staggering and incoherent. It seems my physical endurance was not up to that particular task. Fortunately, the character trait of endurance is not limited to physical prowess. It shows itself in many areas: in projects, relationships and in faith.

Group Discussion. When it comes to endurance, I am like (a) a sprinter: I commit quickly, but I finish quickly too, (b) a hurdler: I skip over the hard parts but keep running, (c) a backpacker: I hike a long distance and carry a lot of stuff, (d) an observer: I don’t commit at all if I can help it, (e) a baseball player: when it rains I head to the dugout, or (f) other: _____ . Explain.

Personal Reflection. Mentally survey your history of projects, relationships and faith. In your estimation, is your endurance rating higher, lower or about right as a person of integrity. Ask God to point out what is appropriate for you in the study ahead.

Job faced an endurance test of gigantic proportions. *Read Job 1:1–2:10.*

- 1.** What troubles you about this story?
- 2.** What successive blows came upon Job?
- 3.** How do you picture Job “before” and “after”?
- 4.** What seems to be the issue of discussion between Satan and God (1:6–12; 2:1–5)?
- 5.** Why was this an important subject for both Satan and God?
- 6.** What additional temptations did Job’s wife offer?
- 7.** Notice Job’s responses to pain. What do these responses suggest about Job’s view of God and of himself (1:20–22; 2:10)?
- 8.** Who won this round of the battle? Satan? God? Job? Explain.
- 9.** What benefits have come to you because of your relationship with God?
- 10.** What is your ability to endure in faith if these benefits were to be taken away?
- 11.** What project, event or relationship is currently testing your endurance? How?
- 12.** How could you better practice endurance in the ordinary events of your life?

Pray, worshiping God for who he is. Bring to mind as many names for God and as many adjectives as you can think of that describe him. Use these in your prayers of worship.

Now or Later - Can you love God for himself—not just the benefits of knowing him? Examine your own motives in God’s presence, and ask God to deal with what you see.

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4

Speak Truth

Genesis 20

²⁰ Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar,² and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

³ But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, “You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.”

⁴ Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵ Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister,’ and didn’t she also say, ‘He is my brother’? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.”

⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die.”

⁸ Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, “What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.” ¹⁰ And Abimelek asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”

¹¹ Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ ¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’’”

¹⁴ Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelek said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.”

¹⁶ To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.”

¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again,¹⁸ for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

“The President tells lies,” chortled headlines in tabloids and tribunes in 1998. In columns of fine print we later learned more than we ever wanted to know about why. It’s easy to fling the whole story into the corner with disgust. But when I examine my own words and motives, I have to ask some sobering questions: What should I say to my elderly “uncle” about the *real* results of his chest x-ray? What would I say if ordered, “Recant, or die”?

Group Discussion. Do you think a lie is ever justified? Explain.

Personal Reflection. What situations tempt you to say what is less than true? When you consider what makes these situations tempting, what do you discover about your motives?

Abraham was on a long journey through dangerous territory. He had a convenient agreement with his wife. *Read Genesis 20.*

- 1.** What is your initial reaction to each character in this story?
- 2.** What does Abraham’s lie in verse 2 reveal about his values?
- 3.** Study God’s words in verses 3 and 6–7. How does God show that he cares for the various people touched by Abraham’s lie?
- 4.** What do these statements reveal about God’s values?
- 5.** How does Abimelech show more concern for godly values than Abraham did?
- 6.** What do you think of Abraham’s reasons for lying to Abimelech (vv. 11–13)?
- 7.** What circumstances do you face that make truth-telling difficult?
- 8.** How might a serious look at your motives help you decide how much to say—and not to say?
- 9.** Look at God’s instructions to Abimelech in verse 7. How did Abimelech go beyond even what God asked him to do (vv. 8–16)?
- 10.** Abimelech said to Sarah, “You are completely vindicated” (v. 16). What do you think Abraham, Abimelech and Sarah each learned from this experience?
- 11.** What harm have you seen come from failure to tell the truth?

