

NEVER SHAKEN

FINDING YOUR FOOTING
WHEN THE WORLD IS SLIDING AWAY

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AUTHOR'S

EXCERPT
NEVER SHAKEN

CHAPTER 3

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PSALM 15

A Psalm of David.

O LORD, who may abide in Your tent?

Who may dwell on Your holy hill?

He who walks with integrity,

and works righteousness,

And speaks truth in his heart.

He does not slander with his tongue,

Nor does evil to his neighbor,

Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

In whose eyes a reprobate is despised,

But who honors those who fear the LORD;

He swears to his own hurt and does not change;

He does not put out his money at interest,

Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things will never be shaken.

STRAW, STICKS, AND SOLID BRICKS

*He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.*

PSALM 15:2

*Integrity is like the weather: everybody talks about it
but nobody knows what to do about it.*

STEPHEN L. CARTER

Who can forget the childhood emotion of hearing the hungry and horrifying big bad wolf exclaim, “I’ll huff. And I’ll puff. And I’ll blow your house down!”? Even in our youngest memories, we all secretly hoped that our house would stand the assault of the carnivorous canine. But, as we know, two of the three little pigs almost became fresh bacon for the ravaging attacker.

The story of “The Three Little Pigs,” made famous in the world of English fairy tales, illustrates the importance of the reliability of our choices. Even little pigs must be sure of the integrity of their homes and the strength of the material they use to build them.

As you likely remember, mama pig booted her offspring into the world to survive independently. The first little pig was quite lazy. He hurriedly built his house with straw. Piggy number two, also a bit negligent and in a hurry to have some fun, settled for sticks.

Finally, the industrious third pig chose to labor on until he had a solid brick dwelling.

The straw and sticks were no competition for the force of the wolf's windy assault. Pigs one and two, suddenly homeless, fled to their sibling's solid structure. All three eventually survived the assault in the security of the brick house. The wolf met his demise by slinking down the chimney of house #3 right into a pot of boiling water. Thanks to the bricks' stability, the menacing wolf became a tasty meal for the little swine (assuming cooked wolf meat can be delicious)—and they all lived happily ever after.

Start Here: Integrity

Breaches of integrity had peppered David's misguided choices in recent years (adultery, murder, parental neglect). He knew the painful price tag of settling for straw and sticks in matters of personal behavior. David now composes this song of reflection while navigating painful rejection and isolation. His son Absalom has thrown integrity to the wind and forced his royal father into oblivion. In his wilderness moment, David underscored the importance of bricks. Perhaps he is sensing the wolflike, internal threats of anger, compromise, revenge, or despondency huff and puff upon his beleaguered heart.

God inspires David to start this affirmation of these characteristics of the godly with the essential truth of integrity. In answer to David's inquiring tune about the marks of those who know and experience God's presence, the Holy Spirit imparts the first and primary quality: "He . . . walks with integrity."

David sang his opening lines about the kind of integrity that is woven into all matters of behavior and motive. He will portray how it shows up in the varied nuances of our relationships. Integrity in one's finances even makes the list. God expected and would empower David to fit the pieces of his broken life together again in

a recommitment to undisputable integrity, and He expects the same of you and me.

Acute Integrity Deficiency Syndrome

We all have heard of or personally known those who have been affected by the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) virus. But a different kind of “AIDS” destroys millions of lives, marriages, friendships, careers, companies, political aspirations, and Christian ministries every year: Acute Integrity Deficiency Syndrome. We’ve come a long way from the fabled days of the boy George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. The young future president told his father, “I cannot tell a lie.” Today it seems many cannot tell the truth, and most cannot tell the difference.

We can identify with David’s cry, “Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak falsehood to one another; with flattering lips and with a double heart they speak” (Ps. 12:1–2).

There is no laboratory-produced antidote or cure for this integrity deficiency. Only a transformation of the mind, a conversion of the heart, a setting of the will, and a consistent reception of divine grace can heal this deficiency.

