

INTEGRITY

Day 1

Many of you know that I am the principal at Bethel Christian Academy. At the beginning of this school year, we took all of our students through 8 weeks of devotions to help them become “Students of Integrity.” Hopefully, that is a lesson that you learned as a young man as well because integrity is one of the most important traits we can have as men. But what does integrity mean, anyway? It can mean being like Jesus, being trustworthy, honest, faithful, or any number of other things, but for the purpose of this devotion we will keep it simple and say *integrity is “making right choices whether with others or alone.”*

If we are to live as “Men of Integrity,” we need to strive each day to follow Jesus’s example and make right choices all the time, in every circumstance, regardless of who might find out or what others are saying is right. Just like Jesus set an example for us to follow in the accounts recorded in the Bible, we are called to set an example to those around us. We should be able to say, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, was big on integrity and big on setting an example in everything. He told Titus to “set them an example by doing what is good” (Titus 2:7) and to show integrity in his teaching. Titus was sent to the island of Crete, a place known for its sinful culture, to help the believers living there to live with integrity. Titus was told to live in such a way that people who speak negatively of him would be “ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us!” That’s how we should live because we know what is expected of us Christians and as men of God!

The evidence of a life of integrity is in our actions, but where does integrity come from? The Bible says that integrity comes from the heart. In Genesis 12, God protected a king named Abimelech from sinning and bringing guilt on his house and his country because of “the integrity of thy heart” (Gen. 20:6 KJV). God recognized Abimelech as a man who had integrity in his heart, and God honored him for it. Several times in the Bible, there is a correlation between integrity and protection.

In Psalm 25, David is very distressed, so he calls on God. He asks for forgiveness for his sins, and acknowledges his dependence on God and the hope that gives him. Then, in verse 21 he says, “May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, Lord, is in you.” He desires to live a life of integrity, and trusts that he will be blessed for it. Both David and his son, Solomon, were promised that they would always have a descendant on the throne if they would just follow God and live the way that they were supposed to live. While the Bible doesn’t say, “Be a man of integrity and you will be blessed and nothing bad will ever happen to you,” it does say that God is “a shield to those who walk with integrity” (Proverbs 2:7-8).

You know that actions have consequences. In science, Newton’s Third Law of Motion says, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” The Bible talks about “good trees” bearing “good fruit” and “bad trees” bearing “bad fruit.” You are recognized by your fruit (Luke 6:43-45). What kind of fruit are you bearing? Do you have integrity in your heart? If you do, your life (words, actions, attitudes) should show it!

Day #1 Scriptures

Titus 2:7-8 (NIV) - In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who

oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Psalm 25:21 (NIV) - May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, Lord, is in you.

Proverbs 2:7-8 (NLT) - He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.

Proverbs 10:9 (NIV) - Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.

Luke 6:43-45 (NIV) - No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Day #1 Questions

1. How do you feel when you hear this challenge to be a man of integrity? Excited, nervous, confused...or something else? Why do you think you feel that way? What things can you think about (and ask God to help you to do) that can help you get from where you are to where you know God wants you to be?
2. Read Luke 6:43-45. The Bible is clear that what is in a person's heart will come out in what he does and what he says. Think about the last few days. What would people assume is in your heart if they saw everything you did over the last week?

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Day 2

We have talked about the importance of making right choices whether everyone else is doing it or not. Today's devotion may be a little tougher to fully understand, but I pray that you will grasp the importance of it and take it to heart. Before we start, answer this question: Would you rather have a million dollars or a good reputation? Seriously stop and think about it for a minute. Why did you choose your answer?

Beyond just examples of how Jesus and others in the Bible acted with integrity, the Bible speaks to just how important it is. Proverbs 28:6 says, it is better to be a poor but walk in integrity than to be rich without it! Sometimes it can be hard to put integrity as a top priority in our lives. After all, athletes, actors, musicians, Youtubers, and so many other people are more interested in what they have (money, cars, hits, fans, subscribers, etc.) than who they are. How many times these days do you see someone make the news or go viral or get sponsorships or endorsement deals because of their character? How many times do the things that you seek out online reflect your beliefs on integrity?

You make a decision on where you stand as a man of integrity in the shows you watch, the music you listen to, the people you follow and the things you do, not only in the choices you make when others are involved. Proverbs 22:1 urges us to choose a good reputation (which is the same as choosing to be a man of integrity) over great riches. It says that being held in high esteem (to have the favor or respect of others) is better than silver or gold!

I know it can be tough to picture "riches" and silver and gold, but I hope you are able to truly understand how important integrity is. Seeing how important money, fame, power, or recognition is in today's world and knowing that God considers integrity to be more desirable than all that, should give you a pretty good indication of the magnitude of this verse.

