

June 16, 2019

“Integrity”

I like facts. The more obscure and random, the better. I also like sharing those random and obscure facts.

In fact, growing up my mother called me a wealth of useless knowledge. She wasn't really wrong.

Although I know something about just about everything, I understand nothing. For example, today is Father's Day. I know that more collect calls are made on Father's Day than any other day of the year. I don't know why; I don't know if it's relevant. But I know that you are more likely to get a collect call today than any other day.

There is a book called “The Day America Told the truth” and admittedly I haven't read it. But I know some facts about it. The books authors were James Patterson and Peter Kim. It's a book loaded with social statistics about one simple question which every day Americans were asked to answer and what influenced the results. The question was simply this: What are you willing to do for \$10 million? 2/3 of those polled said they would do at least one of the following, some said they would do several of the following:

- 25% Would abandon their entire family
- 25% Would abandon their church
- 23% Would become prostitutes for a week or more
- 16% Would give up their American citizenships
- 16% Would leave their spouses
- 10% Would withhold testimony and let a murderer go free
- 7% Would kill a stranger

- 3% Would put their children up for adoption

Again, I haven't read the book, so I don't know what explanation the authors gave for these answers, but I have some theories. First of all, such a person could have no love or fear of God. Second, greed would obviously be a factor. There's another that also tops the list with these, it's simply a lack of integrity.

Unfortunately, it isn't uncommon to see a lack of integrity in our culture. I'm sure you've all heard about all of the wealthy families who were buying their kids way into prestigious schools by hiring tutors and teachers to cheat for them, and that's just the first example that comes to my mind.

It's a sad fact, that integrity is becoming more and more rare, to the point where someone sees it in another it often feels like it is big news. At times it almost seems easier to find bigfoot than someone who operates with total integrity.

Do you remember Tom Landry? He was the legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys who passed away in 2000. He was one of those rare sightings. His legacy is far more than just being the NFL's third-winningest coach of all time. It far exceeds his two Super Bowl victories.

He was a man whose priorities were in order: God first, family second, football third. One person said, "Tom Landry provided significant leadership through a strength of character and faith with his priorities intact. He knew that football was just a game and that integrity mattered on the field and off." As former Cowboy Drew Pearson said, "Landry was a teacher. He taught a lot more than football."

There have been many great football coaches, but being a great football coach is not the reason the USA Today ran the headline "Landry's death leaves Texas-size legacy." No, his legacy is that his career was marked with outstanding integrity.

But what is integrity anyway? Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says it's: "incorruptibility, soundness, and/or completeness." Its primary synonym is "honesty."

Today, on Father's Day, I want say this: the world needs men with integrity! It needs men who are incorruptible, complete, and honest.

“He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out” (Prov 10:9).

That speaks to the fact that integrity means incorruptibility. And when you walk in that manner, you walk on good ground that keeps you standing upright.

In Chicago during 1929, a 26-year-old government agent named Eliot Ness formed an elite team of 9 incorruptible men to bring down Al Capone’s \$120 million mob empire, Just another fact for you, that’s almost 2 billion dollars today. At the time, Ness was making \$2,800 a year working for the government. One day a young man walked into his office and handed Ness an envelope with 2 one thousand-dollar bills and promised this weekly if he would lay off Capone.

Ness sent the money and the messenger back. Desiring to make a point, Ness called a press conference bringing transparency to what had taken place in his office. Newspapers and newsreels from various agencies were in attendance. Ness openly confessed the story of Capone’s attempted bribe and his response to it. The next day, headlines read “Ness and his men are UNTOUCHABLE.” In all capital letters.

That’s integrity. It reminds me of something that happened to Raymond Floyd one time. Raymond Floyd was a professional golfer who earned multiple championship wins and his way into the Hall of Fame. One time he was getting ready to tap in a routine putt but nudged the ball ever so slightly before he stroked it. According to the rule book, if the ball moves in this way the golfer must take a penalty stroke.

Consider this situation. Floyd was among the leaders in this tournament which offered a top prize of over 100,000 dollars. To acknowledge that the ball had moved, even a microscopic distance, could mean he would lose his chance for not only victory but also a big payday.

What could he have done? He could duck his head and flail wildly with his hands, as if being attacked by a killer bee or he could step back from the ball, rubbing his eye for a phantom speck of dust, all the while scanning his playing partners and those observing the game for any sign that the ball’s movement had been detected by others. If the coast was clear, he could tap the ball in for his par as though nothing happened.

Ray Floyd, however, didn't do that. He confessed that he had moved the ball, and it ended up costing him the victory and the money.

