

The Journey to Biblical Manhood

Challenge 9: Integrity

Session 1: Understanding Integrity From God's Perspective

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Welcome to Man in the Mirror, Men's Bible study. We are doing the Journey to Biblical Manhood. Let's go ahead and kick it off with a shout out. Actually, I always want to send the signal that this is focused on the word of God. Actually, what I want you to do is first turn to Luke chapter 16. We'll start at verse 10 and then we'll do the shout out. Today, this is a group that we've given a shout out to in the past. We're going to give them another shout out today. They're in Port Allen, Louisiana. Terrance Favorite is the leader. They're guys who are joining us. They meet on Mondays at 6:00 PM. They meet in a barbershop and they call themselves Fishers of Men Tabernacle. I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Fishers of Men Tabernacle. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, men. We're so honored to have you as part of our Bible study. Welcome.

We are in the Journey to Biblical Manhood. We are beginning the ninth of 12 challenges this morning on integrity. The faith and life objectives, I'll go over those a little bit in more detail maybe next week. The title for this first message is Understanding Integrity from God's Perspective. Integrity is just infused into everything. George Burns once quipped. He said, "The most important thing in acting is honesty." He said, "If you can fake that, you've got it made." It's everywhere. I was on the highway last week going camping, and on I-26 between I-25 and Columbia, there's this nice little stretch of I-26. As you get closer to Columbia, it kind of starts to go up and down a little bit. You know how when you're driving on the interstate highway that you get an interval to the car in front of you and that works fine unless there is a lot of traffic. Then people start doing crazy things. You get like a one-second interval if it's really, really busy. But then some guy will always pull into that little gap. As soon as he pulls into that gap, what does he have to do? Hit the brakes. Then what do you have to do? Hit the brakes. I'm camping. I don't know what it was, but it happens one too many times.

This guy in this big, giant, white dually pickup truck ... I'm in the left-hand lane and so he wants to get around whoever's in front of him. He pulls into that gap and, of course, he didn't have to tap the brakes. He actually had to hit the brakes. I just said, "I'm just going to let my car roll up on him." I mean, not hit him, but I'm just going to let my car roll until he regains his momentum to express my displeasure. I'm an old car racer and, in fact, have taught others how to drive on a racetrack. Some of them are located right here in the group this morning. One of the things you do when you're teaching people on how to drive on the racetrack is that you teach them to give a point to let the driver know whether they should go around you on the left or the right-hand side. I'm rolling up on this guy and actually, you know, he

looks like he's a pretty decent driver so that's why I did. I mean, if he was crazy, I probably wouldn't have done it. Yeah, I would have.

Anyway, it looked like he knew what he was doing. I was just so encouraged because obviously he was a racer too. He looked in his rear view mirror and he gave me a point like this. I said, "Great." I said, "He wants me to go around him on the right-hand side." Well, I guess that he meant that he was pointing where he was going to go because he went over to the right-hand side and I went ahead on down the road about 20 seconds. It occurred to me, "Oh, he gave me a different kind of point."

Every day, all day long, we're stretched in this area of integrity, of honesty, of doing the right thing, being moral. There's a cluster of words around this concept of having character, some of them being truthful, being trustworthy, fair, just, honest, moral. These are all words that either synonyms or cousins of each other. What I want to talk about first this morning is, well, first of all what I want to just tell you is, hey, Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. What else do you need to know? I mean, Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. What else do you need to know? The Golden Rule is what? However you would like to be treated yourself, treat others the same way because that really sums up the law and the prophets. Now, the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule, what's the problem with them? You can't even do them one day. We can't even really do them one day. This is what we're going to talk about. How do we sync all this up?

In Luke chapter 16 verse 10, we read these words, Jesus is speaking, he says, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much. Whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." If you've not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? If you've not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? You know, God has these incredible promises for men of integrity. Just of them that I was looking at in the book of Proverbs. You can just use a concordance and look it up yourself. "He is a shield to those who walk with integrity." "Whoever walks in integrity will walk securely." "The integrity of the upright will guide them." "The righteous who walks in his integrity, blessed are his children after him." "Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered." They're incredible promises that God gives to a man who has integrity.

Now, there is a problem. The problem is is that even though almost everything that happens happens with integrity, you do realize that, right? Because the world couldn't last 10 minutes if integrity wasn't a primary value of most people most of the time. You know, people talk about corruption in politics or corruption in business. Yeah, but 99.99% of it is being done honestly with integrity. Otherwise, there would be no trust. The whole world operates on trust. The foundation of trust is are we dealing in integrity with each other. Most everything actually does have integrity. The reason that we think that it's more than it is, it's for the same reason that when somebody pulls out in traffic, you think all those drivers, all those terrible driver. Well, it's one terrible driver and 999 really pretty decent drivers. Or it's one person that won't let you out in traffic, but then it blows up in your mind to be much bigger in proportion. Actually, most of everything that happens in the world happens on the basis of trust with the foundation of integrity.