12. What forms of self-discipline would you recommend to someone who wanted to become more truthful?

Thank God for the ways that he represents truth—that his Word is truth (John 17:17). Bring to God specific areas where you fail to tell the truth. Ask his forgiveness and his help.

Now or Later

Study Psalm 15. What different areas of truth-telling does this psalm address?

What encouragement do you find here to speak truth?

The apostle Paul wrote these hopes for his friends at Ephesus: “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Consider several of the areas where speaking the truth is hard for you. In view of this verse, what can you say in that setting that is both truthful and loving?

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5

Practice Self-Control

Judges 16

¹⁶ One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. ² The people of Gaza were told, “Samson is here!” So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, “At dawn we’ll kill him.”

³ But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.”

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.”

⁷ Samson answered her, “If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I’ll become as weak as any other man.”

⁸ Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. ⁹ With men hidden in the room, she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied.”

¹¹ He said, “If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I’ll become as weak as any other man.”

¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, “All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied.”

He replied, “If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I’ll become as weak as any other man.” So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric ¹⁴ and tightened it with the pin.

Again she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.” ¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

¹⁷ So he told her everything. “No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother’s womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.”

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, “Come back once more; he has told me everything.” So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. ¹⁹ After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.

²⁰ Then she called, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!”

He awoke from his sleep and thought, “I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

²¹ Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison. ²² But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

²³ Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, “Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.”

²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, “Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain.”

²⁵ While they were in high spirits, they shouted, “Bring out Samson to entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, ²⁶ Samson said to the servant who held his hand, “Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.” ²⁷ Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. ²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the Lord, “Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” ²⁹ Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, ³⁰ Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

³¹ Then his brothers and his father’s whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes,” says the closing description of the book of Judges. It was a time of national chaos and violence—Samson’s era. Samson was born to devout Hebrew parents who promised to give their child to God’s service. But the young adult Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman, forced both families to accept the marriage, then slaughtered thirty of his in-laws because he lost a bet. Not surprisingly, his father-in-law canceled the marriage. So Samson caught three hundred foxes, tied torches to their tails and turned them loose among the Philistines’ ripened grain fields. Self-control was not Samson’s specialty.

Group Discussion. Describe a scene from your own memory where someone abandoned self-control.

Personal Reflection. Think about a time when you failed to exercise self-control. How did this affect your relationships? Consider what this event says about how you regard yourself, others and God.

Samson judged Israel for twenty years. He was as close to a national leader as they had at that point. Then came a woman named Delilah. *Read Judges 16.*

1. What examples of Samson’s failure to exercise self-control can you find in this text?
2. When you “see” the various escapades of Samson described in this chapter, what images come to your mind?
3. What does the event described in verses 1–4 reveal about the kind of person Samson was?
4. Review Delilah’s four attempts to discover the source of Samson’s strength and Samson’s response to these attempts (vv. 4–22). What can you perceive about the relationship between these two people?
5. What character qualities in Samson made it possible for Delilah to keep her part of the bargain offered in verse 5?
6. Verses 20–21 describe the painful consequences Samson faced. When have you seen (or experienced) painful results due to lapses in self-control?
7. What do you see as the true explanation for Samson’s strength—and weakness? (Compare Judges 16:20 with 14:6, 19; 15:14.)

8. Focus on verses 23–31. In what ways did the Philistines humiliate Samson?

9. Study the words of Samson’s prayer in verse 28. What does it suggest about Samson’s moral and spiritual condition?

10. Would you say that Samson put self-control to good or bad use in the ending of this story? Explain.

11. What are some of your strengths in the area of self-control?

What areas of self-control do you need to work on?

12. What steps can you take to move toward the kind of self-control that supports integrity? (Consider adjustments in relationships, circumstances, prayer or other appropriate steps.)

Pray, thanking God for the measure of self-control that he has already developed in you. Bring to him specific settings or circumstances that tempt you to a harmful loss of self-control. Ask for his help in those settings.

