

## LeaderLesson 18: More on Integrity

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### Integrity and Who I Am

Even the most spiritually committed among us will blow it at one time or another. No matter how devoted or mature we are, we will find ourselves asking, “What do I do when I have violated my commitment to God and to my own integrity?”<sup>1</sup> To be who God has called us to be, we must stop from time to time to ask if our ethics (what we say we believe) and our morality (how we behave) is matching or not. If they match, we have integrity. If they do not, we exhibit hypocrisy. David gives us a good example of what a godly person does in the face of his own hypocritical failure in Psalm 32:

*How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!  
How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!  
When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.  
I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord” and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.  
Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;  
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.  
You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.  
I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.  
Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.  
Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.  
Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.<sup>2</sup>*

God Himself referred to David as a man who walked with a heart of integrity (1 Kings 9:4), fully devoted to God, (11:4) and who followed the Lord completely (11:6). David’s psalms teach obedience to God. But how can the psalmist who sins be a model of integrity? David had integrity because he consistently held to the same standard. When he wrote about that standard, he meant it. When he violated it, he called it sin – he never glossed it over, made excuses or took it lightly. Psalms 32, 40 and 51 reveal that David’s sin, broke his heart. He pleaded for forgiveness. He took his lumps. He learned and grew.

Does that excuse David’s sin? No! Does David’s story give today’s leader permission to sin? Absolutely not. But integrity doesn’t demand perfection either. Even the most morally committed people blow it. Integrity doesn’t guarantee a perfect life, but it does require an integrated life. People with integrity have a moral center that integrates their behavior. When they violate that moral center, they recognize that violation as sin, admit that they have strayed from their ethics, and treat it as an aberration. They confess it, make restitution, seek forgiveness and reconfirm the standard to which they are committed.

David would be scandalized if he were to learn that people today were using his failure to justify their own sin. His prayers of repentance show leaders what to do when they violate their commitment to God’s standards and want to reestablish their integrity.

### Integrity and What I Do

Just how important to leadership is this business of integrity? David, one of history’s most godly leaders, offers this view on the matter in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19. Meditate your way through this rich commentary on life, and then read Richard Baxter’s penetrating statement quoted below.

Then David praised the Lord in the sight of all the assembly. David said,  
May You be praised, Lord God of our father Israel, from eternity to eternity. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty, for everything in the heavens and on

earth belongs to You. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom, and You are exalted as head over all. Riches and honor come from You, and You are the ruler of everything. Power and might are in Your hand, and it is in Your hand to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we give You thanks and praise Your glorious name.

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? For everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your own hand. For we live before You as foreigners and temporary residents in Your presence as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. Yahweh our God, all this wealth that we've provided for building You a house for Your holy name comes from Your hand; everything belongs to You. I know, my God, that You test the heart and that You are pleased with what is right. I have willingly given all these things with an upright heart, and now I have seen Your people who are present here giving joyfully and willingly to You. Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep this desire forever in the thoughts of the hearts of Your people, and confirm their hearts toward You. Give my son Solomon a whole heart to keep and to carry out all Your commands, Your decrees, and Your statutes, and to build the temple for which I have made provision.<sup>3</sup>

David knew that God was pleased with integrity. Meditation on this passage produces rich reward.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Baxter, writing on the importance of integrity in pastoral leadership, makes a statement that is crucial for any leader to consider:

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours. It much hindereth our work, when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private, that which we have been speaking to them from the Word of God in public...but it will much more hinder your work, if you contradict yourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths and all the week pull down with your hands...He that means as he speaks, will surely do as he speaks.”<sup>5</sup>

This old English “pastor to pastors” has a wise word for any leader who wants to encourage his or her followers to “do it right.” Read his quotation again and think about the implications for your own life as a leader with integrity.

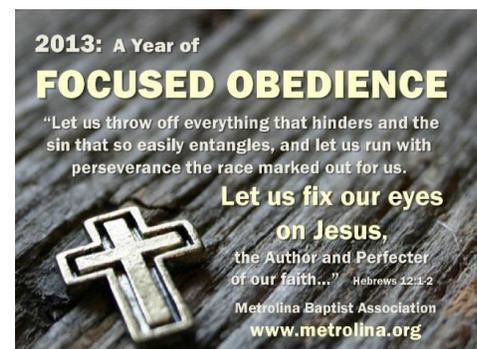
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<sup>1</sup> *Handbook to Leadership: Leadership in the Image of God*, Kenneth Boa, Sid Buzzell, Bill Perkins. Pages 91-92. (This yearlong study is using this text as a primary source. Anyone who would like to go deeper on this journey for leaders is encouraged to get a copy of this excellent resource. It is also available on Kindle.)

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 32:1-11 NASB.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Chronicles 29:10-19 NASB.

<sup>4</sup> *Handbook to Leadership*, page 96.

<sup>5</sup> *The Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter. Banner of Truth Trust, 1989. Page 63.