

January 11, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: INTEGRITY: CHARACTER LIVED OUT, Genesis 39:1-23 (*Growing #2*)

You are single, good looking and have a great job. You've risen to the position of being over all other employees. Your boss trusts you completely, even with personal finances. Then one day someone of the opposite gender makes a pass at you. This person is wealthy and probably very attractive. Even though you initially ignore it, this person continues to come on to you. *No one will know. You're single.* What are the possible outcomes? (Audience participation.)

Second scenario. You are personally chosen for advancement on the fast track in the most powerful organization in the world. Training requires you to do some things that trouble you. Those things won't harm you physically. In fact they are meant for your benefit, but you have some qualms because of your faith. Refusing to comply with the training standards could go quite badly for you. What are the possible outcomes? (Audience participation.)

Third scenario. You are determined to travel to a distant location, where your life has previously been threatened. All your friends and associates warn that if you go, there will be trouble. This is confirmed by prayer. What are the possible outcomes? (Audience participation.)

Each of these is an actual scenario. The second involves Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (better known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego). The third scenario involves the Apostle Paul and his desire to go to Jerusalem. **Each scenario is an example of a test or trial.**

The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 that God tests our hearts, specifically to see if we will be the people we say we are. Before Jesus feeds the five thousand, he tests his disciples. *When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.* John 6:5-6 Moses reminds the people before they enter the Promised Land of Canaan that their years of wandering were not just punishment. *"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."* Deuteronomy 8:2

How do we respond in difficult circumstances? In Tolkien's classic trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, the characters face repeated decisions, which serve as tests. One of the most famous scenes is of the Lady Galadriel being offered the one ring of power by Frodo. She refuses and, as she realizes, passes *the test*.

As I shared last week, life is filled with trials and difficulties. **Although not all these are initiated by God, He nevertheless uses these as tests to see if He**

can entrust us with something more, something greater, whether it is an ancient promise, the ability to be part of and understand a miracle or the preciousness of being His spokesperson of the good news of Jesus.

The three scenarios I mentioned are **tests of integrity**. Integrity, in our language, refers to being complete, whole, sound. The word honesty is listed as a synonym. The biblical understanding of integrity is similar (cf. Proverbs 10:9; 11:3). **Integrity is really about how we live out our character. Does what we say and do match who we are in our deepest being?**

Dr. Robert Clinton writes that God uses challenges or *checks* of our integrity to encourage us to follow through on a promise or vow, to insure that we have a true burden for a ministry or vision, to confirm an inner character strength, to build faith, to establish inner values important for later challenges, to teach submission and to warn others of the seriousness of obeying God [J. Robert Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers, 1989), 125]. Temptation tests our conviction. Restitution tests our honesty. A test of values makes us consider which ones are most important. A test of loyalty challenges our allegiance. These are just some of the integrity tests God uses in our lives.

Let's take a closer look at the first scenario I mentioned. Please turn with me to Genesis 39. ([Read Genesis 39:1-23.](#)) You will remember that Joseph grew up, the eleventh of twelve brothers in a very dysfunctional family. Because of jealousy over their father's favoritism of Joseph his brothers sell him into slavery to traders, who ultimately take him to Egypt and sell him to Pharaoh's chief of security. If you desire to be a person of integrity . . .

- Be faithful in the little things.

Joseph has to grow up fast. Some of you can relate because you are the oldest, faced poverty, struggled with a health problem or grew up with only one parent. Who is with Joseph during this time (vs. 2)? [Read vss. 2-6a.](#) Potiphar notices that **whatever Joseph does is done well and is blessed**. He learns to trust Joseph completely.

Sometimes we desire to be recognized, advanced more quickly, feel like we should be entrusted with more, but we must realize that God knows all of that. We must be faithful in little things . . . and God will honor that. Can God do significant things in little places? Of course. He does it all the time. I met Ronald and Nancy Reagan when I was a 17-year old farm kid in Iowa. When I was pastoring my first church in Linton, I got a telephone call one morning from Paul Harvey. **God can and does do whatever He wants wherever we are.**

Jesus says, “*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.*” Luke 16:10 (cf. vss. 11-15)

Bernard Madoff, former chairman of NASDAQ, was a man trusted for his expertise in managing a huge corporation. He became an investment manager, people trusting him with billions of dollars. We’ve come to learn that the money was never invested. New money was used to pay *returns* on previous investments, while the principle evaporated.

