

Resolute To Be You:

from Resolution to Resolve

Staying in Integrity No Matter the Cause

Adventure Series: Integrity

Advent Week 6 - Jan, 2nd, 2022

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Deuteronomy 23:21-23

Psalm 25

Isaiah 26:2-12

Matthew 5: 33-37

Titus 2:1b-15

The one thing that God requires of us is a pure heart. Simple, right? But, if you are human then you know well what guilt feels like, or shame, or remorse. These experiences are not meant to perpetuate our pain. We do that to ourselves. We can get very creative in the ways that we separate ourselves from reconciling to God.

The most confusing thing anyone ever has to do is declare who they are, who they are becoming, and who they are going to be. All that is ever asked of you is to be your Self, in God's perfect design...

Integrity is all about doing what is 'right', but in our modern society, we have this understanding that there is this universal moral standard that we are supposed to live up to. But, when it comes to integrity it is all about knowing that you are standing in the right place with where you are supposed to be. It is very much about authenticity and it is very much particular to each individual person.

One of the dangers in the flexibility in interpreting the Biblical texts is that it seems to give different advice depending on who you are in the story, or where you are in your journey, or where you are in history. We are taught that there is this standard that is consistent and is reliable for all people - that everyone is held to that same measure. Yet, how is that possible if God created every individual to be exactly that: an individual.

If all people were meant to be the exact same then there wouldn't be so many of us. God designed each person specifically to be who they are meant to be. The meaning that we find in our life, the purposefulness that we find in our life, is the ways that we can express who that is; the ways that we can come to terms with who we are meant to be and the impact that we have on those around us.

Each of us loves different people and different things, and is willing to do different things to protect and stay connected with those things that we love. If we are lucky, then God is one of the foremost on that list, but for so many of us, our relationship with God really has taken a backseat in recent years. So, the challenge of this coming year, when for the past years we have felt so separated from everything else, is to find our reconnection with God and His design and His plan.

He has allowed us the opportunity to rest and recover. He has given us a chance to reset and rebalance. You may or may not have taken up that invitation. You may or may not have taken up that opportunity to do exactly that. Maybe that isolation was more triggering for you. Maybe it made you feel less centred and more disconnected. But, the challenge you face now is to stand up in integrity as who you were designed to be.

Throughout the Bible, there are all of these examples of how each person has these opportunities and instructions on how your word needs to be pure and what that means is when you say something, or you commit yourself to something, whether it is a vow, an oath, a promise, or even a just a passing comment, if those words pass your lips - without a disclaimer that it's actually a joke - you are accountable to what has come out of your mouth.

Yeshua [Jesus] speaks as though corruption isn't what happens when something goes in your body, it's actually what comes from your heart and out passed your lips. And so, we are held by the measure of our own mouth. Our tongue is the indicator of how pure our heart is.

So many make New Year's resolutions only to have them fall away as life plots on. But, the Bible is very clear about being 'a man of your word' and lies, intentional or otherwise, are not tolerated. There is a difference between being mis-taken and absolving yourself of being true to what you've said.

So how do we, in our pesky humanity, stay on the right trajectory and stay in integrity when someone seems to just keep changing the game on us? How do you stay purposefully on-point to keep from absolving yourself of your dissolving resolve?

You are your own responsibility and what that means is that integrity is all about authenticity. But, at the heart of that message lies the premise that first you must know who you are in order to do that. To be able to gauge - not judge, but gauge - if you are in integrity you must have a plumbline. And if the moral standard that is even across all humans is in fact mutable and shapeshifts along with each one of us then how can one tell if they are right or not?

That's why the Bible says that only God can judge a man's heart: because only God knows what that design was and if you are in alignment with that design or not.

So the purpose in life, and practices across religions and across traditions and across history all try to lead us into one understanding not of God but of ourselves. The purpose behind almost every tradition, the teachings within every religion, is to help you get to that centre of who you are so that you can understand your place in the story and you can step up and step in to that purposefulness.

We are judged by what we do. What we do is expected because of what we say we are going to do. So, what happens with things like New Year's resolutions where it's really about designing the life we would like to have and about proclaiming the person we would like to be that isn't true of us yet? And then in time, maybe we fail in living up to that promise. Are we held accountable to it or are we forgiven? Well, we follow both a *Just* and *Forgiving* God... so who knows really, it could go either way.

How we can keep ourselves from falling into those traps of unintentionally, or intentionally, misleading others, misguiding others, or even misrepresenting ourselves is by following Yeshua's advice: do not make promises of yourself, allow your 'yes' to be a 'yes' and your 'no' to be a 'no'. Keep it simple.

If you dedicate yourself to a practice, it is one thing to promise that you want to make yourself available to something it is another thing to declare that you will accomplish that thing. One saying I really appreciate from the Muslim tradition is: 'In sha'Allah'. It means 'God willing'. Most agreements that they make end with: '...if God wills it.'

That may sound like something that is just ritually tagged into the end of a statement, but in doing so they are acknowledging God's plan and design in their life. 'I will meet you

tomorrow at two, if it is in *God's* plan. I cannot promise to meet you at two if that is not the design for my life and I am not the wise one who knows *God's* plan, no human really knows *God's* plan. So, how can I make a promise not really knowing the full design of this world?' The pathway to hell is paved with good intentions, and unintentional lies are an easy trap.

