

**“Going Beyond Good Intentions Series”  
“In Integrity”**

How long does it take for you to earn a reputation of being someone with integrity? Sometimes a lifetime but it is safe to say, a long time. How long does it take for one to lose their integrity? Moments. Perhaps the most important trait that is necessary for a Christian to move beyond good intentions is...integrity. Throughout the Bible you will find words that are synonymous with integrity, some of them are: honesty, purity, truth, upright and complete all translated from the same words meaning integrity. We get our concept of integrity from the Hebrew word *thamam*. It carries with it the idea of completeness or wholeness. In mathematics the word *integer* also has its root in the Hebrew. What is an integer? An Integer is a whole number. It is not fractionalized. Rather, an integer suggests completeness or wholeness. A person seeking integrity is a person seeking wholeness and completeness. If integrity is so important to fulfilling our good intentions why does integrity seem so lacking? A decade ago two researchers James Patterson and Peter Kim published a book entitled, “The Day America Told the Truth.” Using a survey technique that guaranteed the privacy and anonymity of the respondents, they were able to document what Americans really believe and do. The results were startling.

**First, they found there is no moral authority in America.** "Americans are making up their own moral codes. Only 13 percent of us believe in all the Ten Commandments. Forty percent of us believe in five of the Ten Commandments. We choose which laws of God we

believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."

**Second, they found Americans are not honest.** "Lying has become an integral part of American culture, a trait of the American character. We lie and don't even think about it. We lie for no reason." The authors estimate that 91 percent of us lie regularly.

**Third, marriage and family are no longer sacred institutions.** "While we still marry, we have lost faith in the institution of marriage. A third of married men and women confessed to us that they've had at least one affair. Thirty percent aren't really sure that they still love their spouse."

**Fourth, they found that the "Protestant [work] ethic is long gone from today's American workplace.** Workers around America frankly admit that they spend more than 20 percent (7 hours a week) of their time at work totally goofing off. That amounts to a four-day work week across the nation."

The authors conclude by suggesting that we have a new set of commandments for America: They parrot the often quoted teenager, everybody's doing it.

- I don't see the point in observing the Sabbath (77 percent).
- I will steal from those who won't really miss it (74 percent).
- I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage (64 percent).
- I will cheat on my spouse; after all, given the chance, he or she will do the same (53 percent).

□ I will procrastinate at work and do absolutely nothing about one full day in every five (50 percent). We may say that we are a nation that wants integrity, but apparently a majority of us lack it in our own personal lives.

So let's look at ourselves this morning and ask this question, "Am I living a life of integrity?" What will make me whole and complete? If we're not, then we had better scrap our present value system, determine what is important, change our lifestyle and go beyond good intentions. Remember, it was Jesus who said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" [Matthew 16:26].

**The first thing we must do is determine the source of our values.** I'm getting them from someplace. Where am I getting them?" Now that is an important question, because where I get my values determines how valuable they are. Would you consider the National Inquirer a good place to get your values? Would you consider TV talk shows a good place to get your values? Yet, if you are an average American, you'll spend 1,200 hours in 2007 watching television. Which means that by the time you're 65 years old you will have spent 18 years, 12 hours a day, 365 days a year just watching the tube - 15 years of your life.

In contrast, if you go to church every Sunday of your life for 65 years you will have spent a total of 8 months receiving spiritual teaching - 8 months compared to 15 years. That's a big difference, isn't it?

As a nation, we're largely being molded as to what morality is, what decency is, what integrity is by what we devote ourselves to daily. One contemporary Bible phrases 1 John 2:15-16 this way, "Don't love the world's ways...The lust for physical pleasure. The ambition to buy everything that appeals to you and the pride that comes from wealth and

importance. These are not from God but they are from the world. "It's obvious, isn't it, that the world's value system has always remained the same. This verse tells us that there are 3 basic world values that are constantly being conveyed to us.

**The first one is pleasure.** John calls it "the lust for physical pleasure." We are a culture majoring in pleasure. Do you realize that the #1 industry in the U.S. is entertainment? We spend billions of dollars every year just trying to entertain ourselves. This past winter, on several cold mornings when many found it just a little bit difficult getting up and going to a nice warm church building, there will be tens of thousands of people in Foxboro, Massachusetts and in Green Bay, Wisconsin who paid 50 to 100 dollars each for the privilege of sitting on a snow covered seat and watching 22 guys beat each other up as they fight over an oblong ball on a frozen field. And in the name of entertainment those spectators walked away saying, "Boy, I had a lot of fun. That was really great. I'm freezing to death, but I had a wonderful time." All in the name of entertainment!

**Here's the second world value - possessions.** John calls it "the ambition to buy everything that appeals to you." We are a culture obsessed with buying things, getting more and more things. And we love to show off our possessions, our cars, our homes, our clothing, our jewelry. We love to show those things off because that says we are someone important.

**Here's the third one - it's prestige.** John calls it "the pride that come from wealth and importance." We come up with little labels that brand us as successful people. "I'm a CEO," or "I'm an Executive Vice President. I am someone who is really, really important." You have all seen the commercials for Gray Poupon. They're pretty snobbish, aren't they?

Here's this guy sitting in the back seat of a Rolls Royce with a squeeze bottle of Gray Poupon, "Oh, pardon me." Do you realize French's mustard, the blue collar mustard, had a squeeze bottle long before Gray Poupon did? And honestly, how many people have you seen riding in the back seat of a Rolls Royce eating a bologna sandwich with Gray Poupon mustard on it? It's not a real picture, you see.

