

What Do You Regret?

Years ago I encountered a word of wisdom: “At the end of our lives, what we will regret is far more about what we *didn't* do, than what we did.” And then recently, in a conversation about what “youngers” want to learn from “olders,” a colleague said he wanted to know what we regret so he can learn from our lessons the wiser way (observation) instead of the hard way (personal experience). So I’ve been asking.



The answers fell in these categories:

Missed Time and Opportunities

- I regret not spending more time with my parents and immediate family when I could.
- I regret not asking enough questions of my parents and grandparents when they were still here. There is so much more I would like to know from them.
- I regret all the time I wasted looking for a man, dating and fretting over relationships. If I had it to do over, I would invest my time and energy differently. I would spend more time in study of the Word, pour into and serve more freely in ministry and take mission trips! I would’ve trusted God more and Matthew 6:33.
- I regret not making Christ-centered connections earlier

in my life.

- I regret not making connections to Christian organizations (including the church) earlier, and not getting help understanding the Bible.
- I regret not having a mentor.
- I regret not going to the Holy Land sooner.
- I regret not taking advantage of the opportunity to sightsee when on business trips.
- I regret letting work consume me. I regret not traveling because work was too big a part of my life.
- I regret not getting counseling to help me process and grieve my father's murder.
- I regret not learning as much as possible when I had willing teachers. The thought of sitting in a room with peers discussing a book sounds like heaven now, but in school it felt like torture. I did not appreciate the luxury of education then, and now I would LOVE to go back to school for another degree.

Seeking to Please People Instead of God

- I regret spending so much of my younger life being a people pleaser and carrying around burdens that weren't mine to carry.
- I regret being motivated by pleasing people instead of God—even godly people. People can counsel us, but we shouldn't put them in God's place.
- I regret worrying more about what people thought of me than worrying about what God thought of me.
- I regret “performing” for others instead of being true to me.
- I regret all the times I silenced myself at church in order to be the good pastor wife. I didn't even realize how it was slowly poisoning me.

Parenting

- I regret not spending time with my kids instead of

trying to provide more things for my kids.

- I regret the time I wasted doing menial tasks that really didn't matter instead of sitting down longer with my boys. I also regret being too quick to speak and argue when they were teenagers. I wish I had been calmer and sought out conversation instead of confrontation.
- I regret wanting my little ones to be perfect in EVERYTHING they did instead of letting them just be kids, and spending way too much time on the daily tasks of housekeeping instead of using my time wisely to nurture them and being their spiritual leader and teaching them more about Jesus instead of making sure each toy was in place. Also being so strict on them when they were young and not realizing I couldn't control their reactions; that I needed to teach them how to react. Oh, and I used to yell at them as a young mom (because that's what I was taught) but I learned to control my reactions because I don't like to be yelled at, and to speak softly and with respect to each of them, using "sir" and "ma'am" with them as I do today with my grandchildren.
- I regret believing the lie that you should let your kids choose their own religion.
- I regret not creating a family culture when my kids were small.
- I regret not getting counseling for our son when he started into a downward spiral in middle school.
- I regret destroying my relationship with our then-13 year old son because he was failing in school and I was so afraid for his future! I reacted in such destructive ways until a pastor of mine told me, "Dear one, there is no vacancy in the Trinity. The position of the Holy Spirit has been filled!" That began a very long walk back toward a forgiven and reconciled relationship with that now 39-year old son who graduated from college, was in the army for almost 7 years and is now a sergeant in a police force and married with four kids. Thank You

Lord Jesus for your grace and mercy toward us all. You are infinitely better at your job than any of us ever could be.

