

## I. Introduction

- A. I am so glad you are here today. I've been missing our times together. It's great to see you. I know you've been in very good hands—Ken, Jim, and Todd—let's give it up for these guys who preached while I was gone. You've been fed and challenged spiritually about generations and how we need each other. I'm grateful for these co-workers in our ministry. We are a very blessed church.
- B. Before I get into my message today, I have some exciting news for you. In case you have not heard, something big happened on Tuesday here in the city of Redding, CA.
- C. On Tuesday, June 22, at 5:20 pm, the City of Redding Planning Commission gave unanimous approval to our building use permit for Neighborhood Church.
- D. It's gonna happen.
- E. Nobody other than Erich Roehl and Mike Dormer has a clue how much work has gone into this moment. We are grateful. We are excited. Let's pray for a base of operations to make disciples who incarnate the love of Jesus here and around the world for many years to come.
- F. Now the real work begins.

## II. Today's Message

- A. I want to start a short summer message series today. You came on a good day; it's always good to get in on the ground floor of a message series.
- B. Our series is called CHARACTER TOUR. We are looking at the importance of character in our lives.
- C. What's really cool about this message is that I'm coordinating these messages with our Six Flags Family Ministry. So the topic I preach on today will be not repeated, but reinforced on this Thursday night with our kids and our families at Six Flags. I hope you can come back for dinner, teaching, great activities for kids, and dessert, every Thursday night.
- D. Which brings us to our topic today, and to set it up, let's read the Bible.

III. *7 And about this time, Potiphar's wife began to desire him and invited him to sleep with her. 8 But Joseph refused. "Look," he told her, "my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. 9 No one here has more authority than I do! He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I ever do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God." 10 She kept putting pressure on him day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. 11 One day, however, no one else was around when he was doing his work inside the house. 12 She came and grabbed him by his shirt, demanding, "Sleep with me!" Joseph tore himself away, but as he did, his shirt came off. She was left holding it as he ran from the house. (Genesis 39:7-12, NLT).*

- A. Our first character quality in this series today is INTEGRITY. I'd like to talk about Integrity.
- B. Joseph is a really strong, really handsome young man. Very desirable. A lot like me. And his boss's wife, Mrs. Potiphar, keeps hitting on him.
- C. What's a young guy to do?
- D. He asks, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"
- E. Integrity.
- F. Joseph is loyal to his boss, Mr. Potiphar. Potiphar entrusted everything to Joseph. The house. The grounds. The other servants. His businesses. His checkbook. His social security number. All the passwords for his online accounts. According to Joseph, Potiphar has not kept back even one thing from Joseph's power, except what? Or whom?
- G. Mrs. Potiphar.
- H. And now every day, she grabs him and begs him to have sex with her. Over and over. Day after day. She tries to wear him down.
- I. What are the odds of you being Joseph today?

## IV. Integrity

- A. I checked into a few definitions of integrity. Here are some that I like:
  - 1. Integrity means who you are when no one's looking.
    - a) What a great concept. Nobody checking on you. Nobody hold you accountable. Nobody looking over your shoulder at the computer screen. Nobody tracking your text messages. Nobody you know at the hotel room. Nobody looking. Who are you? Are you the same person that you are on Sunday at church when everybody's looking as you are on Tuesday in the car in a strange town when nobody's looking?
    - b) Here's Joseph as a young adult. His friends are gone. His family is gone. Everybody who knows his God is gone. His religion is gone. NO ONE WHO MATTERS IS LOOKING. But he stays true to himself.
    - c) Why?
    - d) Here's a second definition I really like:
  - 2. Integrity means a firm adherence to a code of values: being honest, trustworthy and incorruptible.
    - a) Joseph stayed true because he had values—a code of values.
    - b) Joseph valued loyalty to his boss.
    - c) Joseph valued sexual purity.
    - d) This makes life easy, because when you have values, you don't have to think so hard when you're tempted. You already know your answers.

- e) Once you have values, they're always your values, even if you go into a new culture or a new environment. Values aren't shape shifters. They stay the same. You don't compromise. You don't adapt your values to your peer group. And you don't give in to a big juicy temptation, even if you know you can get away with it. That's integrity.
- 3. Integrity means always being true to yourself, your best self.
  - a) I added the last three words, because they're important.
  - b) Listen to this verse from Proverbs: *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls (Proverbs 25:28, NKJV).*
  - c) This is a great illustration of integrity.
  - d) Your inner life is like a city. This is the core truth of who you are: your values, your desires, your hopes, and dreams, and prayers. Your personality. Your memories. You. Like a city.
  - e) The walls around your city represent your boundaries, your ability to protect yourself and be yourself. That's important, don't you think? If you think it's important to protect yourself and be yourself, say Amen. It won't hurt you. The Bible thinks so too.
  - f) Integrity means that nobody has breached the walls of your city.
    - (1) Nobody has labeled you and made it stick.
    - (2) Nobody has redefined you.
    - (3) Nobody owns you.
    - (4) Nobody defeats you.
    - (5) Nobody put you into permanent victim status.
  - g) You are you, because your walls are intact. Or, Star Trek fans would say, there's no breach in the hull.
  - h) When you have your integrity, your **ACTIONS** stay true to your **IDENTITY**.
  - i) I don't think you got that: Your actions stay true to your identity.
  - j) Do you know that **TEMPTATION** is?