But we look at those things. And the message that is communicated as we watch beautiful people dressed in designer clothing, driving prestigious automobiles, looking immaculate, is that if I eat this mustard, or buy this product, or drive this car, then that's me, and I deserve to be that person. That's why Paul writes in Romans 12, "Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking."

So we begin here. We choose for ourselves. "Where am I going to get my values?" I have only two basic choices. I'm either going to get them from the Word of God or I'm going to get them from the world. Those are the choices that I have.

**Secondly, we need to determine what is important.** Job 34:4 says, "You should choose to follow what is right, but first you must define what is good." I want to give you a homework assignment. When you go home, get out a piece of paper, a pen, and write down the 10 most important things in your life. Prioritize them. What's the most important? What's the second most important? The third most important, and so on. Make a list of your values in life.

Now it is important for you to do that for a couple of reasons. First, most of your values you didn't choose. You just assimilated them. You got them from your parents. You got

them from what you read, or whatever. So it is important for you to firm them up. "I'm going to determine now what's really important for me. I'm not going to let someone else decide that, but I am going to decide what's really important for me." The second reason is because most of us never think about what's important in life until it is too late. As long as we are just cruising through life and everything is falling into place, we never stop and ask the tough questions. We never really ask ourselves, "What are my values? What's really important to me?" until we are bankrupt. Or, until we go through a divorce. Or, until a loved one dies. Then we stop and ask, "Am I living the way I ought to? Are the really important things the things that I consider important in my life?"

It's often not until tragedy comes that we begin to ask those kinds of questions. So what I'm encouraging you to do, is to do that before the pain, and save yourself some pain, because the pain will come but you will be better prepared for it if you have already determined what's really important to you.

How should we decide what is really important and what is not? The key here is perspective. Now by perspective I mean, look at it and ask, "How long is this going to last?" If it is going to last for a long time, if it is going to last for eternity, then it is really important. If it is going to last 30 years it is kind of important. If it is going to last 10 years it's kind of important, but not as important as 30 years. And if it is only going to last for a short time, then it is not very important at all.

The third step we must take to have a life of integrity which allows us to go beyond good intentions is if I see a disconnect between what I know is important and my personal **then I need to change my lifestyle.** I'm going to look at the 10 things that I consider

important & then ask myself, "Does my life match up? Now that is an extremely important question, and we need to be honest with ourselves here because George Gallup in a poll says, "The #1 cause of stress in our lives today is not the lack of money. It's not the breaking down of relationships. The #1 cause of stress in the USA are the incongruities in life. It's saying one thing and doing something else. It's constant conflict inside."

Someone says, "My family is really important to me." Almost everyone would say that. Yet, statistics reveal that the average father in the U.S. spends 5 minutes a day with his kids. So what's he doing? He is saying one thing and he is doing something else. You might say, "My health is really important to me." Really? Do you exercise? "No." Do you eat right? "No." Do you get lots of rest? "No." Do you take days off? "Sometimes, but my health is really important to me." Are you a materialist? "Oh, no! Everybody else is but I'm not. I'm not a materialistic person at all." Really? Is your debt load getting deeper and deeper? Are you buying things that you can't afford? Do you have credit card charges that you can't pay? Are you saving money? "No, I spend it all." So you see, we're not consistent. We don't do what we say is really important. Is God important to you? "Yes!" Ninety-five percent of the people in the U.S. say, "God is important to me." Really? What do your actions say?

So if we're really serious about going beyond good intentions there are 3 areas that you are going to have to consider.

Here's the first one. You're going to have to look at your schedule. Is your schedule consistent with what you say is important? Do you have the most time allotted for the things that you think are really important, or are you spending time on things that you say

aren't important? You're going to have to reevaluate your schedule.

Secondly, you're going to have to look at your budget. "Am I spending the most money on the things that are really important, or am I spending the most money on things that I think are not important, on things that only last for a brief period of time?"

The third area you're going to have to look at is relationships. "Am I spending time with the people who are most important to me? Am I spending time with my family, my wife, my children, my grandchildren? Or am I spending all my time being involved with things that aren't that important to me?"

Psalms 119:37 says, "Turn my eyes away from worthless things." That would be a good verse to put on your TV set. Ephesians 4:17 tells us to "stop going along with the mindless crowd.... That's no life for you...Get rid of it. Then take on an entirely new way of life - a God fashioned life renewed from the inside & working out into your conduct as God reproduces His character in you."

We're talking about a new life here. And I can hear your wheels beginning to turn. Here's what you're thinking, "Preacher, I'd really like to do that. I'd like to rearrange my schedule. I'd like to rearrange my budget. I'd like to spend time with the people who are really important to me. But I've tried this before. I stay with it a week or two and then I miserably fail. I want to do this but I just can't do it." And you're right. You can't do it. You aren't strong enough. That's why you need God. And that's why you need Jesus Christ. You can't do this by yourself. That's exactly why Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything God asks me to do with the help of Christ who gives me strength & power." With the strength & power of Jesus Christ, you can.

I want to close this series with a very important passage of scripture. Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16 and tells him to "keep a close watch on all that you do and think. Stay true to what is right and God will bless you, and He will use you to help other people."

Get rid of all the hype, and it comes down to this, "Do you know God?" Some have missed the most important thing in life because they don't know God. Do you know Him?