Day #2 Scriptures

Proverbs 28:6 - Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways. (ESV) Better the poor person who lives with integrity than the rich one who distorts right and wrong. (CSB)

Proverbs 22:1 (NLT) - Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold.

Day #2 Questions

1. Would you rather have a million dollars or a good reputation? Why did you choose your answer?
2. Think about the people that you admire, follow, or respect. What is it about them that makes them stand out from everyone else?
3. Is having a good reputation or strong character important to you? If so, what are you doing to keep it?

Bonus Quote to Ponder: "Live your life in such a way that when you die they can give your pet parrot to the town gossip." - Will Rogers, humorist.

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Day 3

Integrity means making right choices with others or alone. Today, we are going to talk about the importance of making right choices when we are alone. When you are with others, they will watch to see what choice you make, but when you are alone, no one apart from yourself and God may ever even find out about the choice you made. It's during those times that your true character really is revealed. It is the choices you make when no one is around to see that show whether you are truly a "man of integrity" or not. The next time you find yourself with a decision to make when you are by yourself, think about it and decide if it shows integrity or not. Whether it is as simple as whether to pick up a candy wrapper you dropped on the ground or difficult as whether to look at that website, your choices when you are alone define you, even if no one ever finds out. Let's take a look at a time when Jesus had decisions to make. The devil had a lot to offer Jesus if he would choose to compromise who he was and what he knew was right, and even though Jesus didn't have friends or wife or anyone else to help him or keep him accountable, he made the right choice and set an example for all of us to follow.

Read Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV):

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Jesus was doing what God was telling him to do when he went into the wilderness to be tempted (or tested) by the devil. He hadn't eaten in 40 days, because God had called him to fast. He was

obviously hungry, so turning stones into bread probably sounded like a great idea! But instead of giving into temptation and making a wrong choice, he used the words of God from Scripture (Deut. 8:3) to show the devil that he was a man of integrity by making right choices even when he was alone! We should follow Jesus' example and lean on the verses we have memorized to help us to make right decisions when given a choice to make.

When that didn't work, the devil tried to use God's own words in the Scriptures to convince Jesus to make a wrong decision, but he pulled it out of context. What he said were actually words from Scripture (Ps. 91:11-12), but they did not mean what the devil said they did so they weren't the same as God's Word. But Jesus knew the Word, and we need to as well, to help us to know when things are right and when they just sound right. Jesus again answered with God's words (Deut. 6:16).

Lastly, the devil offered Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world" if he would just worship him (again, make a wrong choice!), but Jesus knew again what was right and choice to make another right choice and keep God as the only thing worthy of his worship (Deut. 6:13). In fact, putting God first was so important that he was through entertaining the devil and he told him to get lost!

Sometimes, when we are alone is when it can be the most difficult times to make right choices. After all, who will find out if I eat this this thing or take that thing, or if I skip out a little early from work or go to this website? If we're not careful we can even begin to justify it, we can begin to excuse it. After all, no one really cares if as long as it's close to quitting time. Nobody will even know if I {you fill in the blank}. But that's where we're wrong. God cares! You're kids and/or wife or friends care, because the more we compromise our integrity on little things, the easier it will become to compromise on bigger things. The devil is sneaky that way. There are things that tempt us that don't tempt others, and things that tempt others that we aren't tempted by. But there is always something that we'll run into that will try to get us just a little further from God. After all, sin is sin...and when we sin, even a little, by making wrong choices, that choice separates us from God! Be a man of integrity! Put God first, trust his Spirit, learn his Word, and make right choices whether you are with others or alone!

Day #3 Scriptures

Psalm 33:12-15 - Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance. From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Day #3 Questions

1. Do you find that it is easier or harder to make right choices when you are alone than with others? What is it that makes it easier/harder?
2. Why do you think it can be so hard to make a right choice when nobody is watching? What is one step that you can do to get better at it (or protect yourself from having to make that choice?)

INTEGRITY

Day 4

Sometimes peer pressure is even hard for men (whether we want to admit it or not!) When we are with our buddies we can be tempted to do dumb things sometimes or talk different or act different than if we were out with our wife! If we are truly to be men of integrity, though, we need to know who we are and be that man no matter who else is around!

