

*Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,
for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.
Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely,
who conducts his affairs with justice.*

*Surely he will never be shaken;
a righteous man will be remembered forever.*

*He will have no fear of bad news;
his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.
His heart is secure, he will have no fear;
in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.
He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor,
his righteousness endures forever;
his horn will be lifted high in honor.*

—Psalm 112:4–9

**The Power Of Integrity:
People pay attention when our actions match our beliefs**
by Jerry White

In the early days of jet aviation, Boeing and Douglas Aircraft were competing for sales to Eastern Airlines, headed by the famed aviator Eddie Rickenbacker. He told Donald Douglas that their specifications for the DC-8 were close to Boeing's in everything but noise suppression. Then he gave Douglas a last chance to outpromise the competition. After consulting his engineers, Donald Douglas told Rickenbacker he could not do it. Rickenbacker replied, "I know you can't. I wanted to see if you were still honest. You just got yourself an order for \$135 million. Now go home and silence those jets!"

Doesn't this story make you wish you had known Douglas and Rickenbacker? Aren't you stirred by the account of a good man who stayed good amid tremendous business pressure? The impact of this story flows from this single truth: Incredible power exists with one who has a blameless reputation and practices integrity.

What is integrity?

My dictionary defines integrity as "consistency and sincerity, with no deception or pretense." Integrity's overriding quality is wholeness: There is no discrepancy between what a person of integrity appears to be on the outside and what he is on the inside. For the Christian specifically, integrity means we live according to what we say we believe, according to the Scriptures. Integrity is best defined by how it is fleshed out in a corrupt world. People of integrity

- keep their word, even when it hurts,
- are honest in all their dealings, personal and business, and
- practice morality in their sexual life, both in mind and body.

No, they are not perfect: People of integrity sin and make mistakes. But they admit them; they do not cover them up. And they change their lives for the better.

Integrity is important in minor matters as well as major ones. When we dig an ethical grave, it is not with a ditchdigger but with a teaspoon, one small choice at a time—a few words plagiarized, minor cheating on taxes, taking home supplies from the company, flirtations with a coworker, white lies, or even creating a false impression to impress a neighbor.

Former President Teddy Roosevelt tested one of his ranch employees by asking him to steal from a neighboring ranch. The man agreed to do so, and Roosevelt immediately fired him, concluding, "A man who steals for me will soon steal from me." He knew the first dishonest step would likely lead to many more in the same direction.

Not the Easy Way Out

Living by integrity does not guarantee success. Donald Douglas might just as easily have lost the contract with Eastern Airlines to his competitor who could make bigger promises. An act of integrity may lead to relational conflict, the loss of business, or even the loss of a job. It can be costly.

Ted Williams was a baseball great of the 1950s. In 1959 when a pinched nerve in his neck caused his batting average to suffer badly, he was offered the highest salary in baseball history—\$125,000. He sent the contract back to the Boston Red Sox and asked for the largest pay cut allowed, 25 percent.

"My feeling was that I was always treated fairly by the Red Sox when it came to contracts . . . now they were offering me a contract that I didn't deserve." So Williams cut his salary by \$31,250—an enormous sum in 1959. Then again, who can put a price tag on a clear conscience? Williams' integrity cost him money, but it also made him a legend—quite apart from his impressive athleticism.

If integrity is costly, lack of integrity is even more so. "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" asks Jesus in Mt. 16:26. This passage is not speaking only of salvation, but of the life of the soul in this world. When we choose worldly gain over personal integrity, we sell out our souls. Any reward is sadly temporary. We cannot live lives of truth and light in a dark world without paying a price. Integrity costs us. But it also reaps rich benefits for those who practice it.

Blessed by God

The person who practices integrity experiences the favor of God—and His blessings. The psalmist writes of this person, "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who . . . conducts his affairs with justice" (Ps. 112:4–5).

God's favor and blessings extend to this person's family as well. "A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him" (Prov. 20:7, NASB).

Daniel, the Jewish captive who became a high government official in Babylon, embodied integrity. Try as they might, even his enemies—the other administrators and the satraps—could find no "grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs.... They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent" (Dan. 6:4). The only way these scheming men could undermine Daniel's influence with King Darius was to prey upon Daniel's devotion to God. They convinced Darius to issue an edict forbidding prayer to anyone but the king himself.

Daniel's integrity—his utter wholeness inside and out—would not let him worship anyone but the God of Israel. With regret, Darius ordered Daniel to be thrown to the lions. Yet such was the king's grief at losing this man of integrity that he could neither eat nor sleep nor find solace in

entertainment that night (v. 18). The next morning, when Darius discovered that God had delivered Daniel, he worshiped the living God—and ordered all in his kingdom to do the same! Daniel's integrity brought him the blessing of the king's high regard. It lifted him to a position of honor and influence even as an exile in a foreign culture. Whereas Daniel's life could have been ruined once he was carted off to Babylon, instead it was marked even more dramatically by evidence of God's favor—largely because of his decision to live with integrity.

As a young Air Force lieutenant, I was a mission controller at Cape Canaveral. Late one night we were conducting a dry run with one of our Navy's Polaris submarines. The test encountered several problems and "holds." The test director kept telling me the problem would be fixed momentarily and asked that we tie up the Atlantic missile range to wait for the repair. The minutes became hours, and the "holds" continued. Yet the director kept telling me the problem was a minor one. What he did not know was that I had learned through other communication sources that the problem was more serious than he represented and would not be fixed that night. I shut down the test against his wishes.

The next morning we were both called to my commander's office to review my decision. The commander upheld my decision. What could have been disastrous to my career gained me a favorable reputation with my superiors. God blessed my simple act of integrity and prospered my military career.