Relationships

- I regret “mind-reading” what I thought others believed about me and reacted as if those beliefs were true...only to go to reunions years later, find out what people actually thought... and realized I could have had a way cooler high school and college experience had I just asked people outright what they thought instead of assuming instead.
- I regret so much that when I saw evidence in my first marriage that something was wrong, I did not fervently ask God to show me what was wrong. I regret it took me over twenty-five years to question red flags in the marriage. I regret not holding my husband accountable for decisions he made, especially financial decisions, and for not pursuing accountability with other believers. I regret that I did not question why, in our Christian culture, submission is confused with inferiority-and therefore a woman can't question any major financial decision her husband does in secret without accountability to his wife.
- I regret every single time I asked a newly married couple when they would have kids. Infertility gives perspective.
- I regret not standing up to an abusive teacher in high school and not reporting him, and I regret years of thinking I was just a bad kid.
- I regret being mean to my wife and kids.
- I regret not asking my husband to help me more with the kids and the house. I didn't ask, and then I got resentful for him not doing what I never asked him to do. I regret shutting him out of my heart and big chunks of my life.

Body

- I regret not memorizing more scripture before mom brain and autoimmune issues took my good memory.
- I regret not taking better care of my body, especially now that I'm pushing 60. It would have been so much easier if I had just worked at it a little bit each day.
- I regret not realizing you could have sculpted muscles at 80; if I had known I would have exercised more starting much younger.
- I regret not going to the dentist more when I was still under my mom's insurance.
- I regret piercing my belly button myself with a needle and an ice cube. Not really for any reason except for sure my daughter is gonna try it.

Spiritual Life

- I regret buying the lies of the culture rather than the truth of God.
- I regret being so afraid of not having enough money (which is really about not trusting God) that I squelched my husband's generosity.
- I regret not learning sooner that I need to depend on the Lord and not myself.
- I regret the sin of self-reliance.
- I regret not allowing scripture to show me what I was really like.
- I regret allowing sin to become an addiction that took joy from my life and replaced it with shame and guilt.
- I regret that I got in God's way many times . . . when God says in His word says, "I've got this all under control, I have a plan for your life, trust in me with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding, rest in Me, Be still . . ." I have done the opposite more times than I can count. So instead of leaning in on Him and watching what He can/could do, I thought I could handle whatever was going on better and faster and tried

and failed. (Still working on this, some of us take a little longer to learn.) God has shown me that even when I get in His way, He forgives, He still has a plan, He is still in control, He gives me strength to sit back and wait on Him, that I can change my heart and let go, and trust Him and rest in Him. As His children, He will never let us go . . . Rest and wait on Him, His ways are always better.

- I regret not learning how to really capture my thoughts and rebuke them with scripture. I learned a little too late that I can choose, truly choose what is in my mind. So many things would have been different . . .
- I regret not attending a healthy Bible-teaching church when I was younger.

Of course, we can't learn all our lessons from other people's mistakes. One especially wise friend wrote, "I know that we can, with God's Spirit in us, learn to avoid many things, and wise counsel helps. But until I had matured more and understood the value of certain things and perspective on others, things older believers shared were often more in my head than taken to heart."

Some examples of regrets that just might have to be learned the hard way:

- I regret indulging and not grasping consequences of every big and little choice.
- I regret listening to legalistic people when I was more vulnerable to toxic religion.
- I regret blowing opportunities, self-imposed insecurity, bad decisions and choices.
- I regret getting upset over really insignificant things.

Finally, for a redemptive view of regrets, this wisdom from a believer who owns the truth of Romans 8:28, that God is able to make all regrets work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose:

“Sue, I think if you live long enough you realize there is a step beyond regret, and it’s thankfulness. Every regret that I would have spoken of, God has used to change me and grow me. As I look back on them all, my heart is full of joy that God has been a part of my life for 47 years. He has brought me out of the mire and filled me up with acceptance of what it’s like to live in this world and that He uses it all. And I thank Him for His goodness.”

What do you regret?

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_do_you_regret
on Sept. 4, 2018.

Your Board of Directors

At a conference several years ago I was given a thought-provoking challenge, to identify the people on the board of directors of my life: whose voices do I listen to? Whose counsel do I follow? Whose values do I respond to?