Now or Later

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Thank God for these blessings from his Spirit as you see them in other Christians and in yourself. Spend a day doing a “fruit search.” Note every time you see one of these fruit in action. At the end of your day, use your list to create a prayer of praise to God.

Consider keeping a self-control journal for a week. Note times when you have exercised appropriate self-control. Note also your lapses in this area. At the end of the week, thank God for the successes and ask that he use them for his glory. Try to notice any patterns that triggered lapses in self-control. Then prayerfully consider how you might reduce temptation or strengthen your inner resolve.

INTEGRITY

Living the Truth

6

Respect Your Body

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Four mornings a week I stumble out of bed at 5:15 and head for the gym. Even after years of this “diversion,” I am still amazed at the range of bodies present there. I see pudgy young adults pumping the pedals of the bikes, elderly gentlemen stepping around the track eyeing their cardiac monitors, a grandmother who works out twice as hard as I do but weighs fifty pounds more, svelte twenty-somethings galloping through step aerobics, an obese twenty-something huffing through the same routine, three muscular guys swimming laps in triathlon training, while a gray-haired women ten feet away does water aerobics with a flotation belt to protect her arthritic knees. Anyone working out before 6:00 a.m. has got to be pretty serious about keeping fit, so I give us all an A for effort. But effort notwithstanding, our bodies wear many shapes. Even so, these shells that house our inner being are a gift from God. We are to respect our bodies and use them for his glory.

Group Discussion. If you could change or fix one thing about your body, what would that be? Personal Reflection. What do you do to care for your body? How do you misuse or neglect your body? Why?

We sometimes see the Christian faith as dealing with the mind and the soul. But in this passage Paul speaks of something both solid and personal—the body. *Read 1 Corinthians 6:12–20.*

1. In what different ways throughout this text does Paul show that our bodies are important?
2. What good advice for care of the body might grow out of the statements in verses 12–13?
3. Verse 14 speaks of resurrection, Christ’s and ours. Why might belief in the resurrection of the body encourage you to respect your body as it is now?
4. Verse 16 quotes the Genesis creation passage, “The two shall become one flesh.” In view of the two verses on either side of this statement, what new significance does Paul bring to that ancient text?
5. What are some ways that you could allow your body to express your relationship with the Lord—that you are “one with him in spirit” (v. 17)?
6. Focus on verses 18–20. Verse 18 says that sexual sins are sins against our own bodies. What harm can come from these sins?
7. Take a moment to meditate on the statement “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19). What feelings, questions or prayers does this bring to mind?
8. Verse 19 says, “You are not your own.” How is this statement in conflict with current secular ethics?
9. What practical differences result from these two opposite views of the self? (Contrast practical expressions of current secular ethics with the way we might live out verses 18–20.)
10. In what ways do people show lack of respect for their bodies?
11. Why might a person fail to care for his or her body?
12. How can you show appropriate respect for your body—without becoming preoccupied by it?

Pray, expressing your belonging to Jesus Christ—body and soul.

Now or Later

What do you like and dislike about your body? Talk to God about some of those feelings.

Prayerfully recall your use (and misuse) of your body. If some of these actions are inconsistent with the teachings of the passage you have just studied, confess any sin against your body and ask God's help in leaving that sin. Accept the fact that he is washing away those sins—as if they had never happened.

Focus on this psalm:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139:13–14)

Thank God for the gift of your body. If it seems appropriate, make a personal commitment to God, regarding the use of your body.

INTEGRITY

Living the Truth

7

Expect Temptation

Genesis 39

¹ Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

² The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison,²¹ the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

"Lead us not into temptation," I whispered—a part of my morning prayer. Then I stopped. *What an enormous request, I thought, and what a strange one. Surely God would not lead me into temptation, or maybe he would—for the strengthening of my soul.* A dozen images leaped to my mind: my hidden weakness, my most vulnerable spots, my fears. "Not there," I begged God, "or there, or there," and shuddered. "Surely I could not resist that." Gradually my breathing slowed and I went on, "but deliver us from evil." ("Yes, please do," I whispered.)

