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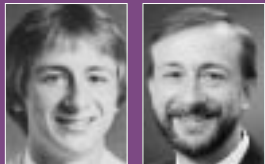
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VERITAS

Equipping Christians to live by truth—veritas—from God.

Integrity: How to Live Above the Crowd

Charles R. Swindoll



CHUCK SWINDOLL is a pastor, author, radio Bible teacher, and the chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary. His radio program "Insight for Living" airs on more than 1,900 stations worldwide. After serving as president of Dallas Seminary from 1994 to 2001, he is now senior pastor of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas. He's authored more than 50 books, including *The Grace Awakening*, *Laugh Again*, and *The Darkness and the Dawn*. He and his wife, Cynthia, make their home in Dallas, Texas, and have four children and 10 grandchildren. *This article is adapted from Dr. Swindoll's message given September 5, 2001, in Chafer Chapel on the Dallas Seminary campus.*

Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane was the chief surgeon of Kane Summit Hospital in New York City and had practiced his specialty for 37 years. He was convinced that general anesthesia was too risky, that people should be operated on with simply a well-administered local anesthesia so that all of the risks of the general anesthesia could be bypassed.

He was anxious to prove his theories. The problem was finding a guinea pig who was willing to go under the knife and to be awake during that time. All of those that he talked to, it seemed, were fearful of waking up during the surgery, that is, in their bodies and feeling the pain of the deep, probing scalpel.

But finally he found a subject. Kane had performed appendectomies thousands of times. He estimates, as he tells the story, about 4,000 times. So it was, once again, the same procedure. The patient was prepped and brought into the operating room. The local anesthesia was carefully administered and the surgery was under way. As always, he simply came to the right side of the abdomen, made a cut across that narrow section, and went in. He tied off the blood vessels, found the appendix, excised it, and finished with a nice simple

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work of suturing the incision place.

And remarkably, the patient felt very little discomfort. In fact, he was up and about the next afternoon, which is remarkable since this was back in 1921, when people who had appendectomies were kept in the hospital six, seven, even eight days.

It was a milestone in the world of medicine. And it was also a milestone in courage because the patient and the doctor were one and the same. Dr. Kane had operated on himself!

What Is Integrity?

This is what I'm asking you to do today. I want to talk about the importance of integrity. But I cannot tell your integrity by looking. This is a "soul" surgery procedure.

We'll let the scalpel of the Word of God go into the very soul and spirit within us, that it might reveal the intentions of the heart.

Now in order to whet your appetite for a subject like this, it might help if I did a crash course on the word itself. The best among our English dictionaries is the *Oxford English Dictionary*. You know it's thorough when you get the two-volume set and the print is so small a magnifying glass comes with it. I have that set in my study, so I checked out "integrity" and found that it comes from the Latin *integritas*, which means "wholeness, entirety, completeness." The root is *integer*, meaning "untouched, intact, entire." *Webster* adds, "a firm adherence to a code of moral ethics, moral values, an unimpaired condition."

A person with integrity is not divided—that's called duplicity. They

don't pretend—that's called hypocrisy. What is seen on the outside, if one has integrity, matches what is on the inside. People with integrity police themselves. They don't have to be watched. It makes no difference whether someone is looking or no one is around. The life is lived the same way.

In searching through the Scriptures for an example of this, I came to the life of Daniel. And I found in the fifth chapter a classic example of true integrity. The background is familiar to many of you. Daniel has lived through several administrations, the latest of which is Belshazzar.

That night the kingdom fell into the hands of the Medes and the Persians, and Darius took the throne from Belshazzar. He and "took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two" (verse 31).

Now when you take over a new kingdom, you set up a new administration. And it is a perfect time for corruption to enter in. Daniel, having been awarded for his good work under Belshazzar, is recognized by Darius as a trustworthy man. So he puts him as one of the three commissioners who oversee 120 governors, who together guard and administer the king's treasury. Then the text says Daniel "distinguished himself among the administrators and [the governors]."

He began distinguishing himself . . . he stood out among the crowd.

Michael Jordan, if anyone would've asked any one of us, has stood out in the ranks of the National Basketball Association.

Some of *you* are doing that. It

just seems to happen. No one told you to do it. It wasn't a part of the curriculum. But as you have continued your studies here, you are a marked person. And that's Daniel. And do you want to know why?

I want to suggest that there are four answers to that question. They just emerge right out of the text.

Why Attitude Determines Altitude

First of all, *he had a superior attitude*. In fact, Daniel 6:3 states, "Daniel so distinguished himself . . . that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom." Surely Darius brought with him his cronies. Surely he knew people better than he knew Daniel. But there was something about this extraordinary attitude that the king could not get past, he could not overlook.

