

Integrity (*Pt 2*)

Why Is Integrity Important?

Integrity is essential for becoming trustworthy or credible. It affects you personally, professionally, socially, and spiritually. It has to do with the core of who you are. It defines your character. Renowned architect and author Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) said, “Integrity is the essence of everything successful.” Zig Ziglar expressed integrity’s importance in a similar way: “Honesty and integrity are absolutely essential for success in life ... all areas of life.”

Our behavior is the result of the choices we make. When we make choices based on our values, rather than on what is advantageous to us, we have integrity. *Integrity requires disciplining ourselves to make decisions based on what is right, not what is most convenient or benefits us the most at the moment.* It’s setting our moral compass to true north, God’s values, and then committing to follow that setting, no matter what the circumstances. Living with integrity is living your values even to your own hurt. And there will be times when it will hurt. Sometimes you’ll make a promise, and then circumstances will change so that keeping your word will be difficult or even cost you, but you will follow through because you “vowed a vow.” Your “yes” needs to mean yes and your “no,” no. ^[5] Integrity means keeping your word.

Having integrity is knowing your moral values and committing to live by them. Integrity is lacking when your words don’t match your actions, when you say one thing and do something else, when your actions contravene your values (God’s values). Our values are what motivate our actions, and when we find ourselves lacking integrity in our behavior, this indicates that our true values may not be what we think or claim they are. We may unconsciously hold values which are out of sync with God’s Word or will. As believers, we should make the effort to measure our decisions, choices, words, and actions against the values which God has revealed to us through Scripture—in short, to align our values with His.

Integrity as a Habit

Making the commitment to live your life with integrity makes it easier to make good choices when faced with difficult ones. When you’ve committed to guiding your life according to godly values, you won’t have to struggle as much with your conscience each time you’re faced with a choice of whether to do the right or wrong thing. That choice will have been made largely in advance, because of your commitment. If you are faced with the opportunity to take something that’s not yours, to do something you know you shouldn’t, to deceive, to lie, to speak ill of someone, to spread gossip, to

violate an agreement you made, to be unfaithful to your spouse, you will have the moral fiber to choose not to do it even if you are tempted—because doing so would violate the values you have determined to live by.

Integrity doesn't happen naturally; it's something that is developed both consciously and progressively. You begin by deciding to live with integrity and committing to it. You decide what your value system is, what you stand for, and you pledge to live by that standard. Having made that pledge, you work to strengthen your resolve in doing so. You'll be tempted to compromise, but as you make right choices despite situations where you feel like doing otherwise, you'll progressively build the habit of acting ethically. Your prior commitment to your values makes it easier to make ethical choices and lessens the temptation to compromise your convictions.

Deciding to have integrity puts us in a position to reach our goals in a manner that we won't be ashamed of. When it comes to the truly important things in life, the journey to reaching our goals is as important as reaching them. If we are dishonest, take advantage of others, appropriate something that is not ours, act unethically, or hurt others in order to fulfill our ambitions, then we have acted with deceit and dishonor. We may have gotten what we wanted, but in the process we will have sold out our values, character, and faith. As human beings, we have the capacity to internally rationalize that the end result was worth whatever it took to get there, but in following that line of thinking, we find that ethics are left behind, our actions are immoral, and our relationships with others and God are damaged.

People who have severely damaged their lives and the lives of others through their moral lapses didn't generally wake up one morning and make a major unethical decision. These decisions usually started small, perhaps early in life, with skirting the truth, telling white lies, taking something small that didn't belong to them, cheating on a test, or other things which, though wrong, don't appear to be egregious. These "minor" infractions were rationalized as not so bad, not something that took away from the person's honor. However, these actions, when done repeatedly, built habits that became difficult to break. Their moral standards were lowered, and what they considered ethical and honest started to become hazy. Having started on this road, it became easier to justify or rationalize greater lies and even more unethical actions. The conviction to live with integrity diminished, and over time they developed into dishonorable people.

Compromising to commit "little" infractions comes with a price and takes a toll on your soul and walk with the Lord. If something is wrong, only doing it a little bit doesn't make it right. Wrong is wrong. On the other hand, when you create the habit of doing the right thing, the more you do it, the easier it becomes. The sum of your

daily decisions is what makes you what you are. You control your life, and you are responsible for your personal decisions and their outcomes.