Temptation comes to us: maybe not in its worst shape, but it comes. We can take comfort in Paul's promise that God "will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear," but even that reassurance is followed with the words, "when you are tempted, ..." (1 Corinthians 10:13). We might as well expect temptation and fortify ourselves. Prepare to resist—for it will come.

Group Discussion. What kinds of temptations seem to be a natural part of your ordinary living?

Personal Reflection. All of us know of situations that would tempt us to do wrong. If you were to pray "Lead us not into temptation" what specifically might you be thinking? Talk to God about this.

At one stage of his life Joseph found temptation at almost every turn. *Read Genesis 39.*

1. This chapter includes three scenes (vv. 1–6, 7–18, 19–23). What temptations was Joseph likely to face in each of these situations?
2. Focus on verses 1–6. What was good and what was difficult about Joseph's situation in Egypt?
3. God is mentioned several times in this section. How did he reveal himself and to whom?
4. Even though Joseph was a slave, he was given much power and responsibility. What temptations related to power and responsibility do you see today?
5. Focus on verses 7–18. What forms of sexual harassment did Joseph have to cope with from Potiphar's wife?

6. In verse 9 Joseph explained to Potiphar's wife why he refused to sleep with her. What values undergird those reasons?
7. What values could help people today resist the many sexual temptations of our era?
8. What practical steps can God's people today take to resist (or avoid) sexual temptation?
9. Focus on verses 19–21. Joseph did the right thing, yet he landed in jail. What does this suggest about the practical aspects of resisting temptation?
10. What new temptations would have faced him in prison?
11. God was with Joseph in prison, just as he had been with him in Potiphar's house. When have you sensed God's presence—even though everything else seemed to be going wrong?
12. Joseph seemed to expect temptation—at least enough to resist it. What temptations have you learned to expect?
13. What are some ways that you can prepare to resist temptation?

Pray aloud the Lord's Prayer. When you come to the line "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," pause for a time of silent meditation and personal prayer. Then finish the prayer aloud—as your closing note of praise.

Now or Later

Make a list of current situations that tempt you to sin. (Review sins of thought, word and action.) Prayerfully consider how you might prepare yourself to resist those temptations.

Study the passage below; think your way through it phrase by phrase. Thank God for what you find there.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:12–13)

INTEGRITY

Living the Truth

8

Guard Your Tongue

James 3:1–12

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

“Gahp,” he says with great enthusiasm. “Gahp?” he asks. I spoon mashed bananas, yogurt and a mushy green bean mixture into his tiny rosebud mouth. “Gahp” he says again in appreciation. All things gastronomic are gahp to Thomas. I marvel at the shape of his mouth, five teeth so far, gums hiding the rest, along with buds of the next set, tongue busy all day long with giggles and yowls and the beginnings of words, a throat with vocal chords that he has somehow learned to vibrate with just the right pressure to express himself, lungs and breath forcing out the sound—at his whim. He is a marvelous creation, this grandson of mine. God made him and gave him incredible skills with a complex mechanism aimed at speech. He (and we) can use that gift for God’s glory—or not.

Group Discussion. Use your tongue to say something that you appreciate about the person sitting on your right and on your left. As long as the compliments are flowing, don’t leave God out of the conversation. When you have finished talking to each other, turn to prayer. Pray one-sentence prayers of praise to God.

Personal Reflection. Take personal inventory of how well you use your tongue. On the positive side, are you quick to encourage and to express appreciation? Are you thoughtful in what you say, so that others gain from your insight? Have you developed a listening manner? On the negative side, do you withhold words that might encourage or inform? Do you speak so often, so fast and so loudly that others do not have opportunity to express themselves? Have you perfected the art of verbal barbs so that people are injured by your words? Ask God to further reveal your verbal strengths and weaknesses as you work with the Scripture passage below.

