

Checking for Cracks in the Foundation

“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”

(Acts 23:1).

John Maxwell in his book, *Developing the Leader Within You* relates an interesting story. In ancient China the people wanted protection from their enemies. They built a great wall. The wall was so high that they believed that no one would be able to climb over it. It was so thick that no one could cut through it or break it down. During the first one hundred years after the wall was built, China was invaded three times. The enemy did not break down the wall or climb over it. What happened? Each time they bribed the gatekeeper and then marched through the gates. “The Chinese were so busy relying on walls of stone they forgot to teach integrity to their children.”

A newspaper cartoon depicts a young boy named Kofi in a fruit tree stealing oranges. A passerby yells, “Kofi, you better come down, or I will report you to your father.”

The boy responds, “Go ahead. He’s in the next tree.”

What did Kofi’s father lack? He lacked integrity and/or good character.

“The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him” (Proverbs 20:7).

How do children reap the blessings of their parents’ integrity?

1. Children learn from their parents’ example. Like father, like son. One proverb says, “The fruit never falls very far from the tree.” (See Ezekiel 16:44.)
2. When parents plant good seeds, the children reap them. (See Psalms 37:25.)
3. Though a child strays, he will have clear guidelines and a conscience that will haunt and judge him as he travels through life. Hopefully, this will encourage him to return to the right paths.
4. The children enjoy the blessings the parent(s) receive.
5. The evil men do lives after them. (See Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9.) The opposite is true also. The good men do lives after them.
6. When parents live above reproach, their children can hold their heads high because of a godly heritage. When reproach comes to the family, all are affected, and children bow their heads in shame.
7. If parent(s) live in hypocrisy, the salvation of the child(ren) can be negatively affected. They will not have a desire to be like their parent(s).

8. The things that are practiced in moderation today will be done in excess tomorrow. Parents who lift up a standard to lighten the way show their children how to walk straight.

Paul lived a life of integrity, blameless before God and man. He walked and worked among men with a clear conscience.

Men of integrity possess a strong, upright, and blameless character. It has been said, "The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he would never be found out." The habits and the framework of our lives should always be decent and blameless. Someone is watching us.

"Character is what you become in the dark."
(D. L. Moody)

In *Becoming a Person of Influence*, John Maxwell quotes Philip Brooks, "Character is made in the small moments of our lives." Maxwell goes on to say, "Anytime you break a moral principle, you create a small crack in the foundation of your integrity. And when times get tough, it becomes harder to act with integrity, not easier. Character isn't created in a crisis; it only comes to light." When crisis and problems come, they reveal what we have become. We either become stronger or weaker in such times. Trials can become opportunities that build us up, or temptations that pull us down.

Because the scorpion was a poor swimmer, he asked the turtle to carry him across a river. "Are you mad?" said the turtle. "You will sting me while I'm swimming, and I'll drown."

"My dear turtle," laughed the scorpion, "If I were to sting you, you would drown, and I would also drown with you. Now that wouldn't make sense, would it?"

The scorpion climbed aboard and halfway across the river gave the turtle a mighty sting. As they both sank to the bottom, the confused turtle asked, "Do you mind if I ask you something? You said there would be no sense in you stinging me. Why did you do it?"

"It has nothing to do with whether it makes sense or not," the drowning scorpion sadly replied. "It's just my character." (*Quotable Quotations*; Lloyd Cory)

An accurate phrase depicting "integrity" is "purity of heart." It is an essential quality for those in leadership.

📖 "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

📖 "The integrity of the upright shall guide them" (Proverbs 11:3).

📖 "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, *NIV*).

Guard your heart so you will not muddy the waters of your life. No one likes to drink from a dirty, contaminated, bug-ridden pond. It is easy to say, "Guard your heart" but harder to accomplish. It is a daily struggle to maintain a pure heart.

Maintaining a Pure Heart

1. Love God and His people (Mark 12:30-31).
2. Discipline yourself to please God (1 Timothy 4:7-8).
3. Follow peace and holiness (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16).
4. Focus on God (Colossians 3:2).
5. Heed God's Word (Psalms 119:9).
6. Hate evil (Psalms 97:10; Proverbs 8:13).
7. Think about the right things (Philippians 4:8).
8. Stay accountable to an accountability partner—your spouse, and/or leadership.
9. Preserve the Word of God in your heart (Psalms 119:10-11).
10. Remain in touch with God through prayer, fasting, personal Bible study, and attending church services.
11. Do not allow a root of bitterness to enter your life (Hebrews 12:15).
12. Beware of the little foxes that spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:15). Do not allow little things to come into your life that could grow into gigantic problems tomorrow.
13. Be careful of what you allow to enter through the five senses: see, hear, touch, taste, and smell (Psalms 101:3).
14. Exercise self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Deny self; take up the cross (Luke 9:23).
15. Die daily to the flesh (1 Corinthians 15:31). Crucify the flesh (Galatians 5:24-25). Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25).
16. Avoid the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and pride of life (1 John 2:16; James 1:13-14). Stay away from places of temptation.
17. Do not get involved in gossip or backbiting. It pulls down integrity (Proverbs 18:8; Proverbs 21:23; 1 Corinthians 15:33, Titus 2:8).
18. Flee fornication (1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22).
19. Resist the devil (James 4:7).
20. Know yourself and your areas of susceptibility. Every one is tempted in some area.
21. Set a standard (code of conduct) for yourself, in accordance with God's Word (Jeremiah 51:27). This should be predetermined so when temptations come, you have already made the decision of what to do.
22. Remind yourself of your position in God. You are His child and a man of God. Joseph wanted to preserve his relationship with God and his master (Genesis 39:9). Therefore, he would not commit adultery with Potiphar's wife.
23. God always provides a way of escape. Look for it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

*"He who loves purity of heart
And has grace on his lips,
The king will be his friend"
(Proverbs 22:11, NKJV)*

Integrity is like a new building under construction. It is built one block at a time. The proper decisions we make cement together the blocks of our character. Each time we fail in our integrity or fall to a temptation, the building is weakened. It eventually becomes unsafe and unusable.

The world's largest bell has never been rung. It weighs 219 tons and is 18-feet high. During its construction, a single drop of water got into the mold. When the bell was cast, it cracked because of one drop of water. What is the consequence? The bell has never been heard.

God is building us into vessels of honor to be used for His glory. Make sure there are no cracks in your foundation.

Study Questions

1. How did the enemy invade China? _____

2. What do we learn from this? _____

3. Why did the scorpion sting the turtle even when it meant that both would drown? _____

4. What happens each time that you break a moral principle? _____

5. Compare integrity to a new building under construction. _____

6. What did D. L. Moody say about integrity? _____

7. What does Philip Brooks say about character? _____

8. When the foundation of integrity has cracks in it, what happens in crisis? _____

9. Why should a Christian guard his heart? _____

10. What is an accurate phrase that depicts the meaning of "integrity"? _____

11. What are three ways children reap the blessings of their parents' integrity? _____

12. List ten ways a Christian can maintain a pure heart.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____