We do have a problem and that is is that we know that authentic Christians struggle with integrity. We struggle every day with lying, with cheating, with stealing, and we see whether we're the subject of it or we're the ones doing it. We see people having workplace affairs. We see fraud. We see Medicare and Medicaid fraud occurring around us. We hear about political corruption. All of this stuff is going on all around us. What's at stake is this thing that we see here in Luke chapter 16. If you're not honest with

very little things, then you're not going to be honest with very big things. If you can't be trusted with very little things like, you know, not returning the point.

I had to decide if I was going to return the point or not. I didn't. Did I want to? You bet you. The problem was I was already 20 seconds down the road. But it's a little thing but it's all those little tiny decisions that we make all day, almost imperceptible decisions that we make every day all day long, cutting corners, that are the little things that put us at risk of not being trustworthy by God to receive the blessings, the promises that I just mentioned and many more. God is asking basically the question, "But can I trust you? Will you be faithful in the little things?" That's what's at stake with this idea of integrity.

How do we solve this problem? The principle idea here is just to abandon every moral code idea that you have that's not rooted in God's word. Just abandon every idea you have about morality, righteousness, that's not rooted in God's word and then align yourself, align your beliefs, with the word of God. You know, if God said it, I believe it, and that settles it. Well, yeah. That gets kind of derided as being sort of simplistic. Call me simplistic. If the Bible says it, then I want to believe it. There's a big idea. So far, I've found that I've started using this at least in 1995, this idea. I think it is God's perspective on integrity. I think it's something that, if you would consider memorizing or at least memorizing the concept of it, then it would give you a gyroscope for this area of integrity. It's something also that you can teach to your kids as I've done mine.

Integrity, the Big Idea today, is the one-to-one correlation between my Bible, my beliefs, and my behavior. Integrity is a one-to-one correlation between my Bible, which is the knowledge of God, the truth of God, and then my beliefs, how I feel about the truth of God, and then, if you've been around here any amount of time, you know that we constantly talk about how belief determines behavior. People do what they believe. You can't really behave your way out of a situation that you believed your way into. Belief determines behavior. The famous Carnegie quote, that Andrew Carnegie says, "The older I get, the less I listen to what people say. I just watch what they do," because behavior reflects what's going on in the inner man. This is a great model for the perspective that God has on integrity. He's looking for a one-to-one correlation between our Bible, his knowledge that he's given us, what we believe about that knowledge, and then the behavior that comes from that.

You know, but there's some problems. Something that's holding us back. Turn with me in the Bible to Galatians chapter five verse 17. The problem here is is that if it was simply a matter of having this information, if it was simply a matter of every Christian having this information, then all Christians would be acting with integrity all the time because they would already know what to do. It's not merely a matter of having the right information. If it was just having the right information, we'd all be balking with decisive integrity all the time. There must be something else and now we need to look at what is it. What is it that's holding us back?

Galatians chapter five 17, "For the sinful nature," or the flesh. "The sinful nature," which we all have. "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit and the spirit, what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want." We have within us, and this is the old bend that Paul ranted about in Romans seven. He said, "I don't understand myself. What I don't want to do, I do. What I do want to do, I don't do. Who is going to deliver me from the body of this death?" We all have this sinful nature within us. We all are going to have lapses in integrity. That's just the way it is.

Men in this room have had and will have affairs, workplace affairs. Men in this room have had and will cheat on your income taxes. Men in this room have done all kinds of different things. I mean, the little white lie. I mean, how many times today am I going to lie? I mean, really, hopefully not during the talk, but you know, as soon as this talk's over, baby, I'm right back to white lying because white lying is how we lubricate life. It's a small thing and it's a deceit. I mean, honestly, if I told you how I really felt about you, I mean, would we still be friends? Or if you told me what you told him, but he told me so now I know and I don't like you either. It's just part of life. It's the flesh.

We're not machines. We're humans and we have this freewill. You know, I think freewill sucks, but freewill is not all it's cracked up to be, I mean, really. When you think about it, freewill is not all it's cracked up to be. We have it, and we use it. Sometimes, we use it to have lapses in integrity. These are the things that hold us back. What really is a problem with this is, in my view, one of the real problems with this is that because we're Christians, we feel like we have to pretend that this is not a problem for us. We get in Christian cultures where it's important to give the appearance that we are more righteous than we really are. This compounds the problem of these little things getting out of control. To be able to be like here in a small group of guys where you can actually be transparent and authentic, where you don't have to pretend that you're somebody that you're not, where you can actually confess your sins to each other. What's holding us back is that we don't have the ability to be who we really are as Christians.

