

1 May 2005
Our Church's Values - Integrity

Scene 1:

I was reading the readers digest the other day and came across a fascinating story about James Lovelock one of the founders of the green movement. It seems that this scientist, who led the way in discovering how pollution was affecting the planet's climate, and is regarded as one of the fathers of the environmental movement is now a strong advocate of nuclear power. Now there is a common perception that environmentalists and nuclear power don't go together. But in this case they do. I have understood for years, as have most people with a technical background that nuclear energy in a modern well managed power plant is safe.

James Lovelock one of the Fathers of the environmental movement is not only saying that it is safe but that it is also clean energy compared to virtually any other method of producing electricity. In spite of all the horror stories. Well run nuclear reactors don't cause green house gas emissions and over the course of 10 years produce literally only a few bucket loads of waste, which can be safely stored or reprocessed and used again. On the other hand coal fired power stations produce millions of tonnes of ash, and vast amounts of carbon and other gases. Apparently gas fired power plants aren't much better and wind & solar power will never be able to provide the base load requirements.

As I read this article I was struck by the integrity of this man. Someone who was willing to stand up and argue against a popular position because the facts said that something unpopular was in fact the best available option.

Another example of someone standing up and doing what is right is found in the story of Joshua, the leader of the nation of Israel when they came and took the promised land of Canaan (Joshua 18-19) It was Joshua's job to act somewhat like a trustee of an estate, making sure that each tribe received the lands to which it was entitled. It was a delicate job that required him to act with great integrity. Otherwise he might be charged with being unfair in assigning boundaries or with neglecting commitments previously made by Moses.

Joshua handled his responsibility by seeking the welfare of the twelve tribes first before asking for land himself (Josh. 19:49-50).

In doing so, he ran the risk of having to settle for a leftover, second-best portion of Canaan. But he avoided any question of impropriety. This policy was in marked contrast to that of the Canaanite and Amorite kings of the city-states that the Israelites were inheriting. The pagan kings generally lorded it over their people, choosing for themselves the first and the best. Joshua took the posture of a "servant-leader," forsaking greed and self-interest in order to seek the highest good for his people (see Matt. 20:25-28).

Joshua's example is worth emulating today. As we accept responsibilities and make decisions that affect others, our challenge is to do the right thing by seeking justice, trusting God to work out the details of our own welfare.

Scene 2:

What does it mean to have integrity?

Webster's Dictionary defines integrity as

1 : firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values : INCORRUPTIBILITY

2 : an unimpaired condition : SOUNDNESS

3 : the quality or state of being complete or undivided : COMPLETENESS

As a church we see integrity this way. As people who have received the grace and forgiveness of God, we aim to live according to His word and in the power of the Holy Spirit, so to become more like His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In all we do we will deal openly and honestly with people, prepared to be truthful in love, and maintaining both accountability and confidentiality.

Some Scriptures: Titus 2:1-7, 3:8; Ephesians 4:1-2, 15; 1 Timothy 2:7; 1 Peter 1:22; Romans 12:9; 2 Corinthians 6:3, 4a, 7

Chuck Swindoll in his book Simple Faith puts it this way "Now for the sake of a few idealistic souls who could assume only the best and think, I can hardly wait to live like this; this is going to be fun! I want to bring you back ever so gently to reality. When you decide to live like Christ among the selfish and strong-willed, God will honor your decision, but ... you will encounter misunderstanding and mistreatment.

You will be taken advantage of. However, don't make another wrong assumption by thinking that if you are going through tough times, you are off target. Not so. Doing what is right is never a stroll through a rose garden. Jesus' plan for living may be simple, but it is not easy....

No matter how painful it may be, let us trust Him to bring good from our living His way. The Lord Jesus Christ is the model to follow—and you remember where He wound up! But think of all those who were once His enemies, now His friends. You and I would certainly be numbered among them. The force of love is absolutely unconquerable.”

Scene 3:

One of the best descriptions we find in scripture of integrity is found in Psalm 15. “Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.” (Psalm 15:1-5 NIV)

Psalm 15 lists ten marks of integrity.

How does your life compare?

The person of integrity...