How we use our gift of speech is important to God. *Read James 3:1–12.*

1. Notice the different objects this text uses to illustrate the tongue. How do these objects help us to picture the impact of our words?
2. Why is the use of the tongue such a good test of our character (reread v. 2)?
3. The power of speech is a gift from God, but it can also become sin. What are some sins of the tongue?
4. What inconsistencies do verses 7–12 point out?
5. How do the fig tree, grapevine and salt spring illustrate the tongue—and the source of its words?
6. Verse 8 speaks of the tongue as containing “deadly poison.” When have you seen words become deadly poison?
7. Verse 9 says that blessing may come from the tongue. When have you been “blessed” by someone’s tongue?
8. Verse 1 begins, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers.” How might this passage help a person (who does presume to teach) to become a better teacher?
9. Verse 9 implies that our relationship with God ought to influence what we say to and about people. What reasons can you give for this connection?
10. Take a quick mental survey of your verbal strengths, skills and outright inclinations. What are some ways that you can glorify God with your tongue?

11. What do you consider to be your strengths and your weaknesses in the use of your tongue?

In view of these strengths and weaknesses, what steps can you take to improve the use of your tongue in one of your current relationships?

Pray, thanking God for at least one person who has spoken (or written) words of value to you. Commit to God the use of your own tongue.

Now or Later

How do you feel about the way you use words? Uncertain? Embarrassed? Frightened? Confident? Creative? Fulfilled? Other? (Perhaps these feelings vary, depending on the circumstances.) Talk to God about your feelings. Thank him for the gift of language and ask his help in using that gift in a way that honors him.

What are the pressure points that cause you to lose control of your tongue? Picture the circumstances where this is likely to occur, then bring that setting to God in prayer, making confession as needed, and asking his help in those circumstances.

Study the Scripture passages below using them as a focus for self-examination and prayer.

The mouth of a righteous man utters wisdom,
and his tongue speaks what is just. (Psalm 37:30)

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord;
keep watch over the door of my lips. (Psalm 141:3)

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

INTEGRITY

Living the Truth

9

Offer Forgiveness

John 21

¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”)²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

²² Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”²³ Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31–34)

Peter and Jesus saw the future differently. As we might expect, Peter’s view of the future (and of himself) was a little shortsighted. Satan did sift Peter as wheat—and Peter flunked the test. After denying his Lord three times almost as soon as Jesus was captured, Peter disappeared from the scene. Scripture does not show him at the crucifixion. There is a brief, mysterious note in Luke 24:34 that Jesus appeared to Peter, probably on Easter Sunday morning, but we don’t get to see that meeting. What we do see is an amazing account of Jesus and Peter’s interaction—dealing with the problem of forgiveness.

Group Discussion. Why is forgiveness difficult to give and to receive?

Personal Reflection. Bring to mind a fractured relationship from your own experience. What do you need to forgive? What do need to be forgiven of?

Peter had abandoned his Lord at the time of Jesus’ greatest need. Peter had seen Jesus once since then—perhaps even been forgiven—but what would their new relationship be? What role (if any) would Peter have in God’s continued work? *Read John 21:1–14.*

1. Close your eyes and imagine that you are present at this event. What sights, sounds and smells surround you?

2. Try to put yourself in Peter's sandals. What are some of your thoughts and feelings?
3. In what ways did Jesus show that he wanted to continue a relationship with his disciples?
4. What would be hard about any continued relationship with Jesus at this point?
5. Jesus created an atmosphere that made it easy for his disciples to be with him. Consider one of your own difficult relationships. If you wanted to, what could you do to create a welcoming setting that might lead toward forgiveness?
6. *Read John 21:15–25.* What do you think was painful to Peter in his post-breakfast conversation with Jesus?
7. Although Jesus did not mention the word *forgiveness*, what all do you see that suggests Jesus has forgiven Peter?
8. What does the conversation with Jesus reveal about Peter's future responsibilities?
9. What do you personally find reassuring about Peter's conversation with Jesus?
10. What do verses 20–25 reveal about the perspective of John, the writer of this book?
11. Why is it important to learn to give and receive forgiveness?
12. Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. Why is it particularly hard to forgive people who are close to you?
13. Bring to mind one person with whom you need to extend or receive forgiveness. What is a step you could take in that direction?