Jesus was the teacher, the Rabbi, Messiah, Son of God, and the leader of his group of friends. He knew his God-given vision and did everything he could to follow the plan. We don't hear much about Jesus' friends trying to get him to do wrong. Maybe because they understood who he was and knew it wouldn't do any good, or maybe because they were on board with what Jesus wanted to do. There are recorded in the Bible, however, a couple times that Jesus had to resist the temptation to throw out the plan and do what his friends (or at least Peter) thought were best. One example is when Jesus was telling his disciples that God had sent him as a sacrifice for our sins. Read Mark 8:31-33:

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Now, Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends, and like a good friend he didn't want to see Jesus suffer or die. So, Peter spoke to Jesus in private and rebuked him. Rebuke doesn't mean, "Ah, come on, Jesus. That's crazy. There's gotta be a better way than that." No. It means to "express sharp disapproval or criticism" of someone because of their actions. Peter was very sure, and probably scolded Jesus for talking that way. Jesus could have let Peter's ideas pull him away from God's plan, but he didn't. He was pretty blunt right back and reprimanded him for being selfish and not accepting God's plan. Jesus stayed true to what he knew was right and didn't let anyone, even his close friend, talk him into things that weren't of God.

Another time (Matthew 26:47-54) involved Peter again, after Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed and his friends (disciples) kept falling asleep! I'm sure Jesus was frustrated with his friends, he was at least a little concerned about what he knew was coming. After all, he was about to be betrayed by one of his disciples, beaten, tortured, and crucified. He had a right to be concerned about what was coming! In Matthew 26:47, Judas brings soldiers to arrest Jesus and Peter decides to fight back! He grabs his sword and attacks, chopping off a guy's ear. Jesus could have joined in and decided he wasn't going down like this, but in spite of all that was going on in his mind, he was able to make the right choice. He told Peter to put his sword away, and he quietly went with the soldiers. Luke 22:50-51 even mentions Jesus taking the time to heal the man's ear! What a choice to make for a man that is with the group of people arresting you! But Jesus made right choices regardless of what his friends thought he should do and despite what others may have expected.

When you are with your friends, it can sometimes be tough to make right choices. That is part of the reason that it is so important that your best friends are those who will help you make right choices. Proverbs 13:20 (NLT) says, "Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools

and get in trouble." We need to be a positive influence on our friends, setting an example in how we speak, how we act, and how we treat others. Making right decisions when you are with your friends makes God, our family, and our friends proud of us. It also helps those around you to make right choices, too! It is up to us as men of God to lead by example in making choices that bring glory to God help us to maintain our integrity.

Day #4 Scriptures

Romans 12:2 (NIV) - Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Galatians 1:10 (NIV) - Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV) - Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Day #4 Questions

1. Is it easier to make right choices when around your friends or not? Why do you think that is?
2. Do you make it easier or more difficult for your friends to make right choices? How can we help our friends and other around us to make right choices?

INTEGRITY

Day 5

We have spent several days talking about what integrity is. Today we are going to talk about what integrity does. When you decide to live with integrity, it changes you. You will start to think and act different. If you are going to be a "Man of Integrity," you must treat your friends, neighbors, and even people who are treat you poorly or unfairly with love! Twice in the Bible it says to "do unto others" what you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:12 & Luke 6:31). The beginning of Matthew 7 says not to judge other people (vs. 1-2). Then it tells us not to look for negative things in others, but to make sure that we are living and acting right, then we can help others to live the same way (vs. 3-5).

If we are to live by God's Word and be a "Man of Integrity" we need to show others love and give them the benefit of the doubt, to be nice to them and help them and not treat them badly. We need to be encouraging and show each one respect. That means being kind and encouraging with our words. It means showing love to everyone that you see. As not only "Men of Integrity," but as "Christians," we need to be working hard to get closer to God. We need to be doing the things that help strengthen our relationship with God: pray, worship, read the Bible, go to church, memorize scriptures. As we continue to do those things and get to know God better, God will help you to treat others better. God will help you to love others because when we learn to love HIM more, we will naturally start to see others more like how God sees them.

How you treat your friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and even strangers or the driver who cuts you off in traffic demonstrates whether you are true man of integrity or not. You know it, but are you living it out? The Bible says, "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (James 1:22). You see, it takes more than KNOWING what is right. God requires us to DO what is right.

Day #5 Scriptures

Ephesians 4:9 (NIV) - Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 7:12 (NIV) - "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Luke 6:31 (NIV) - "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Leviticus 19:18 (CEV) - Don't be angry or try to take revenge. I am the LORD, and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself.

Day #5 Questions

1. Do you feel like you understand what it is to be a "Man of Integrity?" Has it changed the way you act in any situations? How?
2. Is there a place you are finding that it is hardest for you to maintain your integrity? What are you doing to ensure that you will be able to?
3. What is one way that the men in your group can pray for you?

INTEGRITY

Day 6

Before we start today, I want to ask you whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I am an expert in integrity.
- I know the right choice to make in every situation that comes.
- I make the right choice 100% of the time.
- I usually know the right choice, but sometimes it is still hard.
- I do what I want and don't care about "right" or "wrong."