The speaker pointed out that some people ought to be kicked off our board—like parents, if their voices of shame and criticism still control and restrict us. So should voices of much of the media, especially TV. And we can replace them with wiser, more godly voices who can offer us direction and perspective. There was a discussion of categories of potential board members. They don’t have to be alive, and we don’t have to personally know them, either.

The Lord Jesus, of course, needs to be the #1 board member. If we’re married, our spouse should be on our board. The Apostle

Paul is a good board member. Peter and James are good too, as is Solomon. So are some of the church fathers and Christian writers like C.S. Lewis. Or a pastor, and not necessarily our own. (I have a friend in a distant city who has adopted my pastor as hers, and listens to every audio recording my church puts online.) Mentors are great board members, and so are wise and trusted friends.

A few weeks ago, John Townsend, one of the co-authors of [the Boundaries series](#), was at my church. I love what he writes and listen to him on the radio show “New Life Live” whenever possible. I had a chance to talk to him briefly, so I told him about my board of directors. “John,” I said, “Several years ago I installed you as a permanent member of my board. Other people have come and gone, but you’re always there. I really appreciate your wisdom and godly perspective, and you have equipped me to respond to various life challenges. Just wanted you to know how you’ve blessed me even though we’ve never met.”

(To my delighted surprise, he lit up and asked if he could hug me!)

Who’s on your board? Who can you kick off to the glory of God? (Hint: magazines that make you unhappy with how God made you as you compare yourself to the celebrities and models inside, certain internet sites, particular TV shows. . .)

Who can you put on your board? Let’s hear it.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/your_board_of_directors
in July 2009.

“Do You Have Any Advice to High School Graduates?”

Funny you should ask; after polling some wise people I know on “Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before I Graduated,” I just shared these thoughts with our graduating senior girls in our church.

- **The importance of choosing purity.** This is the biggest area of regret for many people, but especially young women, who pay a greater cost of giving their bodies away. One lady said, “I wish someone had told me that my body is a precious gift from God to give to ONE man. I wish someone had told me that if someone pays attention to you or says nice things, it doesn’t mean they love you and it SURE doesn’t mean you have to give them your body.”

One element of choosing purity is to choose modesty in dress and behavior. Showing skin (especially midriffs, shoulders and backs) is a great temptation to men and it is a statement about oneself that a girl might not want to be making: “I care more about what’s trendy than about honoring God with my body. I want guys to look at me, even if they have to struggle with their flesh over it.”

- **Don’t get into credit card debt.** The credit card companies will throw undeserved credit at you, and it doesn’t take any time at all to be way over your head. One young lady was so desperate for other people’s approval that she got \$80,000 into debt to buy friends and impress people. The people aren’t around anymore, but her debt certainly is. Proverbs says that you are in bondage to your debtors, and credit card debt is a terrible kind of prison.

- **If you find yourself wondering, “Should I be doing this?” you probably shouldn’t.** Untold heartache and regret can be

avoided by listening to that internal alarm. You won't wonder "should I be doing this?" about things you should do, like, "Should I brush my teeth today?" "Should I be kind to my friends?" "Should I exercise self-control?"

- **Choose your friends wisely.** You will become like the people you hang out with, so choose people with beliefs and behaviors consistent with godliness.

- **Pursue your relationship with Christ.** Less than half of the students in church youth groups will still be walking with God ten years after they graduate. Pre-decide to be one of those people. Go to church every Sunday. *GO TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY!* Get plugged into campus Christian groups as soon as you get to college. If you don't go to college, get plugged into some Christian fellowship group where you will be continually encouraged in your walk with God in the context of Christian community. You are like wet cement; you will (probably) determine the shape of your spiritual life for the rest of your adult life by the choices you make and the habits you form during ages 18-24.