Focus on the forgiveness that God has given you, the forgiving work of Jesus on your behalf. Pray, thanking God for all this brings to mind.

Now or Later

Do you suspect that you have offended someone, that perhaps you need to be forgiven? Prayerfully study Matthew 5:23–24. Then make the effort described in that passage. Has someone hurt you to the point that you are having trouble forgiving them? Prayerfully study Matthew 18:15–22. Focus on the goal stated in verses 21–22. Then go back to the earlier part of

the passage and consider what steps are appropriate for this particular relationship, steps that could lead you toward that goal.

Do you need to forgive a person no longer available to you, perhaps separated by distance or death? Notice that forgiveness does not minimize the hurt. (Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to declare his love—just as many times as he had declared his denial.) Write a letter, journal entry or prayer that could lead you to forgive that person. Then ask God's help in bringing that about.

INTEGRITY

Living the Truth

10

Trust God

Psalm 25

¹ In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

² I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

³ No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

⁴ Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.

⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

⁶ Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

⁹ He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

¹⁰ All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

¹¹ For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

¹² Who, then, are those who fear the Lord? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.

¹³ They will spend their days in prosperity, and their descendants will inherit the land.

¹⁴ The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.

¹⁵ My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷ Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.

¹⁸ Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.

¹⁹ See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!

²⁰ Guard my life and rescue me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, Lord, is in you.

²² Deliver Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

I must admit that I do not do my best praying in a crisis. My mouth gets dry, my heart pounds, my body gets the shakes, my mind moves into what therapists call “catastrophizing.” It’s not a good scene for prayer. Somehow I’m able to move that all aside if it is someone else’s crisis. But

when it's *my* crisis, my prayers come out more like rabbit squeaks of "Help, God" and "Lord, have mercy." I confess that I have much growing yet needed in prayer. And in trust.

Group Discussion. Make a timeline of your past, dividing your life by decades. As you think of the events that occurred in your life, note how that era could build your trust in God. Remember that sometimes we learn to trust out of need, sometimes out of thanksgiving. Record trust-building events on your timeline. Share your timelines and discuss: What events in your life have helped you to trust God?

Personal Reflection. When you are in a difficult situation, what kind of prayer are you likely to pray? Ask that God will grow you in prayerful trust as you study an example of David at prayer.

David's psalms cover a huge range of emotions: anger, guilt, thanksgiving, praise—and trust. *Read Psalm 25.*

1. This prayer psalm divides into four stanzas (vv. 1–3, 4–7, 8–15, 16–22). Give a topic title to each.

Which of these topics do you particularly connect with and why?

2. What does it mean to "lift up" your soul to God?

3. What do you see as the relationship between hope and trust (vv. 1–3)?

4. Study stanza 2 (vv. 4–7). What all does David ask God to do?

5. Three times David uses the term *remember*. Why would David want God to use "selective memory"?

6. What would you want God to remember (and forget) about you?

7. Study stanza 3 (vv. 6–15). In what ways does stanza 3 show that God has integrity—and therefore ought to be trusted?

8. In what ways does this stanza acknowledge David's dependence on God?

9. What do you count on God to do and to be?

10. Study stanza 4 (vv. 16–22). What words and phrases here help you to understand David’s current situation?

11. Compare David’s position, described in stanza 4, with what he hopes from God in verses 12–13. In view of the differences, what does David’s prayer say about his own integrity?

12. How might meditating on God’s character, as David did, help you to strengthen your integrity?

Pray, beginning your prayer with David’s words, “To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.”

Now or Later

Review the four stanzas of David’s psalm. Select one idea from each stanza and write your own prayer drawing from this outline.¹

¹ Nystrom, Carolyn. *Integrity: Living the Truth: 10 Studies for Individuals or Groups: With Notes for Leaders*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2000. Print. A LifeGuide Bible Study.