#### v. Temptation and Identity

- A. Temptation is an attack on your identity—your truest self, your best self in Christ.
- B. In Christ, your identity is pure and holy, but temptation says, **SLEEP WITH ME.**
- C. In Christ, your identity is true and honest, but temptation says, **TELL A LIE, CHEAT ON YOUR ASSIGNMENT.**
- D. In Christ, your identity is powerful and able to do all things, but temptation says, **HAVE ANOTHER DRINK, TAKE ANOTHER HIT—YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELF.**
- E. In Christ, your identity is forgiven and cleansed, not perfect, but forgiven for not being perfect, but temptation says, **MAKE THEM THINK YOU'RE PERFECT. MAKE THEM THINK YOU'RE SWEAT DON'T STINK. PUT ON A GOOD FACE, A FALSE FRONT, BE PERFECT, LOOK PERFECT, DRESS PERFECT, WRITE AND SPEAK PERFECT, AND SMELL PERFECT.**
- F. In Christ, your identity is regal, you are spiritual royalty with dominion and authority, but temptation says **YOU'RE A VICTIM, YOU'RE DAMAGED GOODS, and YOU'RE RUINED FOR LIFE.**
- G. In Christ, your identity possesses a noble, self-respecting yet self-giving love, but temptation says **THEY'RE CHEATING YOU, AND GOD IS CHEATING YOU SO LASH OUT AND TAKE CARE OF NUMBER ONE.**
- H. Temptation is an attack on the walls of your city, an attack on your identity in Christ.
- I. When you received Christ, he swooped in and created a brand new you. Not really a new you, but he unleashed the real you—the best you—with all your uniqueness and personality and strength.
- J. And when you have integrity, you let **THAT** identity shine through in every temptation, in every test, in every opportunity, and in every trial.
- K. Even if someone is tugging at your sleeve, dragging you into bed.
- L. Integrity means always being true to your best self.

#### VI. And one more definition:

- A. (4) Integrity means always being true to God.
- B. Joseph said, "How can I sin against God?"
- C. A man named Job suffered epic amounts of pain and his own wife tried to tear him down from his lofty identity. She said, "Why don't you just curse God and die?" And he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Integrity means always being true to God.
- D. Before Jesus was crucified, he prayed. He could feel his death closing in on him, and the pain, and torture he dreaded the alienation and condemnation his own Father was about to heap on him. He could sense the horrors of the Cross about to pounce.
- E. *And he prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39, NKJV).*
- F. He came to do his Father's will. He lived to please his God. And when his own heart was tempted to shrink back from his calling, Jesus had integrity. He resisted the attack on his walls. He stayed true to his God, and by doing that stayed true to himself.

## VII. Integrity...

- A. If you're going to get married, be sure to marry a man or a woman with integrity.
- B. If you're dating, date a person with integrity.
- C. If you're married, be a person of integrity.
- D. If you're married to a person without integrity, still, be a person of integrity.
- E. How could I sin against my master? How could I sin against God?

## VIII. Turn a corner

- A. Now I want to turn a corner and ask how to develop integrity because everything I've said so far you can hear in any school, in any business, in any seminar in the world.
- B. What is it about Christian integrity that sets it apart from other brands?
- C. Simply this: True integrity is a fruit of the Spirit.
- D. In this series, we are going to talk about character: integrity, self-control, faith, courage, and endurance.
- E. Why?
- F. So you can be Jesus in all your places. So you can be Jesus at work. Jesus at home. Jesus at school. Jesus in the neighborhood. Jesus in the mall. Jesus on I-5. And Jesus in the line at Costco.
- G. His character needs to be your character.
- H. How does that happen?