Joseph is a man of integrity. Potiphar notices . . . but he isn’t the only one. Who else notices? Potiphar’s wife is attracted to Joseph because of his character, his abilities, his hard work, his dependability, his management skills, his power and . . . Read vs. 6b-7. She tests Joseph’s integrity.

How many of us compromise our standards? We move across the line. Or maybe we move right up to the line and then wonder why we get hurt when we lean over it. *Where was God*, we ask? Where were we? Maybe we do what we do to spite someone, a parent, a spouse, a girlfriend or boyfriend. **If you desire to be a person of integrity, be faithful in little things.** If you desire to remain a person of integrity . . .

- Stay firm through testing.

How do we stay firm? (Audience participation.) **We stay firm by continuing to live by the principles of God’s word.** Listen to what John writes. *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.* 1 John 2:15-17 **Where is your real love?**

Our character is continually tested. Do we cheat? Compromise our standards? Lower the bar? Fudge a little bit on quality? Give in?

In his book *Integrity: the Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality*, Dr. Henry Cloud writes that **character is the key to integrity.** Although the book is addressed specifically to people in business, the principles apply to more than business contexts. If we are to be people of integrity, then we need to look at various aspects of character, including:

1. *The ability to connect authentically (which leads to trust)*
2. *The ability to be oriented toward the truth (which leads to finding and operating in reality)*
3. *The ability to work in a way that gets results and finishes well (which leads to reaching goals, profits or the mission)*

4. *The ability to embrace, engage, and deal with the negative (which leads to ending problems, resolving them, or transforming them)*
5. *The ability to be oriented toward growth (which leads to increase)*
6. *The ability to be transcendent (which leads to enlargement of the bigger picture and oneself)* [Cloud. *Integrity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 35]

Cloud writes that integrity means moving beyond surface relationships, searching out the complete truth, doing our very best and helping others do the same, working toward resolving problems and difficulties, always seeking that which is better and realizing there we are part of a whole bigger picture.

Notice the differing responses of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Read vss. 7-10. There's the **look** (vs. 6), the **thought**, the **invitation** (vs. 7) and the **persistence** (vs. 10; cf. Proverbs 5:8; Ephesians 6:10-18). She tries to emotionally wear down Joseph's resistance. Why does Joseph refuse her advances? Joseph mentions his master (her husband), but that isn't the chief reason. **This is sin and sin is against God**. David understood this when he wrote Psalm 51. Read vss. 11-12. If you desire to keep your integrity . . .

- Flee temptation.

What does Joseph do? He leaves . . . even his cloak. The Apostle Paul counsels Timothy, *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* 2 Timothy 2:22 (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4; Joseph's not willing to *even be with her*, vs. 10)

Potiphar's wife isn't pursuing love; she's pursuing lust. When Joseph rejects her advances, she turns on him in a moment. She concocts a plan, telling the assistants and her husband that he tried to assault her

It is interesting that Potiphar only throws Joseph in jail, but doesn't have him killed. Does he suspect the truth? Verse 19 says Potiphar becomes very angry, but the text is ambiguous. Is his anger because of what Joseph allegedly has done or is it because of his wife's accusation against *his slave*, in effect blaming Potiphar for the trouble? Does he suspect his wife? Maybe all.

Our problem is that **we think we can handle the situation**. We are mature. We needlessly put ourselves in questionable situations and then we fall. It's not that we are seeking to fall (at least that's what we tell ourselves), but we compromise a little more and a little more until we find that we've crossed the line. **Our pride gets us into trouble**.

The Bible says, *If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you*

are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

Read vs. 20-23. **Even though Joseph does the right thing, it does not mean that things automatically turn around. The test continues for Joseph.** From the perspective of looking at his whole life and what God will accomplish, it is a time to toughen Joseph.

Tests of our integrity don't just have to do with sexual sin and *passing the test* does not mean one faces an immediate reprieve. **God, though, promises His presence, giving whatever strength and guidance is needed to pass the test.**

Conclusion. So where are you? Have you failed? I don't know any of us who haven't failed at various points. If you have unconfessed sin, acknowledge that sin and failure to God, confess it and then start with the little things. Stay in His word and His way. **Remember that it is the power of Jesus Christ that forgives and the power of the Holy Spirit living in us that causes us to stand in Him. Maybe you are standing firm, but continuing to face test after test.** I invite you to review this outline or reread the message on the website. *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Galatians 6:9 **Keep your eyes on Jesus. God will honor you.** (Pray.)