THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever watched any of those "renovation" shows on television? In every case, the homeowners have big plans for how they want their house to be transformed. Remove walls. Rearrange the rooms. Add square footage. Upgrade the floors, lighting and style. But there is almost always something the crew discovers as they tear out walls, floors and ceilings that reveals a serious problem with the wiring, plumbing, framing or foundation that will have to be corrected before they can proceed. Often the problem came about because a previous owner or contractor had cut corners and covered it over. The most serious problems present a safety hazard. Perhaps someone cut into a support beam or stud and the "structural integrity" of the whole house was compromised. That beam or stud is not doing what it is intended to do, what it needs to do in order to be trusted.

If you want a picture of what integrity (or lack of it) means, there it is. Pretending to be something you're not. Covering over some flaw or shortfall hoping people won't notice. But when that's discovered trust is severely compromised.

If we want to love like Jesus, we have to be trustworthy, which involves integrity.

Our working definition of integrity is this: **INTEGRITY IS… making sure your beliefs, words and actions line up in public and in private.**

Here's a quick analysis of that definition.

- *Beliefs*— are what you think and value.
- *Words*—what you say—must line up with what you think and value.
- *Actions*—what you do—must line up with what you think and value and say you think and value.
- *Making sure*—means you are constantly examining your words and actions in relation to your beliefs to see if there is any inconsistency.
- *Public and private* — Plus, you're examining your public words and actions and your private words and actions to make sure there's not a sliver of difference between the two.

Wow! Can you see how that take's significant effort on your part? But you do it for the sake of others, not just so you can feel good about yourself.

COMMENTARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY

And can you see how integrity is at the heart of love in every relationship you have? After all, isn't one of the most important gifts you can give to any other person the ability to count on you? No one wants to ever be surprised to find out disappointing secrets, perplexing inconsistencies, or that they simply don't care about something or like something as much as you thought they did. No one wants to admire someone but later find out they cheated or misrepresented themselves or went back on their word or violated their convictions. This can have devastating effects, as it has in so many cases when revered Christian leaders have had secret sins exposed.

One of the most wonderful things we learn about the Lord in scripture is written in James 1:17. ***Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.***

And another important verse is Hebrews 13:8. ***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

Because the Lord does not change, as the old hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" says, "There is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not." Because we can count on Him to not change, we can count on what He has said: ***Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*** It is only because of that as the writer to the Hebrews continued, ***So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*** (Hebrews 13:5-6)

REFLECTION:

Take a few minutes to consider what you need in order to cultivate the trait of integrity. **What is going to help you speak and act in private like you do in public view?** A common sad fact is that husbands, for example, can treat their wives with more kindness and respect in public than they do at home. They would never snap at them in a public setting the way they do at home. That may not be you, but does that represent anything or call to your attention a way in which you might need to do better at home than you currently are?

The place to start to close that gap between your public and private self is confession (specific, to the Lord), an apology (directly to the persons affected by the discrepancy between what you say and what you do), a promise, a vow to "do better" (to those persons) and two or three accountability partners (not a formal arrangement, just informal—go on record.)

Now one more point of examination. **Are there any ways your professed beliefs and values are contradicted by your words or actions?** For example, you say you believe the Lord will provide for your needs, yet you worry and are anxious about many things. Or, you believe it is important to be understanding and forgiving, yet there is a person or persons you consistently criticize behind their back. **What should you do about closing the gap between your professed beliefs and your actual behavior? What will help you?**

You need to answer these questions. The fact is two things need to happen… You need to ask the Holy Spirit to convict you every time you are on the brink of speaking or acting out of sync with your professed beliefs and values, and in that moment you have to listen and obey. **What's going to work for you to hear and obey?** I can't answer that for you. That's between you and the Lord and your conscience. Ask the Lord to help you find what will work for you and what has the best chance of helping you do what's right in that moment of choice.

Integrity. It's something Jesus has without fail. Pursue it until you have it too. Join me in this prayer.

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, if I'm honest, I have to admit that most of the time when there is a discrepancy between my beliefs, words and actions — or my public and private self—I actually have a sense at the time, and I choose to ignore it. There's no failure on Your part to put a check in my spirit. It's my problem of willingness. I fear that's because I have never put enough passion behind having integrity. It's a *good idea* that has not yet risen to become a *grand intention* in my life. I'm going to pray a bold request that makes me kind of nervous. Do whatever needs to happen in order to create in my heart an unshakable passion for integrity. I want to be like You, and there's no way that will ever happen without this passion for integrity. I'm Yours for the shaping. Amen.