## IX. Two approaches:

- A. There are two approaches, two theories on how this happens. If you're a church brat, like me, for most of your life you have been pounded with theory one:
- B. Method one: BY IMITATION.
  - 1. The character of Jesus becomes the character of you by imitation. You imitate Jesus. Walk in his steps. Be a WWJD kind of person. Imitate your Savior.
  - 2. There's good Scripture for this approach:
    - a) *I Therefore be imitators of God as dear children (Ephesians 5:1, NKJV).*
  - 3. So when I stand up, and preach—hey you, imitate God—how do you feel about that?
  - 4. How about this one:
    - a) *I Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1, NKJV).*
  - 5. I'll imitate Jesus, and you can imitate me. That's what Paul says.
  - 6. Look, I believe in imitation as a means of holiness. But you can't start there. You need to start with someone else, because you're trying to imitate what is impossible for mortals to imitate—the perfections of Jesus Christ.
  - 7. So how can we have his character, his endurance, his courage, his faith, his self-control, and his integrity flowing through our veins?
- C. Method two: ABIDE IN CHRIST
  - 1. *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:4, 5, NKJV).
  - 2. Stay with me, because this is big. Look at the metaphor Jesus used to help us understand what this means.
    - a) Who is the vine? Jesus.
    - b) Who are the branches? Us/Believers in Jesus
    - c) When we abide in him, what do we bear? Fruit
    - d) What quantity of fruit? Much fruit
    - e) Without Jesus, what can we do? NOTHING
  - 3. We are talking about character. We are talking about integrity. We are talking about the fruit, the product, and the outgrowth of your connection with Christ.
  - 4. And what I want you to know above everything else is this:
    - a) FRUIT HAPPENS.
  - 5. It is not about imitating. It is not about striving. It is not about straining, and pushing, and white-knuckling anything.
  - 6. FRUIT HAPPENS—when?
  - 7. When the branch stays connected to the vine, the life of the vine, the nutrients of the vine flow through the branch, and FRUIT HAPPENS—Integrity happens.
  - 8. Some of you are trying to force the characteristics of Christ in your life. You are trying to force fruit. You are straining and struggling to produce by effort what can only be produced by nature and by life.
  - 9. The Creator sets something in motion, and fruit happens: A new creation, a new life, a new union with Christ—that is where every good thing in your life comes from.
  - 10. If you get stressed out trying to be like Jesus, you're not like Jesus. If you get legalistic, and driven by a list of to-do's to become like our Savior, Jesus; if you are burning yourself out trying to imitate the ONE whose life cannot be imitated.
  - 11. Jesus has you in mind when he says, APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING!
  - 12. But stay connected to me, Jesus said, and you will bear much fruit, and that includes integrity, and love, and joy, and peace, and patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.
  - 13. You will be Jesus in your character.

14. So how? If it's not about imitation, and striving, and pushing out fruit, then what is it about?
15. Simple. One thing:
- a) **NURTURE THE LIFE.**
16. Pay attention to the roots, and the fruits pretty much take care of themselves.
17. Nurture the life. Cultivate your connection to the vine who is Jesus. How? What does that mean?
- a) Nourish the roots. Provide good nutrients for the vine. And that means the Bible. You listen to God's voice through the word, day by day, reading your Bible, doing your devotions, listening to messages, exposing your heart to the voice of God that we call **SCRIPTURE**. Nourish the life.
  - b) Cherish the connection. We just finished a ridiculous amount of landscaping in rocky soil at the Giovannetti house. Some of our trees came wired to a wood stake. When we planted them, we planted the stake and all. A few weeks later, I noticed something. The wire was strangling the trunk. The trunk was bulging around the wire, and it was time to cut the wire ties, so the nutrients could flow. To me, that's prayer. The energy and nutrients have to flow to all the branches or there will be no fruit, and that flow is prayer. You talk to God thru prayer; he talks to you through Scripture. Do not expect integrity, at least not the kind God wants you to have, unless you nurture the life of Christ in you—without him, you can do nothing.
    - (1) So you nourish the roots—Scripture and...
    - (2) You cherish the connection—prayer and...
  - c) Join the forest. Okay, you got me. I'm leaving the vineyard analogy, but I have to. I just came from Alliance Redwoods Camp which is in redwood forest. Redwood trees grow fantastically high—400 and 500' and more. I learned that they have a little tiny root system, way too small to hold the trees high. **BUT** what they do is that high up in the upper elevations, the join limbs, and holds each other up. And I'm telling you, that you need to join limbs with the people around you, in the mystical body of Christ—if the life of Christ is ever going to show up in you the way God wants it too.
  - d) Cut out the dead parts. That's called pruning. Whatever you do that kills your integrity, prune it. Get internet filters if you have to. Get a friend to pray for you. Cut up the credit cards. If there is a diseased limb, cut it off. Don't negotiate with it, prune it. Don't accept it, prune it. Don't surrender and tell yourself it's just the way you are—cut out the dead parts and even that is impossible without this last guideline:
  - e) Trust the mystery of life because when you have a vine, and you nourish the roots, and cherish the connection of each branch to the trunk, and when you cut out the dead parts—you know what? **FRUIT HAPPENS.**

#### x. Conclusion

- A. Like I said, we just got our building use permit.
- B. I am excited about what God is doing.
- C. And I'm nervous too because I don't want to build a church on human energy. I don't want us to be just another emotional/psychological institution—something Oprah could create with a little Jesus sprinkled over the top.
- D. It's not imitation, it's habitation. Christ in you, the hope of glory. If we don't abide in him, let's not build. If we don't want to be Jesus in our communities, let's not build. Let's not grow at all. Let's not even play church if we're not going to do this thing God's way.
- E. Because when it comes to character, the character that really counts is the character of God, expressed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and now re-created in you as you nurture your connection to the vine.