The Peace of a Clear Conscience

When we practice integrity, we will experience a deep inner peace, knowing that we have not violated our conscience or hurt someone else's. We can be confident that when someone examines us, we will be proven innocent of wrongdoing.

In contrast, when our lives lack moral wholeness, we live in constant peril of being "found out" as frauds. In Prov. 10:9 we receive both a promise and a warning: "He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out" (NASB). There is a promise of security: The man or woman of integrity sleeps well at night with a clear conscience. But there is the also assurance that if we lack integrity, we will be found out.

The Apostle Paul was brought before Felix in Acts 24 to defend himself against accusations that he was a troublemaker, a ringleader of a dangerous sect, and a desecrator of the temple. Paul was able to stand before the governor, look him in the eye, and calmly refute the charges against him. The only thing he was gully of, he explained, was worshiping "the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way." Further, he could confidently declare, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (v. 16). Paul was a man at peace with him self, even when standing trial. His conscience was clear; he knew his examiners would find no hidden sins to hold against him.

The Respect of Others

Men and women of integrity can be depended upon. People look to them with trust and respect. And by biblical standards, few things are more valuable than a good reputation. "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold" (Prov. 22:1). The reputation of God is also at stake as our reputation is revealed. Integrity is a primary ingredient of our witness as a follower of Christ. It was integrity that gave the Olympic runner Eric Liddell such a powerful testimony. He refused to run in the 100-meter dash in Paris in 1924 when it was scheduled on a Sunday, the Lord's Day, even though that was considered his best

chance for a gold medal. He didn't make a big deal about it and shout his convictions from the rooftop so people would see how pious he was. He simply said, "I will not run on a Sunday." No doubt some people thought Liddell was crazy, but others were moved by the strength of his convictions. And his influence was not limited to his peers: Many years later the film *Chariots of Fire* told his story and inspired another generation to live lives of integrity that bring glory and respect to God.

A Pattern for Our Children

One of the greatest benefits of a life of integrity is the pattern it sets for our children. We may think they do not know when we cheat on taxes, take advantage of a customer, lie to the boss, or misuse sick leave. But they see more than we realize.

Our misdeeds, whenever they are discovered, will cause our children to lose respect for us, or worse, to pattern their own actions after ours.

An old Volkswagen "bug" was our family car for many years. After 11 years, the time came to sell it. People would come to examine the car, and I would recite all its problems and faults—much to the amazement of the prospective buyers. The person who finally bought the car asked me to falsify the purchase price on the title to save him taxes. I refused. Throughout this process, my three older children observed how I conducted myself. Had I compromised—by withholding information about the true condition of the car, or by appeasing the buyer—what would have been my testimony to them?

How to Grow in Integrity

We've seen that though integrity may cost us, it also brings us many benefits. But the most difficult question remains: How do we become people of integrity?

The first step in building integrity is to deal with the past. If you have been impressed by the Holy Spirit about an area of integrity, confess it to God and ask His forgiveness. It is always available. You may even need to confess to others who have been affected by your actions. These actions will clear your mind and conscience to be able to think biblically.

Next, commit to discovering what the Scriptures say about integrity. To help you develop biblical convictions, I encourage you to:

1. Search the Bible for what it says on a particular subject, such as justice or honesty. It may help you narrow your search if you write out the questions you have: "What is the right response when my boss asks me to withhold from a client information that may affect the sale of our product?"
2. Examine your daily walk with God. Are you reading the Bible and praying daily? Are you quick to repent, confess sin, and seek God's enabling grace to change direction?
3. Listen to your conscience. Often the Holy Spirit will speak to you in this way, making you uncomfortable about a contemplated action or an attitude. If you are unsure what your conscience is telling you, go back to Scripture to see what it says about the issue. In this way, you let the Word of God, not human wisdom, shape your conscience.
4. Seek godly counsel from someone who understands your circumstances and lives by God's values.
5. Obey what you know. Respond to, don't ignore, what God asks you to do through His Word, the urging of the Holy Spirit, your conscience, and what you simply know to be

right. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas. 1:22, KJV).

These steps do not represent a one-time-does-the-trick effort. Integrity is built over time as we diligently apply God's teachings to the choices we must make in life. The results, however, are worth the effort—a good conscience and a vibrant witness to the world around us.

Our Power Source

How can we find the discipline to live like this? First, every moral decision must be based on faith and dependence on God. It is His moral law that we turn to, not the voices around us or our own common sense. It is His love within us that enables us to treat each person with dignity, respect, and utter honesty.

The only power source for a life of integrity is Jesus Christ. He must live in us and direct our lives. This means a surrender to His lordship. We withhold no area of our lives from His control. We commit to obey Him no matter what the consequences.

Let me urge you to live out and speak up for integrity and honesty on your job, in your family, in professional associations, and in government. Our society has succumbed all too readily to the belief that integrity and morality are private matters. But integrity is much more than private conduct. Public relations consultant Lee Baker says, "Always protest the deceitful course." A reversal of our society's declining morals and ethics must start with believers living lives of integrity. All that is necessary for a society to dissolve morally is for godly people to keep silent. When everything around us screams out that nothing is really sin, let us determine to remain true to God's standards for ourselves and our families.

Jerry White has served with The Navigators since 1966, currently as the international president. Trained in the field of astronautics, he taught at the Air Force Academy and worked in various positions in the American space program. Jerry has authored several books, including Honesty, Morality & Conscience and Dangers Men Face (both NavPress). He and his wife, Mary, have four adult children.

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