

BETTER TOGETHER

When We Practice Integrity

Various Texts

Created by *Dale Ohmart*

Big Idea: *Being a good person demands that we integrate the values of our heart into the actions of our day.*

A police officer pulled a driver aside and asked for his license and registration. “What's wrong, officer,” the driver asked. “I didn't go through any red lights, and I certainly wasn't speeding.”

“No, you weren't,” said the officer, “but I saw you waving your fist as you swerved around the lady driving in the left lane, and I further observed your flushed and angry face as you shouted at the driver of the Hummer who cut you off, and how you pounded your steering wheel when the traffic came to a stop near the bridge.”

“Is that a crime, officer?”

“No, but when I saw the ‘Jesus loves you and so do I’ bumper sticker on the car, I figured this car had to be stolen.”¹

Do the bumper stickers of your life tell the real story about who you are? Like the cliché says, “Talk is cheap.”

We are engaged right now in a series of studies designed to help you understand what it means to live a life of integrity. What do I mean by that? Here's a working definition of the word...

Being a good person demands that we weave GODLY values into our EVERY DAY ROUTINE .

This series is built around one of the best-known lists in the entire Bible. **Galatians 5:21-22** lists nine character traits that will supernaturally develop in our lives as a result of a relationship with God. Over the past few weeks, we've talked about how to practice LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE and KINDNESS. Perhaps you know that the next characteristic in the list is GOODNESS. But that is a very ambiguous concept. How to you practice GOODNESS? The answer has so many layers that I decided to narrow our focus down to something much more pointed. That's why this definition is worded this way. Goodness comes from integrity, and integrity is only visible when the values we claim to have made their way into daily routine. That's the proof of what you truly value. The way you use your time indicates what you truly value. The way you use your money indicates what you truly value. It's like what the famous jazz saxophonist, Charlie Parker, once said:

*If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.*²

According to the Bible, it is more important to live it than to have it.

¹ Adapted from *Homiletics* magazine (May 2004); submitted by Gino Grunberg, Gig Harbor, Washington. Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today, Intl.

² Jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker (1920-1955). *Citation:* Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois, copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today, Intl.

Proverbs 28:6 (NASB³)

⁶ Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than he who is crooked though he be rich.

I know what you're thinking, and I agree...life would be a lot easier if we could both walk in integrity and be rich! Be that as it may, I can think of four essential building blocks⁴ that need attention for integrity to take shape in you and me.

Integrity of WORD.

Of course, when you hear that, you immediately think about telling the truth. But let's expand on that. Do my actions live up to the statements and the promises I make?

- I'm setting at my desk working, and one of the girls comes down to tell me that dinner is ready. I say, "OK, I'll be there in five minutes." Do I really get there in five minutes?
- Somebody shares an urgent prayer request with me. Do I really pray about that situation? Or do I find myself desperately breathing a silent prayer for them as they walk across the room toward me a week later?
- I don't leave early enough for an appointment, so I'm speeding my way down the highway and pull up at the meeting place late. Do I walk in and complain about how bad the traffic was?
- We're in a meeting, and a very critical action item comes up. I know that I'm already over-committed. But this item is extremely important, and nobody else seems willing to step up. Do I promise to get it done, knowing that something else I'm promised will have to be sacrificed?

Gaps in integrity can appear without any lying at all. You know what I deal with? Far too often, I find myself carefully shaping what I say primarily for the sake of my image...I'm concerned about what other people are thinking about me. Before integrity can begin to take shape in me, the focus of my attention has to change!

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

The ongoing battle of repentance is to pull myself out of the center of my thoughts and be more concerned about God and others. When I'm getting ready to say something, everybody is better off when I'm thinking about what is good for them rather than worrying about what they'll think of me. In fact, fear is probably one of the reasons why many surveys often find that the majority of Americans regularly practice some degree of dishonestly. Maybe you don't tell the whole truth at work because you're afraid it will threaten your job in some way. Maybe you don't tell the whole truth at home because you're afraid it might lead to a fight. Maybe you don't tell the whole truth in other conversations because you're afraid people won't like you.

³ Scripture marked "NASB" taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

⁴ Adapted from a sermon by Tom Holladay, "The Secret of Integrity," from the sermon series *9 Secrets of Healthy Relationships* (available through Pastors.com).

Psalm 25:21 (NLT)

May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you.

But what is that integrity and honesty really protect me from? I ask that question because it's obvious integrity can sometimes be so incredibly risky. At first, integrity may cost us something. Maybe your job suffers a bit because you're honest. Maybe you experience some conflict in a relationship because you are honest. But lack of integrity ultimately leads to fractured relationships with both God and others.

Proverbs 2:7 (NLT)

⁷He grants a treasure of good sense to the godly. He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity.

As you build a pattern of integrity of WORD, the pay off will come. The people in your life will realize that they can trust you. Most important, your spirit will not have to pay the price of the chaos that comes from dishonest.

Integrity of WALK .

Alister MacGrath, professor of historical theology at Oxford University, observed that “what propels people toward atheism is above all a sense of revulsion against the excesses and failures of organized religion.”⁵ In other words, when Christians don't live up to the standards they preach, people conclude that Christianity must not be true. The word we use to summarize that is hypocrisy, and examples of it exist everywhere you look. For instance...

OK...this picture is primarily for fun. But think for a minute about how you would feel if you saw someone you really respected doing something as obviously wrong as robbing a bank. It would certainly have an emotional impact. It might even have a behavioral impact. If they're doing it, maybe it isn't so bad. Maybe it would be OK for you to do it. Think about how influential other people have been in your life.

And think about how influential you might be in the life of someone else. I hope you have never said to anyone, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Integrity is more caught than taught.