You know, this is the most inclusive ... Christianity is the most inclusive religion in the world. Did you know this? Every other religion in the world, you have to perform. Christianity is the only religion in the world where nonperformance, you're willingness to confess your inability to perform, is the single requirement to be part of the religion. To confess that you are a sinner is actually your admittance slip to the Christian faith and faith in Jesus. In every other religion, you have to perform to either make God happy or avoid his wrath. You have to be righteous in your own strength. You can't be righteous in your own strength because the flesh is warring against the spirit. The spirit is warring against the flesh. They're in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want.

Paul said, "Thanks be to God. Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The inclusive one. Jesus is the most inclusive figure in all of human history. He wants everybody. He wants everybody to put their faith in him and receive forgiveness. What's holding us back? It's the need to live a life of repentance. That's the way out. Psalm 139:23 and 24, "Search me, O God," David says, "and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out any offensive way in me and lead me in your everlasting way." That's repentance.

In the movie Seabiscuit, Charles Howard has this horse that doesn't seem to be much. He says to his trainer, "Let's go ahead and get rid of this horse." His trainer says, "Mr. Howard, you don't throw away a whole life just because it's banged up a little." They kept the horse and Seabiscuit, we know, went on to become this incredible racehorse. Later in that same movie, the jockey had been injured and Mr. Howard was thinking about releasing the jockey. The trainer, rather, was thinking about releasing the jockey. Mr. Howard, in the movie, you know, the drama of the movie, turned that around and told his trainer who had told him this, he said, "You don't throw away a whole life just because it's banged up a little bit."

Ours is a religion of redemption, of reconciliation through simply repenting and acknowledging our own inability to do this. The thing that's holding us back is often simply our sense that we have to pretend that we're better than we really are. We don't. If you point, apologize to God and if you can, to the

person, but probably not, and with a sincere heart of course, and once again, walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. We're in Galatians. Look at verse 16. Here's the answer. "So I say live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." That's the way out. What's the way forward? Turn back to Mark chapter 12 verse 13.

The way out is the forgiveness of Jesus through the gospel of Jesus through repentance by us. That's the way out. The way forward, look at this, Mark chapter 12 verse 13. These religious leaders came to catch Jesus in his words. They said this. They said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of," what? Integrity. "You aren't swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are. But you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." The way out is repentance. The way forward is actually to follow the example of Jesus. The gospel of Jesus is the way out, but the way forward is the example of Jesus. He did not pay attention to what other men were doing and saying. Instead, he taught the way of God. What's that? That's the Bible. That's the truth of God. He taught the way of God in accordance with the truth. That's the Big Idea. Even the religious leaders who didn't believe in him saw that he understood that integrity means having a one-to-one correlation between my Bible, my beliefs, and my behavior. You see this in the example of Jesus.

Then, finally, how do we get this integrity? It's a choice that we make. It's a choice that we make that is not powered by our strength. It's not a choice that I am going to be a man of integrity in my own strength. It's a choice that I'm going to be a man of integrity and I'm going to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to help me live that life. When I fail, I'm going to continue to embrace the gospel of Jesus. We see in the lives of Job that he was tested severely. When Satan came before God again, he said, "Have you considered my servant Job? Even though you incited me to harm him, he still holds on to his integrity." Then later, his wife says, "Why do you hold on to your integrity? Why don't you just curse God and die?" Even his wife couldn't understand it. He said this. He said, "O you foolish woman. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." He was walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph, the famous story where he is, in Genesis chapter 39, where Potiphar's wife is coming on to him and he resists the temptation to sexual infidelity to a lapse of integrity with her. He did this by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. That's how you and I are able to get our integrity. It's we make the choice that we are going to live this way but not in our own strength, rather by the power of the Holy Spirit that is within us. Integrity, it's a one-to-one correlation between my Bible, what my Bible says, and my beliefs, and then my behavior. My behavior is telling you, "You can't press that 100%. You understand that." My behavior is showing you what I really believe. I can tell you what I believe, but how I act out my life day to day is a more accurate reflection of what I'm believing. To have integrity from God's perspective, those beliefs that are informing my behavior, when they are in a one-to-one correlation with my Bible, then I can be confident that all of these great promises that my children will be blessed after me, that I will walk securely, that God will take care of me, that all these things will come to pass. Let's pray.

Our dearest Father, we come to you this morning and we simply ask that, first of all, you search us, know our anxious thoughts, our offensive ways, lead us in your everlasting way. Forgive us, Lord, each of us, for the all the ways in which we have had lapses of integrity. Father, we know that some of those will have consequences that still have to be dealt with. Father, we also know that through the gospel of Jesus, this inclusive religion that you have so wonderfully given to us, that those sins are now forgiven. Then, Lord, in terms of moving forward from here, we just pray that you would help us follow the example of Jesus who made a one-to-one correlation between the word, his belief, and his behavior and

that we would be able to follow in his footsteps, not in our own strength, but by the power of your Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus's name, amen.