No one, when you get out, will want to know what your grades were in seminary. I keep waiting for them to ask me, and they've never asked me. But they will know from the beginning about your attitude.

It just pours out all over you.

I was bringing a commencement address at a very fine school outside of the state a number of years ago and was sitting, interestingly, flanked by graduates. I had finished the commencement address and sat down as they were recognizing graduates.

Of course the greatest applause went to the valedictorian. But the faculty member sitting on my left, whom I'd known for years, didn't applaud. I leaned over and said to him, "Obviously, you're not too impressed." He said, "Well, if we were giving awards for attitude, she'd be last in the graduating class. Her attitude stinks."

Isn't that an interesting comment?

I want folks with great attitudes on my team. I don't want one sour attitude. That doesn't mean they'll always agree. That doesn't mean they won't say things that are a little hard to hear sometimes. But they do it with a great spirit.

How's your attitude? I'd love to ask you that next April, or maybe March, when the newness is worn off and the honeymoon is over. Do a little self-surgery. Let the scalpel dig deeply. Let it hurt.

Daniel possessed "exceptional qualities." He had a great attitude. The king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom

because the king noticed that. "The king planned to set him over the entire kingdom. At this, the administrators and the [governors] tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel." Isn't that interesting, that when one is promoted over others, people don't usually think "wonderful, thrilled that my peer got an appointment over me. I am delighted that he's promoted and I'm not."

As a matter of fact, when you've got a rotten attitude, you begin to look over the top of your glasses at people

They will know from the beginning about your attitude. It just pours out all over you.

who are promoted beyond you. And rather than “rejoicing with those who rejoice” you begin, in your mind at least, to find something you could be suspicious of. Always rejoice over the promotions of others. Never fail to acknowledge others’ promotions. God honors that.

Could You Survive a 60 Minutes Exposé?

But these men, pagans as they were, had no interest in that. As a matter of fact, Daniel was all the more suspicious because he was not one of the guys that ran with the crowd. “They could find no corruption in him, because,” there it is, “he was trustworthy.”

And that’s the second characteristic of integrity: *he was faithful in his work*. He was faithful in the discharge of his official duties. This is not about his religious life, this is about how he did his work in governmental affairs. That’s what they looked into. They began to try to find a ground of accusation in regard to governmental affairs, his work. He was diligent, he was honest. They could have brought in *60 Minutes* to do an exposé on him, and they wouldn’t have found a thing because he was faithful.

I just read this morning in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” I don’t know if you’re employed outside the school; most of you probably are.

Let me ask how things are at work. How are you doing at work? Faithful to the “nth” degree? Diligent? Punctual? Good spirit? Cooperative? Innovative?

Having initiative? They are all qualities that make an employer pleased to have you.

I’ll never forget my good friend in another state who ran an excellent clothing business, in fact, top-of-the-line clothing for men. “I’ve hired my last Christian,” he said to me one sad day. We were having lunch. I put my fork down and said, “How can you say that?” “Because I can’t trust them. They are the ones who take advantage of me. They know I’m a Christian, so they expect special treatment—a little extra time off, a little understanding when they are late to work, a lack of diligence.” And he said, “I’ve really hired my last Christian.”

If you worked for him, would you be on that list? You know what, I don’t think so. I don’t think that would characterize you at work, as it didn’t Daniel. There was no negligence and there was no corruption.

“What Are You Doing?!”

Characteristic number three is *purity in his private world*. No negligence; no corruption; excellent attitude; faithful and honest at work; personally pure. With Daniel, there were 122 men looking for something impure to use against him. They were rifling through his files, they were checking when no one was looking, they were spying on him, they were trying to find any shred of evidence against him, and they couldn’t find a thing. Remarkable.

You don’t steal, do you? You’re not lying, you’re not cheating, are you?

I’ll never forget sitting in a classroom where Dr. Stan Toussaint

was the teacher and we were translating Greek. It was a small class, so the guy was dumb not thinking Dr. Toussaint would see him. Dr. Toussaint has X-ray vision. So this guy’s sitting there and we’re all translating, stumbling through 2 Corinthians, and he’s reading it like he’s reading *Time* magazine. And he has an English language Bible in his lap! That really helps, by the way, in the reading of the Greek text. You just have to kind of change the language and shrug a little with the order of words, but if you’re sharp, as some liars are, you can do it.

But I’ll never forget Dr. Toussaint, while the guy was looking at both text and Bible and didn’t realize that he was about to be assaulted by a very, very strong-hearted man. “*What are you doing?!*” was about the way he said it.

This guy tried to lie his way out of it right there. Right there with a Bible in his lap! I wanted to say, “Duh, you dummy, don’t go any further. Just say, ‘I’m cheating.’ Just say it!” Not only did Dr. Toussaint dismiss the class, he threw the guy out of school, as he should have done, and never regretted it.