1. walks uprightly. What is your basic ethical commitment? Are you out to honor the Lord or to serve yourself?
2. works righteousness. What is the end result of your work? Are you promoting good in the world—or evil?
3. speaks the truth. Are you in the habit of telling “little white lies” when it is necessary or convenient?
4. does not backbite. Do you tear down others behind their back?
5. does no evil to a neighbor. What is your policy on office politics? Do you believe in “doing unto others before they do unto you”?
6. does not take up a reproach against a friend. How loyal are you? When everyone is down on a colleague, do you jump on the bandwagon, or do you offer support and seek fair play?
7. honors those who fear the Lord, not the ungodly. What is the character of your best friends? What is their attitude toward God and the things of the Lord?
8. keeps his word, even when it is costly. Are you trustworthy and reliable? Is your word your bond, or is there always a question whether you will follow through?
9. does not practice usury. Do you make it harder or easier for poor people to gain the resources necessary to support themselves?
10. does not take bribes. What would it take to get you to compromise your integrity?

Over and over the Book of Psalms reminds us that what ultimately matters to God is the quality of our character (Ps. 37:27–29). The following psalms merit careful study if we want to pursue ethical decision-making and godly behavior: Psalm 26: Integrity is a reasonable basis for seeking the Lord's protection. Psalm 101: This psalm expresses some of the high ideals that the person of character will pursue. Psalm 119: God's Word provides clear guidelines for living with integrity. Psalm 141: This psalm is a prayer for help to maintain integrity when one is tempted to compromise.

Scene 4:

But how do we do this. It is easy to say what we should do but often quite hard to continually do it. Don't we all fail sometimes!

It might be that we drive the car faster than the speed limit and in so doing show our own lack of integrity. It might be that we say, “Do not Gossip” but we do! It might be that we know that we are to love; yet there are many whom we wouldn't miss if they died.

If we as a church are to live by our core values and in so doing be Christ to this community we need to individually and corporately live a blameless life.

So how do we live that blameless life that will mark us as a people of integrity? Let's look at an example from the book of Esther as told by Max Lucado “The Book of Esther. Some things about it you love. Some things you admire. But there is one thing about it that leaves you scratching your head.

You love the story. A Jewish girl raised in Persia by a cousin named Mordecai. She becomes the wife of the king by winning the Miss Persia contest. Her husband is Xerxes. (Better known to some as Ahasuerus, which sounds like something you do when you have a bad cold.) It's a rags-to-riches romance, though you've got to wonder how much romance could occur when you are married to a guy who could chop your head off if you popped into his office without an appointment. But that's what Esther did. She took the chance at the chance it would save her nation.

That is the part of Esther you admire. Aside from being a beauty, she was gutsy. Xerxes's right-hand man is Haman. (A name that, as you'll soon see, sounds curiously close to "hangman.") Haman was a raging Nazi. Nothing would suit him better than annihilation of the Jews.

One day he got his chance. Mordecai, Esther's foster father, refused to bow before Haman. Haman was so mad he convinced Xerxes to let him do away with the whole nation.

That's where Esther comes in. Literally. She comes into the king's chambers uninvited but not unprepared. After getting the Jews to pray and fast for three days, she puts on her royal robes and stands at the door.

Xerxes likes what he sees and invites her in. One invitation leads to another, and by the time she finishes, Xerxes not only agrees to call off the massacre but orders Haman to hang from the same gallows Haman had built for Mordecai.

Whew! Quite a lady, this Esther. You have to admire her courage. You have to love her story. But there is one thing that is tough to figure.

God's name never appears in the entire book. His actions do. His thoughts do. His plan does. His fingerprints are on every page. But his name never appears. Could it be that God is more concerned about getting the job done than getting credit?

Scene 5:

You see just as God is more concerned about getting the job done so should we.

The key to integrity is humility.

Remember the example of Jesus in Philippians 2:1-11;

From Master to servant, from life to death,

He willingly humbled Himself that He might lift us up!

He lived out an attitude of Humility because he walked in fellowship with his heavenly father.

Do you want to live a life where people look at you and say,

"There is a person of integrity, they bring honour to their God?"

Do you want to live a life where people say;

"There is a person who's faith is real, I want to know the God that they know because that God certainly makes their life a life worth living?"

If you would like to live a life like that then, I invite you to let the Holy Spirit, to let God himself be the boss of your life.

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