Clarifying Integrity

“Integrity” in Psalm 15:2 (also translated “blameless” or “honest”) implies what is whole, or wholehearted, and sound.¹ The Hebrew (*tāmîm*), appearing approximately fifty times in the Hebrew Bible, literally means complete, sincere, or perfect.²

The Latin root is *integer*. So a person of integrity is a whole person—a person undivided. All the pieces fit together into a whole. “The word conveys not so much a single-mindedness as a completeness; not the frenzy of a fanatic who wants to remake all the

world in a single mold but the serenity of a person who is confident in the knowledge that he or she is living rightly.”³

To “walk” in integrity is not a matter of putting one foot in front of the other. Instead, this is a reference to a consistent pattern of living. Billy Graham aptly noted, “Integrity is the glue that holds our way of life together.”⁴

Know, Grow, Show

Author Stephen Carter proposes that integrity requires three things: (1) Discerning what is right and what is wrong; (2) Acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and (3) Saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right from wrong.⁵ Borrowing from Carter, I have summarized integrity similarly as the commitment to KNOW, GROW, and SHOW.

KNOW the Truth

The very first psalm sets the foundation for a walk of integrity: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:1–2).

Integrity is based on understanding what is right and wrong, and this clarity springs from a longing for and delight in the regular intake of the Scriptures. To desire to grow in integrity but to neglect the Bible is to dream of “brick” but to build with straw and sticks.

We choose integrity every day by “taking heed” of the Word. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:9–11).

The constant daily onslaught of deception and degradation demands that we firmly remain unaltered by the world around us. The

Bible is the influence for this resolve toward integrity. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

GROW in the Truth

At the same time, we must act on what we have discerned with daily resolve and painstaking attentiveness. Unfortunately, the world, our flesh, and the devil offer numerous alternatives to integrity. Here are three common pitfalls we must avoid as we grow in the truthfulness of integrity.

1. Refusing Pragmatism

The mantra of a pragmatist is “what-ever works.” In essence, the end justifies the means. As long as it turns out okay, it does not matter if there are shades of compromise in getting there. But the truth is not defined by our experiences or our opinions. Our tainted perspective can lead us to negotiate on principle in the process—as long as we get the desired product. A pleasing outcome or some sense of personal benefit does not define what is biblically correct.

**INTEGRITY REQUIRES
THAT THE “BACKSTAGE”
OF OUR AUTHENTICITY IS
CONSISTENT WITH THE
“FRONTSTAGE” OF OUR
APPEARANCE.**

2. Rejecting Hypocrisy

Integrity requires us to sniff out and snuff out all trappings of hypocrisy. In ancient Greece, a *hupokrites* was an actor in a play who wore a mask to fulfill his role in the drama. It came to refer to anyone who pretends to be someone they are not. We must seek to discard the public masks that can eventually accommodate our duplicity.

You’ve likely heard that integrity is who we are when no one is watching. The God who sees is the One we seek to please through a life of true integrity. Integrity requires that the “backstage” of our

authenticity is consistent with the “frontstage” of our appearance. The theory of our day emphasizes that it doesn’t matter what you do in your private life as long as your public life doesn’t disrupt society. Quoting Billy Graham again, “Integrity means that if our private life was suddenly exposed, we’d have no reason to be ashamed or embarrassed. Integrity means our outward life is consistent with our inner convictions.”⁶ Jesus warned His followers to avoid the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day: “Do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them” (Matt. 23:3).

3. Shunning Compartmentalization

If integrity is a life where all the pieces fit together, then its antithesis is compartmentalization. Compartmentalization is “a defense mechanism in which thoughts and feelings that seem to conflict or to be incompatible are isolated from each other.”⁷ It involves actions that are clearly wrong in one area of life but, in the mind, are “separated” (kept secret) in order to deny the conviction of the Spirit and avoid getting caught. Walls rather than wholeness are the *modus operandi*.

In two of my pastoral assignments, I was called to succeed former senior pastors who had been exposed in moral failure and forced to resign. In one case, the church leader carried his secrets for almost eight years. The hurting members left affected by the fallout often asked me how he could have kept preaching, marrying people, baptizing new converts, and leading some semblance of a normal family life. Compartmentalization was evidently the coping mechanism. In varying degrees, any one of us could be tempted to manage our lack of integrity the same way.

A newspaper story appeared some years ago about a young man in Long Beach who went into a KFC to get some chicken for himself and his female companion. While she waited in the car, he went in to pick up the chicken. The store manager accidentally handed the guy the box in which he had placed the money from the daily sales. He put the money in a fried chicken box to conceal the large deposit.

The customer took the box back to the car and went on his way. They went to a nearby park to enjoy the chicken only to discover they had a box full of money. Realizing the mistake, they had a stroke of honesty and returned to the KFC. The manager was elated and relieved! He was so impressed that he asked the young customer to stick around, noting, "I want to call the newspaper and have them take your picture. You're the most honest guy in town."