- **Pursue wisdom.** Pray for "wisdom beyond your years." God loves to answer that prayer! Pray for your future spouse. Young women tend to be very passionate and full of longings for connection to a husband; turn that emotional energy into something constructive by praying faithfully for your husband. You might consider keeping a journal for him that you can give him when you marry, so he can see how you became the woman you will be. Write down your thoughts and feelings as well as the ways you are praying for him, even before you know him. At the same time, don't go to college for an "MRS degree," looking for a husband. Trust God to take care of that in His time. Getting married is a lousy goal for college.

- **Develop self-confidence.** Forget all the garbage about self-esteem that you were taught in school. It's not bestowed, it's earned. Real self-esteem is self-confidence, and there's only

way to get it: by doing hard things, by rising to a challenge and working until you succeed.

- **PRAY!** Pray for your roommate. Pray for your studies, pray for your work. When you find yourself battling loneliness or homesickness, press hard into Jesus and let those hard feelings drive you to pray in dependence on Him. Trust God to be in control, and rest in Him. He loves you more than you can imagine!

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

St. Augustine

Former Probe intern Tim Garrett explains that St. Augustine's The City of God and his Confessions reveal not only a brilliant mind, but demonstrate his abiding concern to announce God's righteousness in His dealings with man.

Who Was St. Augustine?

One of the most remarkable things about a close reading of Church history is that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. In the New Testament we find that a man who called himself "the chief of sinners" due to his murderous hatred toward Christians was saved when Christ Himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus. What is clear from the account in the ninth chapter of the Book of Acts is that it was not Saul who was seeking Christ: instead, it was Christ who was seeking Paul.

In modern times we see a similar situation in the life of C. S. Lewis. In *Surprised by Joy*, he recounts the night that he

knelt to admit that God was God by calling himself “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” Like the Apostle Paul, we can see that Lewis was perfectly prepared to be an apologist for the faith, but that preparation occurred *before he ever became a Christian!* It is only after the fact that we see how God was actively seeking the sinner.

In this article we will examine another reluctant convert, a man whose life and ministry has been crucial to church history. His name was Aurelius Augustine: we know him as St. Augustine of Hippo. But until his conversion, Augustine was anything but a saint! Born in the year 354 in North Africa, Augustine was raised by a Christian mother and a pagan father. The father’s main desire was that his son get a good education, while his mother constantly worried about her son’s eternal destiny. Augustine indeed received a first class education, but his mother was tormented by his indulgent lifestyle. Augustine became involved with a concubine at the age of seventeen, a relationship which lasted thirteen years and produced one son. Recognizing that sexual lust was competing with Christ for his affections, Augustine uttered the famous prayer “Make me chaste Lord . . . but not yet.”

While sexual passion ruled his heart, Augustine sought wisdom with his mind. After suffering enormous internal conflicts, Augustine submitted himself to Christ at the age of thirty-two, and soon thereafter became Bishop of Hippo. Augustine became a tireless defender of the faith, diligent in his role as a shepherd to the flock as well as one of the greatest intellects the Church has ever known.

In this look at the life of Augustine we will focus on two of his greatest books—the *Confessions*, and *The City of God*. As we will see, Augustine’s life and work is a testimony to the boundless mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Augustine's Youth

In a gripping television interview recently broadcast on *60 Minutes*, the man convicted of the Oklahoma City bombings spoke of his grievances against the federal government. During the interview, Timothy McVeigh revealed that his lawyers have filed an appeal that maintains that pre-trial publicity prevented him from getting a fair trial. Like many of us, McVeigh seems intent on avoiding the penalty of his actions; but rather than doing so by insisting upon his innocence, he is attempting to have the verdict thrown out due to a technicality.

It was truly disturbing to see an articulate young man such as McVeigh coldly dismiss the mass murder of innocents on the basis of a legal technicality. In many respects, his demeanor reflects the contemporary shift in attitude toward sin and guilt that has had devastating consequences for society. As a nation, America has seen a shift from a worldview primarily informed by biblical Christianity to one in which the individual is no longer responsible for his actions. Now it is either society or how one is raised that is given emphasis.

