

BASIC INSIGHTS

Sweet Surrender **Session 3—Trustworthy**

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **How can I be worthy of someone's trust?** and to drive home this one truth: **Love people honestly and loyally.**

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

I once uttered the same words a lot of teenagers use on their parents: "Don't you trust me?" I was in high school and was planning on going to the movies with friends. Unfortunately, the weather turned bad and the theater was on the other side of the city. I begged my parents to let me go, but they were concerned about allowing an inexperienced driver out on the highway as the roads were beginning to freeze over. Of course, my parents explained that they trusted my intentions, but they didn't trust my driving. And they certainly didn't trust the other drivers on the road. (That hardly made me feel better.)

Students want to be trusted. They want their parents to assume they can handle any situation. Unfortunately, teenagers are not as quick to consider what would make them trustworthy.

The previous sessions in this series focused on God's trustworthiness and our need to place trust in Him. Being a Christ-follower not only means placing trust in Him, it also means we develop His character of trust in our lives. As God is trustworthy, we are also to become trustworthy. As you guide students through this session, help them to evaluate their character in terms of their own trustworthiness. Help students consider how well their life reflects the character of the One they follow.

POINTS TO FOCUS ON

A. Be a person of integrity.

The opening scene of the latest Batman movie, *The Dark Knight Rises* (Warner Bros., 2012), depicted nameless thugs diving from one low-flying airplane to another. They accomplished this feat by attaching cables to the rear of the second plane and then using the momentum of one plane to lift the rear of the second. As it tilted from horizontal to vertical, the plane began to lose integrity. The tail, wings, and so forth began to peel apart as the plane was placed under unusual pressure. The plane crashed because its integrity was compromised.

As I write these words, I am about to board an airplane to fly home. (I'm hoping our flight is more successful than the plane carrying Batman's nemesis.) Assuming I arrive safely, it will be because the plane was able to withstand the pressures placed on it to maintain integrity.

Integrity is a word we borrow from structural engineering. When we say that a student has integrity, we mean that his or her life is consistent. He or she doesn't act one way at church and another on the job or in the high school locker room. We mean that, despite pressure, the student continues to function well. The Book of Proverbs calls for that kind of consistency.

The one who lives with integrity lives securely, but whoever perverts his ways will be found out. (Prov. 10:9)

A number of the proverbs contrast the wise with the foolish; that is the intention of this proverb. It suggests a wise person will live a life of integrity. The Hebrew word translated "integrity" has also

been translated “uprightly.” The word means “trustworthiness” or “faithfulness” (Mounce, 2006). Integrity is a characteristic of God; He is always faithful and always trustworthy. It is also a characteristic that is desired in us. A person of integrity will be faithful in action and attitude toward others and will be consistent in service to God. People who live in such a way will experience security in life. Generally, they will have secure relationships with friends and family. They will be trusted.

On the other hand, the foolish person is described as one who “perverts his ways.” A student whose life is not upright may succeed momentarily, but will be exposed in time.

Encourage students to think about the consistency of their lives. Are they faithful in their relationships? Are they faithful to God? Lead them to discuss what it is like to be labeled by friends as unreliable or two-faced. Help students understand that being trustworthy means being a person of integrity.

B. Keep confidences.

Being trustworthy also means you can be trusted with confidential information.

A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but a trustworthy person keeps a confidence. (Prov. 11:13)

While people of any age can be guilty of gossip, students can be particularly malicious. The peer group is important to most adolescents—they want to be accepted and esteemed. Sometimes adolescents will put others down to make themselves more popular by comparison. Embarrassing or harmful information can spread quickly through a high school, and teenagers can be merciless when it comes to making fun of peers, especially those they perceive as having lower social status. Gossipers not only share information; they hurt others by inflicting embarrassment or exclusion.

Students often understand the importance of keeping secrets for their friends. They may be hesitant to talk about problems their friends are having even if the information should be shared with a trusted adult. However, they are less careful about sharing the secrets of siblings. It can be painful to watch how quickly a younger brother will share some embarrassing detail of an older brother’s life in a Bible study setting. Often the intention is merely to embarrass the older brother. Likewise, students might give no thought to sharing harmful information about peers they don’t particularly like. They may feel justified in their negative attitudes toward those peers when they can share gossip about them.