"Oh, no, don't do that!" said the trustworthy customer.

"Why not?" asked the manager.

"Well," he said, "you see, I'm married, and the woman I'm with is not my wife."⁸

A person of integrity fights compartmentalization. He is integrated and authentic. There is no duplicity of attitudes and actions.

SHOW the Truth

We live out integrity with unambiguous declarations of our intentions. This public commitment reinforces accountability and strengthens our intended testimony.

I fashioned twelve family principles for my children as they were growing up. I hoped they would embrace them in life. We reviewed them regularly. I gave them a personalized notebook as a keepsake. They still have some of the Henderson Family Values memorized and, in various forms, they pass them on to their children.

My public articulation of these gave my kids frequent opportunities to reinforce them in my own life and parenting. One of them was, "Pray and read your Bible every day." They watched to see if I did it. Another was, "Always keep your word." They enthusiastically reminded me of my declaration whenever I told them I would do something.

The Pathway Toward Integrity

Integrity demands that we carefully incorporate truth, keep an unwavering commitment, and portray an authentic testimony into the fabric of everyday life. This is a vital recipe for integrity but one we must carefully steward.

My favorite dessert is crème brûlée (my wife makes a delectable one). It is a baked dessert custard with a sweet caramelized top. The simple ingredients include egg yolks, sugar, and heavy cream, with a topping of burnt brown sugar. What's not to like? Yet the process is precise. You cannot just throw the ingredients in a big bowl, shake them together and eat it. Instead, the recipe outlines a specific process of mixing, heating, cooling, baking, and cooling again. The final top coat of caramelized brown sugar adds a crunchy, finishing touch.

Integrity is not complicated, but it cannot be careless. It requires great intentionality and watchfulness.

The Gospel Empowerment

Our ultimate example of integrity is Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15 tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” He understands our fight for integrity. He bids us to come to Him in the battle to receive His grace to live blamelessly. He lives in us and through us to impart a supernatural capacity for a lifestyle of integrity.

Paul demonstrated the power of Christ to forge a blameless life. He testified, “You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers” (1 Thess. 2:10). He explained, “For we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21).

Paul knew the power of Christ to form integrity in and through every believer, calling us to “approve the things that are excellent, in

order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10). He further urged believers to “prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). Peter, writing about our lifestyle before the Lord’s return, states, “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

The gospel defines and delivers empowerment for integrity. We know that those who lead the church are required to be “above reproach”—examples of holistic integrity before the ones they lead (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:1–9). In a real sense, Christ does not call you to a standard of integrity. He is the standard of integrity and will live through you to demonstrate His character to a dark world.

The Tests and Testimony of a Life of Integrity

In Psalm 26, likely written around the same time as Psalm 15, David prayed, “Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity.”⁹ David knew the blessing God had promised those who cling to integrity. Psalm 84 (also written on the same occasion, but on David’s behalf by the sons of Korah)¹⁰ declares, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield. The LORD gives grace and glory; He does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity. Happy is the person who trusts in You, LORD of Hosts!” (vv. 11–12 HCSB).

Late in life, as he led God’s people in worship at the dedication of the temple, David prayed, “Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You” (1 Chron. 29:17).

David’s youngest son, Solomon, having witnessed the trials and triumphs of his father, would eventually articulate the blessings of

integrity. Maybe he had Dad in mind when he wrote them. Perhaps he reflected on the recklessness of his older brother Absalom.

- “He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.” (Prov. 10:9)
- “The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.” (Prov. 11:3)
- “Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.” (Prov. 19:1)
- “A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him.” (Prov. 20:7)

Yes, security, guidance, blessing, and a godly heritage. These became the enduring testimony of David’s Psalm 15 moment and thus memorialized in a song that millions have cherished ever since.

The big bad wolf of pragmatism, hypocrisy, compartmentalization—and various winds of compromise—still roars. Build with the integrity of biblical brick. You’ll never regret it.

Never Shaken Application

- If your life right now was actually a house built with bricks, what top five key “integrity ingredients” do you hope will compose those bricks? Why are these most significant for you?
- Think of the three most important people in your life. How do you want to demonstrate integrity to each of them? What influence do you hope this will ultimately have in their lives? Ask the Lord to more fully shape this characteristic in your life, according to the truths in this chapter.

STRAW, STICKS, AND SOLID BRICKS

- Review the verses from Proverbs cited at the end of the chapter. Based on these truths, try to summarize why integrity is important to you.

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