Against this cultural backdrop it is truly therapeutic to read Augustine's *Confessions*. Throughout this wonderful book, which is written in the form of a prayer, Augustine freely admits his willful disobedience to God. Augustine's intent is to reveal the perversity of the human heart, but specifically that of his own. But Augustine was not intent on just confessing his sinfulness: this book is also the confession of his faith in Christ as well. Augustine, as he is moved from a state of carnality to one of redemption, marvels at the goodness of God.

One of the most telling incidents in the *Confessions* is Augustine's recollection of a decisive event in his youth. He and an assortment of friends knew of a pear tree not far from his house. Even though the pears on the tree didn't appeal to

Augustine, he and his friends were intent on stealing the pears simply for the thrill of it. They had no need of the pears, and in fact ending up throwing them to some pigs. Augustine's account of this thievery reveals a penetrating insight into our dilemma as human beings. Whereas today many want to blame their parents or their environment for their problems, Augustine admits that his sole motive was a love of wickedness: he *enjoyed* his disobedience.

This reflects one of Augustine's major contributions to Christian theology: his emphasis on the perversity of the human will. We would all do well to read Augustine's *Confessions* if only to remind us that evil isn't simply a sickness but a condition of the heart that only Jesus Christ can heal.

Augustine's Search for Wisdom

In his fascinating book entitled *Degenerate Moderns*, author Michael Jones convincingly documents how many of the intellectual gurus of the modern era have conformed truth to their own desires. Jones research reveals how Margaret Mead, Alfred Kinsey, and other prominent trend-setters intentionally lied in their research in order to justify their own sexual immorality. Sadly, contemporary culture has swallowed their findings, leading many to conclude that sexual immorality is both normal and legitimate.

However, when we turn to Augustine's *Confessions*, we see someone who has subordinated his own desires to the truth. The *Confessions* is an account of how Augustine attempted to satisfy the longings of his heart with professional ambition, entertainment, and sex, yet remained unfulfilled. One of Augustine's most famous prayers is therefore the theme of the whole book: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee, O God." Only by submitting his own desires to the Lordship of Christ did Augustine find the peace that he was seeking.

But that submission did not come easy. Throughout most of his adult life, Augustine had been seeking to discover wisdom. But two questions were especially disturbing for him: What is the source of evil, and How can a Being without physical properties exist? Obviously, this second question was a barrier to his belief in the God of the Bible. In his search for answers, Augustine became involved with a group known as the Manichees, who combined Christian teaching with the philosophy of Plato. Plato's philosophy helped convince Augustine that existence did not require physical properties, but he found their answer to the question of evil problematic, and after eight years as a seeker left the Manichees.

Still, the most difficult barrier for Augustine was not intellectual, but a matter of the heart. He eventually came to the point where he knew he should submit himself to Christ, but was reluctant to do so if it meant giving up his relationship with his concubine. One day, while strolling through a walled garden, Augustine heard from the other side of the wall what sounded like a child's voice, saying "pick up and read, pick up and read." At first he thought it was a children's game. Then, acknowledging what he took to be a command of the Lord, he picked up a nearby Bible, and upon opening it immediately came to Romans 13:13-14, words tailor made for Augustine: "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticisms and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts." Augustine's search for wisdom was complete, as he acknowledged that wisdom is ultimately a *person*: Jesus Christ. The wisdom of God had satisfied his deepest longings.

Augustine's Philosophy of History: *The City of God*

The United States is currently going through what some call a "culture war." On the one hand there are those who believe in eternal truth and the importance of maintaining traditional

morality. At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that the individual is autonomous and should be free to live as he pleases without anyone telling him what is right or wrong. Until thirty years ago the first group held sway. Today, that same group is considered divisive and extreme by the “politically correct” mainstream culture.