We live in a gossip-saturated culture. We find the arguments between two sisters broadcast on reality TV to be entertainment. Additionally, so much personal information is shared on Facebook, we might wonder if there is a need for someone who keeps secrets any more. But people who keep confidences are worth trusting. A friend who will listen to your failures or frustrations and keep those conversations confidential is a tremendous gift. A counseling professor once told me that a lot of the people who go to counselors could save their money if they just had trustworthy friends. Your teenagers show themselves to be trustworthy when they keep other people’s information to themselves.

Of course, keeping secrets is not always the moral thing to do. Help your students to understand that some circumstances call for secret breaking. Specifically, if a friend is in danger because of self-destructive behavior or a threat from someone else, it is imperative to share that individual’s secret with a trusted adult. Asking for help from a trusted source is different than gossiping. Gossip seeks to harm another. Someone who shares the secrets of a person in danger is seeking their good.

C. Be honest.

Judas had spent many months with Jesus. He had listened to Jesus’ teaching, seen His miracles—Jesus had even washed His feet. But when Judas decided to betray Jesus, he did it with a kiss. “His

betrayer had given them a sign: ‘The One I kiss, He’s the One; arrest Him!’” (Matt. 26:48). It is a principle Solomon penned hundreds of years before when he wrote:

The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive. (Prov. 27:6)

Kisses don’t have the same cultural meaning for us now as they did when this proverb was written, but we understand what an insincere kiss must have been like. An enemy might flatter you with words, but his words may not be so kind when you are out of earshot. No “kind” word from an enemy actually helps you. A true friend speaks truth—even when the truth is painful.

Your students will quickly equate trustworthiness with honesty. If you ask students what kind of person they can trust, one of the first answers you will get is, “someone who is honest.” However, honesty can be difficult. All of us are hesitant to tell a friend something that may damage the friendship. We don’t want our friends to be mad at us, so we tell them what we think they want to hear. At times, real friendship should confront rather than flatter.

D. Love unconditionally.

Finally, the person who is trustworthy loves unconditionally. To look at this characteristic, we move from the Book of Proverbs to the New Testament book of 1 Peter. Peter described life outside of Christ as full of ignorance, dominated by desire, and empty (1 Pet. 1:14-18). He contrasted that kind of life with three characteristics of a Christ-filled life:

By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,²³ since you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Pet. 1:22-23)

First, Peter described the Christ-filled life as one devoted to obeying the truth. If students have come to faith in Christ, they are no longer ignorant of God. They have met Him face to face. Peter emphasized the need to obey the truth and not merely understand it.

Second, Peter described the Christ-filled life as pure. Believers are no longer driven by their own evil desires; Christ purifies them. While this purity indicates that believers are no longer given to sinful desires, it does not come from our good works or religious practices. Rather, it is a purity that comes about by new birth in Christ. It means receiving the righteousness of Christ.

Finally, Peter describes the Christ-filled life as filled with brotherly love. No longer are our lives empty. We live in the community of Christ. Notice the words Peter used to describe this love. We are to love “earnestly.” To love earnestly means to put great effort into our love. Earnest love is not a passive affection but an active practice. We are to seek the best of others. We are also to love “from a pure heart.” It is easy to express love when we receive something in return. Peter calls us to love with pure motives. We love because Christ loves us. We do not love conditionally, nor do we love to get something from others.

Students know conditional love. They know peers who care about them as long as they act the right way. They have seen that appearance determines acceptance. Some even experience conditional love at home. The idea of unconditional love may be difficult for more cynical students. Is it really possible for us to love without thinking of what’s in it for us? Help students to see how genuine love causes people to trust.

Of course, being a trustworthy person doesn’t come from the answers students give in a Bible study class. It doesn’t come from a week of genuine effort to be nice to people. Trustworthiness comes from a

consistent life of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us to develop the character of Christ. Integrity, honesty, and genuine love should become our character rather than merely our behavior. And that requires a close walk with Christ.

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