These two Old Testament scriptures refer to the life and heart of King David. When it was time for David's son, Solomon, to become king, God reminded the young man about the example of his father.



The Ohmart Girl Gang – Natalie, Tasha (top), Anna and Tina

⁵ Alister McGrath, “The Twilight of Atheism,” Christianity Today (March, 2005). Copied from PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today, Intl.

1 Kings 9:4-5 (NLT)

⁴As for you, if you will follow me with integrity and godliness, as David your father did, always obeying my commands and keeping my laws and regulations, ⁵then I will establish the throne of your dynasty over Israel forever....

The most important mark of David's life was how transparent and genuine he was in his worship for God. At the end of his life, David looks back and prays...

1 Chronicles 29:17 (NLT)

¹⁷I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know I have done all this with good motives, and I have watched your people offer their gifts willingly and joyously.

Years later, Jesus echoed the value of truth. Worship is not really worship without it.

John 4:23 (NLT)

...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson gives us the following version of this same verse in his paraphrase of the Bible known as *The Message*.

John 4:23 (MSG⁶)

It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship.

No pretense...no façade...“simply and honestly themselves.” How else could you approach God? He made us! Does anyone in here really think we can fool Him or hide the real truth from Him? And since that is the case, we have to touch on this third building block of integrity...it has to do with how we handle the moments in life when we fail to measure up.

Integrity of WEAKNESS .

One of the most powerful evidences that the Bible is a reliable document is that it does not cover up the failures of its main characters. Without skipping a beat, its pages tell us that David's life was characterized by “integrity and godliness,” but we also read that he committed adultery and ordered a man to be murdered. We read that God spoke to Moses as a man speaks with his friend, but we are also told that Moses murdered an Egyptian guard. In the New Testament, Peter could have the insight to see that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God...but would also deny that he had any association with him.

⁶ Scripture marked MSG taken from The Message. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Tom Holladay is on staff at the Saddleback church in southern California. When he preached on integrity, one of his main points was that we need to “confess regularly.” When we fail, we need to own up. He quotes a poem by Ogden Nash:

To keep your marriage brimming
With love in the loving cup
When you're wrong, admit it
And when you're right, shut up

That's a lesson that applies to all human relations, not just marriage.

One of the oldest stories in the Bible is about a man who suffers terrible loss and pain for reasons that are never fully explained. Job had been richly blessed, but the first two chapters of his story describe how all that was taken away. When his friends come to offer comfort and encouragement, they end up telling him that he must be suffering because he sinned. That was the commonly held belief of that time. Of course, they were wrong. But along the way, they do offer some thoughts that are worth thinking about. One of those thoughts appears in a question.

Job 4:6 (NASB)

Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways you hope?

Look especially at the last part of the question. Sometimes, do I unconsciously begin putting my hope in the integrity of my own ways? Sometimes, do I start acting like I never stumble? Sometimes, do I start acting like, “How could I be wrong”? That's an obvious trap we need to avoid.

But another trap is the “What's the use?” trap. It's the trap that says, “I know I'm going to fail anyway, so why try to have integrity?” That's just another way of saying that everything depends on me.

That's why I believe it is so important to have this thing I'm calling the **integrity of WEAKNESS**. We need to willingly admit where we fall short. That's the first step toward trusting God to strengthen the integrity of our lives. He takes our weakness and supernaturally builds lives of substance that will last forever. That is His work.

Integrity of WORK.

Integrity is our work, too. But I fear that we have lost sight of that. A few days ago, George Barna released the results of a survey that suggests that very few adults base their moral decisions on the Bible.⁷ When subjects like stem cell research, the war in Iraq, gay marriage and the recent Terri Schiavo case are brought up, most people base their opinions more on what they have heard in the press and from their acquaintances than on Biblical teaching.

Mike Slaughter hasn't, though. As the coach of the Marquette High School football team from Alton, IL during the 2002 season, he was riding an undefeated wave of success. His team was 10-0 as the play-offs were about to begin. Then, sixteen of his teams best players were arrested one night at a party for underage drinking. Parents suggested that the embarrassment of arrest was punishment enough. But Coach Slaughter didn't agree. His response was, “We stand for certain things. Kids have to be responsible for their actions.” He suspended

⁷ George Barna, “Most Adults Feel Accepted by God, But Lack a Biblical Worldview.” *The Barna Report*, 8/9/2005. Available at www.barna.org.

those players and his team's season ended with a 63-0 loss in the play-offs.⁸ A lot of people would look at that and say, what a failure. But I believe Coach Slaughter was more successful in defeat than he was in all his victories. A championship is a nice memory. But the lesson he taught those young men had the potential to change their lives.

Are you going about your job with that thought in mind? Is your life thoughtfully structured to have a contagious integrity?

One of my most cherished gifts is a little plaque that Cindy and the kids gave me one year for Father's Day. The scene is the drawing of a man wearing a plaid shirt with a child on his shoulders, walking hand in hand with a second child at his side. Across the top of the picture is this quote...

Proverbs 20:7 (NLT)

⁷The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children after them.

Don't make the mistake of confusing your job with the work of your life. It's natural that our jobs often become the hub of our lives. It's natural because that is usually what occupies our attention during the majority of the waking hours of any given day. But if you let that happen, your life will not have the integrity it ought to have. God may have created you with the abilities and opportunities to be a nurse...to be a fireman...to be a secretary...to be a (you fill the blank with what you do to put food on the table). But you won't be those things forever. And when He created you, God was thinking about forever.

Today, will you make a commitment to focus on forever with Him? Obviously, it starts with having a relationship with Him. After that is established, God wants us to cooperate with Him as He builds His character in our lives and through our lives to touch this world. That's the real work of our existence.

⁸ From www.PreachingToday.com (copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today, Intl.), quoting from the website of *World Magazine*, 11/23/02.