But culture wars are not unique to modern America. In the year 410, mighty Rome was sacked by an invading army of Goths. Soon thereafter, the search was on for a scapegoat. In the year 381 Christianity superceded the ancient religion of the Romans as *the* state religion. This enraged those who favored the old state religion, who claimed that Rome had gained world supremacy due to the favor of the ancient gods. When Rome officially accepted the Christian God and forsook the gods, the gods were said to have withdrawn their favor and allowed the invading armies to breach the walls of Rome in order to demonstrate their anger at being replaced by the Christian God. Educated Romans found such an argument silly, but an even more serious charge was that Christians were disloyal to the state, since their allegiance was ultimately to God. Therefore, Christianity was blamed for a loss of patriotism since Christians believed themselves to ultimately be citizens of another kingdom³/₄the Kingdom of God.

Augustine responded to these accusations by writing his philosophy of history in a book entitled *The City of God*. Augustine spent thirteen years researching and writing this work, which takes its title from Psalm 87:3: “Glorious things are spoken of you, O City of God.” Augustine’s main thesis is that there are two cities that place demands on our allegiance. The City of Man is populated by those who love themselves and hold God in contempt, while the City of God is populated by those who love God and hold themselves in contempt. Augustine hoped to show that the citizens of the City of God were more beneficial to the interests of Rome than those who inhabit the City of Man.

For anyone interested in the current debate between secularists and the "Religious Right," Augustine's argument is a masterful combination of historical research and literary eloquence. Christians in particular would be well served by studying this important document, since believers are often accused of being divisive and extreme, characteristics considered by some as un-American.

In Augustine's time, it was asserted that the values of Christianity were not consistent with good Roman citizenship. But Augustine's historical investigation revealed that it is sin that is at the root of all our problems: starting with Cain's murder of Abel, the sin of Adam has borne terrible consequences.

Much of Augustine's task was to demonstrate the consequences of a society that loses its moral compass. Augustine took it upon himself to demonstrate the falsity of the assertion that the Christian worldview is incompatible with civic life. Those who maintained that the acceptance of Christian virtues had had a direct bearing on Rome's fall did so primarily from a very limited perspective. The clear implication was that Christianity, a religion that asks its adherents to love their neighbor and pray for their enemies, had fostered a society incapable of defending itself against its more vicious neighbors.

Augustine's response was to demonstrate that Rome had suffered through numerous catastrophes *long* before Christianity ever became the religion of the Romans. Actually, it was due to the respect of the Goths for Christianity that their attack wasn't worse than it was: they relented after only three days. Against those who claimed that Christians could not be loyal citizens due to their higher allegiance to God, Augustine reminded them that the Old and New Testament Scriptures actually *command* obedience to the civil authorities. And any assertion that Christianity had weakened the defense of the empire failed to acknowledge the real cause of Rome's

collapse, namely that Rome's moral degeneracy had created a society where justice was no longer valued. Augustine quotes the Roman historians as themselves recognizing the brutality at the very root of the nation, beginning with Romulus' murder of his brother Remus.

Augustine's analysis came to conclude that the virtues of Christianity are most consistent with good citizenship, and then went on to show the biblical distinction between the founding of Rome and that of the City of God. Just as Rome's origins date back to the dispute between Romulus and Remus, the City of God had its origin in the conflict between Cain and Abel. The City of Man and the City of God have intermingled ever since, and only at the final judgment of Christ will "the tares be separated from the wheat." For Augustine, the ultimate meaning of history will be borne out only when each one of us acknowledges who it was that we loved most: ourselves, or God.

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Integrity – A Christian Virtue

Kerby Anderson helps us understand the true meaning and importance of the Christian virtue of integrity. From a biblical worldview perspective, integrity is a critical element of a Christ centered life. Understanding integrity will help us incorporate it in our daily walk with Jesus Christ.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Integrity and the Bible

The subject of this article is the concept of integrity—a character quality that we often talk about but don't see quite as regularly in the lives of public officials or even in the lives of the people we live and work with.