You cheat here, you’ll cheat later. You cheat here, you’ll cheat on your wife or your husband. Don’t cheat. No negligence, no corruption. Let’s just understand, that goes with ministry. That just goes with it.

Don’t ever find out where they count the money when they take the

offering at church. Don’t even take money from people. Tell them, “That’s what this usher is here to help you with,” or “This deacon will be glad to take that check you forgot to put in the offering plate.” Don’t touch the money.

The Linchpin of Your Spiritual Success

You know the story, they finally decided that if they’re going to catch him, they’re going to catch him in doing something against the king.

So they tricked the king into signing this stupid edict stating that if anybody believed in any authority aside from the king of the Medes and

Persians, they’d be thrown in the den of lions. And Daniel found that out (verse 10). “Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published,” look at what he did. “He went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem.” I love this: “Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

And that’s the fourth characteristic of integrity: *consistency in your spiritual life*. Daniel was there when things were good; he was there when his life was threatened. He was there when promotion was in front of him; he was there when the lions’ den was just around the corner.

I had the privilege a number of months ago to have a little part in Tom

Don’t ever find out where they count the money when they take the offering at church.... Don’t touch the money.

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Landry's funeral. The best part of it was being with the former players, whom I've admired from a distance on the television set. And here stood Randy White, who choked back the tears, this all-pro, Hall of Fame lineman, and said, "The thing I always loved about Coach, he just walked the talk. He didn't try to ram that stuff down us, he just walked the talk."

And that's virtually what they were all saying about Mr. Landry—he walked the talk. That's the greatest thing they can say about you as a minister. You can preach, but you can live better than you can preach. You can challenge folks, but if they want to get a flashlight and look in your window when nobody's around or check your files or the history on your Web browser—if they want to look when nobody's around—there's not a blessed thing that they're going to find that's going to disqualify you, because you "walk the talk." Keep doing that.

The embarrassment of this particular generation is that all of these things have now invaded the church. There's always been sin, but it seems like lately that there's been a lack of blushing over the sins as they have become a part of the church.

That breaks my heart.

I read this past week about Rafael, the great painter, who was working on one of his famous Vatican frescoes when a couple of dignified-looking cardinals decided to stop and watch him work and, as always, criticize it. One of them stood there and frowned and said, "The face of the apostle Paul is much too red." Rafael responded, without even looking up, "He blushes to see into whose hands the church has fallen."

HELP US, OUR FATHER, IN THE PROCESS OF LIVING THIS LIFE, to really live it. Teach us in these early days, for these first-year students at this seminary, that faking it is just about the worst possible act. Help us all because we're all "prone to wander . . . prone to leave the God [we] love." Help us to get at this business of walking the talk and help us to address the things deep within our lives far more carefully than we address the things of the text or the assignment that's given us.

GIVE US THE COURAGE TO DO SELF-SURGERY, FATHER, and start with me. Keep me from resting on my laurels or leaning on some kind of reputation that other people have of me, and all that kind of "stuff." Help me to do this better than I have communicated. Guard our school, our Father, from scandal. Guard our faculty from disappointment and the shock of finding a student cheating.

WATCH OVER US, LORD, IN THE PRESSURES OF THIS ENVIRONMENT so that we police ourselves and become better students of who we are, so that we might come to terms with the stuff that we're going to drag into our ministry and deal with it now. I ask this with all my heart in the name of the only perfect One who ever lived, our sovereign Savior, Jesus.

And everybody said . . . amen.

You and I Are On the Hook

I never cease to be challenged by Chuck Swindoll, my friend and our chancellor here at Dallas Seminary. I am glad he loves us—me, our students who heard this chapel message, and the readers of *Veritas* enough to give us the tough, practical advice found in this article.

We *all* need a Daniel. We all, as maturing Christians, need models of integrity in action, up close.

And secondly, we all need to be, or become, a Daniel to others—people of integrity who can inspire, encourage, and mentor others.

The apostle Paul taught the first Christians how to do this. He told the church at Corinth to imitate him as he imitated Christ (see 1 Cor. 4:16). And he told the Philippians, "Join . . . in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Phil. 3:17).

If we're going to be Jesus' disciples, men and women of integrity, we need to follow godly leaders. And as we *become* people of integrity, we're to model the godly Christian life for others. We're to be the ones Paul was talking about, the ones who set the "pattern" for other Christians.

Hebrews 13:7 says we're to remember those who have leadership over us and imitate their faith.

We shouldn't idolize celebrities' personality and style. Instead, we should admire those who demonstrate the attitude, faithfulness, purity, and consistency Chuck pointed us toward. What a powerful sermon our lives will be.



DR. MARK L. BAILEY
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Bailey".