If you answered honestly, I am pretty sure I know what answers you chose. Most likely, our answers are the same. We know, but that doesn't make it easy. We truly want to do what is right, but that doesn't mean we always will. So what can we do? We can go to God for guidance for every decision we make and for every action before we do it!

Luke 17:11-19 tells the story of 10 lepers. They were ostracized, kicked out of the town and called "unclean." When Jesus came by they asked for mercy, and Jesus had compassion on them. He healed them and sent them to the priest. The reason for this was that the priest is the one who diagnosed them with leprosy in the first place and declared them "unclean." He was the only one who could declare that they were clean and allowed to go back to their lives. This was an 8 day process involving shaving their heads, washing repeatedly, being examined and anointed with oil, giving sacrifices, and more! There was a lot involved in being declared clean. Then, they had to wait another 8 days before they could go back to their life to make sure the leprosy didn't come back. When Jesus healed the men, 9 ran off to start that process. They were probably so excited to get back to their lives that it was all they were thinking about. They obeyed the command of Jesus right away and took off to find the priest. But one came back. He praised God and he thanked Jesus, and was told that his faith had made him well.

Did the nine that didn't return do anything wrong? Maybe. I'm not sure, but I know for sure that one did everything right! One found Jesus, gave him praise, and thanked him for what he did for him. Sometimes we get so excited about something that we forget to thank God and praise him for what he has done. Sometimes we get so comfortable or confident in ourselves that we forget to depend on him.

My favorite verse in all the Bible is Isaiah 30:21. It says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" It is the verse that I try to live by. Even though I try hard to be a person of integrity. Even though I know what is right and wrong. It is important that I remember that I still need God to help me every day! We all need God to help us, not only in the huge things that we can't do by ourselves, but also in the small things that we feel like we can. He delights in the smallest details of your life, and wants to help you to make the BEST choice ALL THE TIME! Remember to listen to his voice and let him guide you in every decision you make and every action you take! You'll be a lot better off in the long run!

Day #6 Scriptures

Isaiah 30:21 (NIV) - Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Proverbs 37:23 (NLT) - The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.

Psalms 32:8 (NIV) - I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

Day #6 Questions

1. Do you tend to depend on God or yourself to make most of your decisions? Do you feel the ratio of "God decisions" to "Me decisions" is a good one? Is there an adjustment to be made?
2. Do you believe that God cares every detail of your life? If not, where is the line? Think about things you think he does or doesn't care about. (ex. words, actions, things you watch, listen to...)
3. Do you tend to be more like the 9 or the 1? Are you more like the ones who were excited and moved on with life or more like the one who was excited and also gave God glory for the good thing that had happened? Why do you think that is?

INTEGRITY

Day 7

If you asked people questions about your progress as a “Man of Integrity,” what would they say? Read 1 Samuel 12:1-5. Samuel is giving his farewell speech to Israel, which he had led for years, because they finally got a king (even though God was supposed to be their king, they wanted to be like all the other countries and have an actual human king) and didn’t need Samuel to lead them anymore. Samuel stood in front of the people and asked them if he had done anyone wrong? He was confident that he had acted with integrity, and he allowed anyone who thought otherwise an opportunity to speak up. No one did. In vs. 5 the people acknowledged before God that he had indeed led with integrity.

If you stood up in front of your family or friends and asked the following questions, how do you think they would respond:

- Have I taken anything that didn’t belong to me?
- Have I treated anyone unkindly or called anyone a name?
- Have I had the opportunity to help someone and chose not to?
- Have I acted differently depending on who was around?
- Have I done anything that God, my friends, or my family wouldn’t be proud of?

There are many variations of those questions, but they are all examples of questions that, depending on the answers, tell you that you have done a very good or very poor job of living a life of integrity. Samuel had been a good leader, but there was also one more thing that Samuel did even after he was no longer the leader of Israel. He kept listening to God! He anointed Saul as king and then David as king. Even after Saul was established as king, Samuel called him out for not making a right choice! When you know who you are in God and live with integrity, you can be confident in what you are doing and that God will direct your steps. It is so important for you as a man of God to live with integrity, for the good of your marriage, your children, your job, your witness, and countless other reasons. I pray that you will accept the challenge to live as a Man of Integrity in every area of your life!

Day #7 Scriptures

1 Peter 2:15-17 (NIV/MSG) - For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.

Titus 2:6-8 (NIV) - Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

John 13:34-35 (NIV) - A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Day #7 Questions

1. How many of those questions could you ask with confidence? Are there some things in your life that you are willing to change so that 6 months from now your confidence level will be higher?

2. When you think of integrity, do you look at other people and think, “I’ve got more integrity than them so I must be doing okay!” or do you look at yourself compared to how God wants you to live? One may help you feel good, but the other will challenge you to keep getting better and also to depend on God more to help you be the man that he is calling you to be!