And so, we keep our promises simple and keep ourselves humble: 'I will aim to meet you at two, if it is in *God's* plan.' That way we keep ourselves in integrity while we make our plans, while we dedicate ourselves to our pathway.

Rather than stating that you are going to work out every single day, or going to go on a diet that you will be held accountable to every single day,' if it is not within the realm of your personality to be that disciplined then simply do not put that pressure on yourself. Not only will you likely not live up to the promise, but the pressure of that in and of itself is also often the reason why.

What if integrity is less about if you do the universally standardized 'right thing' and more about how well you know yourself in the first place to set yourself up for success? The failure isn't necessarily in the failed execution of an unrealistic promise, but more in not knowing yourself well enough to know what to realistically promise of yourself.

So, to lighten the load and relieve yourself of those unnecessary expectations that we put on ourselves, that we project into others, in order to do that all we need to do is keep our dedications very simple and honest. State who you would like to be and you can even shape how you think you are going to live that out, but keep your promises simple.

It's not that you are going to work out or that you are going to do a diet, because you may or may not follow through with that, but in doing those things what were you really aiming for? Maybe it was to be a healthier individual, to honour the temple that is your body. So instead of dedicating yourself to disciplines that may not match your personality long-term, be more honest in what it is you are trying to do.

'I will make efforts towards being more conscientious of the ways that I am a steward of this temple that *God* designed for me to be in. He embedded me in this body. I am a steward of this temple and therefore in that stewardship I proclaim and dedicate to exploring what that care looks like and learning to prioritize that. Admitting that I will likely fail in my execution of it and that my dedications will change on a rotation as I learn what it is that who I really am needs.'

Maybe you know that you characteristically cannot stay connected to or disciplined in something for more than two months. Rather than dedicating yourself to being accountable to that thing for a year, maybe make that dedication for only two months to train yourself into discipline with reasonably achievable goals.

If your heart is measured by the accountability of what passes your lips, then be very intentional about the words that come out of your mouth. Speak with integrity. That is what you are responsible for. Integrity is about embodying and living up to who you say you are, but life is all about the becoming of that person. Most of us know something about ourselves that we cannot yet prove and our life is shaped as a running of the gauntlet in which that becomes true in the living of it.

Many resolutions are built by trends or peer pressures, but some are actually indicators of what our soul desires for ourselves, but our psyche just doesn't quite know how to pull off yet. Maybe we don't have the habits, maybe we don't have the support that we need to shift into that quality of life or quality in expression of ourselves. But, if your heart is measured by what passes your lips then make sure that you are the one who is in control of what is said. Make sure that the promises you make are the things you are willing to be measured by.

The measure of integrity is not whether you live up to a standard, this moral measure that all people are held accountable to. In one culture, context or another, that line may shift a little, or the interpretation of that same word may shapeshift quite a bit. We are not to pass judgement on anyone, the Bible is very clear about that, so how can we pass judgement on ourselves?

Humans seem to be missing this innate ability to forgive ourselves of our own failures. We are more likely to justify the treachery of other people than we are to forgive ourselves for a misstep. The transgressions that we commit, intentional or otherwise, are the thing that trips us up more than anything else.

More often than not, it is the collateral damage that we collect throughout our lives that eats away at our soul and makes us question ourselves. It keeps us further and further away from the divine design God had for our lives and for our beingness.

My prayer for everyone in the wake of these holy-days, is that you will understand what it feels like to be responsible and accountable to the integrity of your own heart. I pray that

you will not feel judged, but instead that will feel that you measure up. That you can be gentler with yourself and give yourself enough room that you can actually succeed. If you are always holding yourself to some measure, you are more likely to always measure failure instead of success. Are you a half full or half empty kind of person? Are you always collecting the tally of your wins or your losses?

It's ok no matter what your answer was. The key is being able to recognize which way your mind works so that you can work with it instead of it working against you. Does it bend towards judgement or is it bent towards forgiveness?

When you know that you tally losses, then you need to work way harder to recognize anything as a win, if at all. But, if your mind is bent towards wins then often you will absolve yourself of the responsibility of losses almost like a foot-note in your path. Either way, you are held accountable to both.

Integrity is all about setting yourself up for success. If your heart is measured by what passes your lips then the key to integrity is being very much mind-full of what it is you say of yourself. Who do you say you are? Who do you promise to be? ...and how can you reframe that very carefully so that it is not a lie, intentional or otherwise, but instead what you say is an invitation for you to live up to instead of a promise that you will be held accountable to.

Can you learn to speak to yourself through invitations? Can you learn to invite yourself into the fullness of your potential rather than setting yourself up with a host of expectations and then beating yourself up when you can't live up to an inhuman(e) amount of pressure? Can you be gentler with yourself? Can you take the load off? Can you (en)lighten the pathway so you can see where you are headed? And can you open the way to your own becoming and the revelation of who you are?

It's almost impossible to not be in integrity if you make no promises of yourself, but it's also almost impossible to navigate life. All you need to do is speak truth. For many of us, that means speak less. For some, that means speak more carefully. For some of us, that means speak up.

The measure of your heart is on the tip of your tongue. Who do you say you are?

Selah...

Soli Deo Gloria,

Rev. Rynn Parraw