The word *integrity* comes from the same Latin root as *integer* and implies a wholeness of person. Just as we would talk about a whole number, so also we can talk about a whole person who is undivided. A person of integrity is living rightly, not divided, nor being a different person in different circumstances. A person of integrity is the same person in private that he or she is in public.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about those who were “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8), implying an undividedness in following God's commands. Integrity, therefore, not only implies an undividedness, but a moral purity as well.

The Bible is full of references to integrity, character, and moral purity. Consider just a few Old Testament references to integrity. In 1 Kings 9:4, God instructs Solomon to walk with “integrity of heart and uprightness” as his father did. David says in 1 Chronicles 29:17, “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity.” And in Psalm 78:70-72 we read that “David shepherded them with integrity of heart, with skillful hands.”

The book of Proverbs provides an abundance of verses on integrity. Proverbs 10:9 says that, “He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.” A person of integrity will have a good reputation and not have to fear that he or she will be exposed or found out. Integrity provides a safe path through life.

Proverbs 11:3 says, “The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them.”

Proverbs is a book of wisdom. The wise man or woman will live a life of integrity, which is a part of wisdom. Those who follow corruption or falsehood will be destroyed by the decisions and actions of their lives.

Proverbs 20:7 says, “A righteous man who walks in his integrity; How blessed are his sons after him.” Integrity leaves a legacy. A righteous man or woman walks in integrity and provides a path for his or her children to follow.

All of these verses imply a sense of duty and a recognition that we must have a level of discernment of God’s will in our lives. That would certainly require that people of integrity be students of the Word, and then diligently seek to apply God’s Word to their lives. The book of James admonishes us to be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22). That is my goal in this article as we talk about integrity.

Corruption

As we examine integrity, I would like to talk about its opposite: corruption. We claim to be a nation that demands integrity, but do we really? We say we want politicians to be honest, but really don’t expect them to be; perhaps because often we aren’t as honest as we should be. We say that we are a nation of laws, but often we break some of those same laws—like speed limits and jaywalking— and try to justify our actions.

A powerful illustration can be found in the book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, by James Patterson and Peter Kim.[^{\[1\]}](#) 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 was 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:

- 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.

The Traits of Integrity

Honesty

I would now like to turn our focus toward four key traits found in a person of integrity. One of those traits is honesty.

We talked about some of the findings from the book *The Day America Told the Truth*. The authors found that nearly everyone in America lies and does so on a fairly regular basis. Truth telling apparently is no longer a virtue people try to adopt for their lives. We may say we want people to tell the truth, but we don't do it ourselves.

That is the problem with corruption; it is corrosive. We believe we can be dishonest just a little bit. We say we want people to be honest, but then we cheat on our taxes. We say we want people to obey the laws, but then we go "just a little" over the speed limit. We want to be honest just enough to ease our conscience.

It's a little like the story of the man who sent a letter to the Internal Revenue Service. He said, "I cheated on my income taxes, and felt so bad that I couldn't sleep. Enclosed find a check for \$150. And if I still can't sleep I'll send the rest of what I owe."

Many of us can relate to that man. We want to be honest, but sometimes we find it easier to be dishonest. So we try to find a way to compromise our values so that a little bit of lying doesn't bother our conscience.

Trustworthiness

Another characteristic of a person of integrity is trustworthiness. A person of integrity is unimpeachable. He or

she stands by principles no matter what the consequences. A person of integrity realizes there are moral absolutes even in a world of relative values.

In Tom Clancy's novel, *Clear and Present Danger*, Jack Ryan is about the only noble character in the book. As he begins to uncover this clandestine government plot, he is confronted by the antagonist who makes fun of Jack Ryan's principles. He says, "You're a boy scout, Jack. Don't you get it? It's all grey. It's all grey."

I wonder how often people of integrity hear a similar statement in corporate board rooms or the halls of government. It's all grey. There are no absolute right and wrong values. It's all relative.