As Christians, our morals must remain untouchable by corruption. We need to be people with integrity. By doing so, we'll not only please God but we'll also be among those rare sightings that people take notice of. And it's when that happens, Jesus is lifted up for the world to see.

"He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity" (Prov 2:7).

Integrity equals completeness.

That statement might sound a bit crazy. "Integrity equals completeness." That verse has nothing to do with that. Or at least not from a technical standpoint.

In other words, if you've ever watched an old war movie, you've probably heard pilots or sailors talking about the integrity of their crafts, referring to if their vehicle is holding up under the stress of its wartime involvement. In this case integrity refers to the vehicles' construction remaining sound, that it is unimpaired, that it is complete. That is how integrity equates to completeness.

But as a Christian, I think integrity can mean completeness in another sense. The Scripture said, "He is a shield to those who walk in integrity." Now let me substitute the word "integrity" for "completeness" there and read it again. "He is a shield to those who walk in completeness."

How is it that a person can walk in completeness? And why is God a shield to those individuals who do?

Well, Col 2:10 says that in Christ you are complete. See, without Jesus in your life there is something missing. And without that missing element your level of integrity is inevitably compromised.

It's when you clothe yourself in the completeness that God offers that true soundness, true stability is achieved. And when you walk in that integrity, God is your shield.

Think about Star Trek for a second. When the U.S.S. Enterprise gets into a battle with the bad guys, the first thing the captain yells is “shield’s up.” Now if that invisible forcefield shield ever gets compromised and goes down then the hull is in danger next time they get hit and the crew’s lives would be at risk.

In Christ, our hull is sound and complete. And we never have to fear that it’s integrity will be compromised, because He is our defense shield that surrounds it. See, God is a shield, an impenetrable one to those who follow after Him.

Integrity can be modeled and transmitted.

The last verse of the day is this: “A righteous man who walks in his integrity, How blessed are his children after him” (Prov 20:7).

A father once worked long hours in a plant mixing a special kind of feed that farmers give to their chickens. Every day he would come home covered in the particles of God only knows what went into that food, and every day his four-year-old son would say to him “Dad you sure are dusty!”

The father never thought much about it until one day he was in their gravel driveway washing his truck when he noticed his son rolling around on the ground and picking handfuls of dirt and rubbing it on himself. The father asked, “What are you doing?” and the boy responded “I want to be dusty like you, dad!”

I think there is an important lesson in that story. If a child would look up to his father for being dusty and want to copy that, a child could look up to his father and follow the example he is setting about anything.

What are you passing on to your children?

The actor Charles Coburn told a story about a time when he was a teenager. There was a burlesque show that was popular among the men in his town and he wanted to know what all the hype was. His father would try to dissuade his interest by telling him “Don’t go there, son, you’ll see things you shouldn’t.” But eventually his curiosity got the best of him and he snuck in one day.

Coburn ended the story by saying “My dad was right. I saw something I shouldn’t have. I saw my dad there!”

Father’s need to be good examples and model integrity.

In his book “The Jesus Style” Gayle Erwin tells a story about his father.

Gayle Erwin was six years old when his father was in an airplane accident that left him partially paralyzed and brain damaged. The accident forced his mother into the role as breadwinner which meant that she wasn’t there that often as she struggled to support her family. Although physically his father was there, his injuries left him mostly absent in his children’s lives. The wheels of failure were in motion for the struggling family. But they didn’t fail.

Through the difficult times the family remained faithful to God and to each other. Love and dedication surrounded the family even though money and decent homes didn’t. Then when his father finally died, Gayle and his two brothers stood in front of their father’s casket and told those at the funeral,

‘Our father did not leave a financial empire for us to carry on. Many things that a dad normally does with his sons, ours was unable to do. He was unable to teach us many things that a dad normally teaches. But he did leave us something that he had. He left us with a love of God, a love for the Bible, a love for people, an understanding of worship and an inability to hate. We feel that he has left us only things that will last. So we stand here before you as his sons and declare publicly that we will follow his God.’”

That’s the kind of integrity we should want to model, that we should want to leave behind.

THE WORLD NEEDS MEN...

who cannot be bought;

whose word is their bond;

who put character above wealth;

who possess opinions and a will;

who are larger than their vocations;

who do not hesitate to take chances;

who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;

who will be as honest in small things and in great things;

who will not compromise with wrong;

whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires;

who will not say they do it because everybody else does it;

who are true to their friends through good and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity;

who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning, and hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning success;

who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth when it is unpopular;

who can say "no" with emphasis, although all the rest of the world says "yes."

And let me just add one more thing, the world needs men with the integrity found in Christ.

Happy Father's Day, Amen.

Trey Fulkerson
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, IN