A person of integrity knows that it isn't all grey. There are principles worth standing by and promoting. There are values that should govern our lives. We have a responsibility to follow God's law rather than the crowd.

When the book of Proverbs talks of the "integrity of the upright" it implies that we adhere to God's will and God's laws. We have a duty to obey God's absolute commands in our lives and become men and women of integrity.

"Private" Life

There is a popular book on the market entitled, *Who You Are When Nobody's Looking*. Who are you when nobody's looking? Will I see the same person that I see when you are in a group of people? Do you do the right thing no matter what the circumstances?

There was a newspaper story years ago about a man in Long Beach who went into a KFC to get some chicken for himself and the young lady with him. She waited in the car while he went in to pick up the chicken. Inadvertently the manager of the store handed the guy the box in which he had placed the

financial proceeds of the day instead of the box of chicken. You see, he was going to make a deposit and had camouflaged it by putting the money in a fried chicken box.

The fellow took his box, went back to the car, and the two of them drove away. When they got to the park and opened the box, they discovered they had a box full of money. Now that was a very vulnerable moment for the average individual. However, realizing the mistake, he got back into the car and returned to the place and gave the money back to the manager. Well, the manager was elated! He was so pleased that he told the young man, "Stick around, 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 fellow.

"Why not?" asked the manager.

"Well," he said, "you see, I'm married, and the woman I'm with is not my wife." [\[2\]](#)

Apparently he had not considered the consequences of his actions. Even when he was doing something right, it turned out he was also doing something wrong. A person of integrity is integrated and authentic. There is no duplicity of attitudes and actions.

When the apostle Paul lists the qualifications for an elder in the church, he says "he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:7). This is not only a desirable quality for church elders, it is a quality we should all aspire to. Christians should be "above reproach" in their public testimony before the watching world.

In the next section we will talk more about the importance of a public testimony of integrity and conclude our study.

Public Testimony

I would like to conclude our discussion by addressing the importance of integrity in our daily lives.

It's been said that we may be the only Bible some people ever read. In other words, people around us often judge the truthfulness of Christianity by its affect in our lives. If they see us as hypocrites, they may not go any further in their investigation of the gospel.

Every day we rub shoulders with people who are watching us. Your life will demonstrate to them whether Christianity is true or false. They make value judgements about you by your attitudes and actions. Have we made the right choice?

After his Sunday messages, the pastor of a church in London got on the trolley Monday morning to return to his study downtown. He paid his fare, and the trolley driver gave him too much change. The pastor sat down and fumbled the change and looked it over, counted it eight or ten times. And, you know the rationalization, "It's wonderful how God provides." He realized he was tight that week and this was just about what he would need to break even, at least enough for his lunch. He wrestled with himself all the way down that old trolley trail that led to his office. Finally, he came to the stop and got up, and he couldn't live with himself. He walked up to the trolley driver, and said, "Here. You gave me too much change. You made a mistake." The driver said, "No, it was no mistake. You see, I was in your church last night when you spoke on honesty, and I thought I would put you to the test." {3}

Fortunately the pastor passed the test. Do you pass the test when unbelievers look at you and your life and wonder if the gospel is true? It's a convicting question. When we live lives of integrity, opportunities for evangelism and ministry surface. When we don't, those opportunities dry up.

I have been encouraging you to develop a life of integrity. In some respects, it's a life-long process. But we have to begin somewhere. Our lives are the collection of choices we have made in the past³/₄ both good choices and bad choices. Perhaps you have seen the poem:

Sow a thought, reap an act.
Sow an act, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

I would encourage you to begin to focus on the verses and biblical principles delineated here. If you want to be a person of integrity, it won't happen overnight. But if you don't make a deliberate plan to be a person of integrity, it will never happen at all.

Notes

James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).

Dallas Times Herald, 23 Sept. 1966.

Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* (Assurance Publishers, 1990).

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