

Lesson 2 - God's process of building Integrity – 1

Learning objectives

God's method of building Integrity through Integrity Checks

Understanding the Power of powerlessness / Dethroning self and enthroning Christ for evangelising

Character is who we are in the dark – This is D L Moody's description of character. When we think of this it is indeed quite frightening. We have seen the Biblical understanding of Integrity and we can now appreciate that this is where our character lies. It lies in the place where only God sees us.

Effective ministry flows out of character and not out of external activities alone. The danger is that when we do not let God change our character then the gradual falling away happens. We become callous internally and we will be involved in Christian activity externally. We can carry this dual life quite easily and this is where the majority find ourselves. We have to discipline ourselves to constantly stand before God for Him to examine and correct us in our character.

Integrity checks

The Lord is constantly building us in our character. To do that He allows integrity checks to come into our lives. These integrity checks come at different times, ways and intensities. These checks are the method that God uses to shape us into His character and nature. (*Jam 1:2-4*) We must remember that we are being shaped into the image of Jesus. This was how we were created. We were created in the image of the Triune God.

The twofold purpose of Integrity checks

Let us look at an example of how God uses an integrity check in the life of His servant to build His character and also accomplish His eternal purposes. Yes, the purpose of Integrity checks is twofold. One is to build into the character of Christ in us. The other is to accomplish His eternal purposes in and through us as we are being transformed into the image of Jesus.

The test (*Gen 22:1-2*)

God tested Abraham and asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac, whom he loved, as a burnt offering. We see it as a test and we can distance ourselves from the encounter. What would it have been for Abraham to face this test? How would he have felt when God asked him to sacrifice his son? We're sure it must have been traumatic.

Obedience

Abraham obeyed God and started out on the journey. (*Gen 22:3*) We do not see him hesitating or questioning God. If this was a test to check the obedience of Abraham to God's word then the test should have been stopped at that point. We all know the story that God did stop the test eventually when Abraham learnt the lesson that he had to learn.

This was not a test to teach the lesson of obedience to God's word.

Faith

Abraham, Isaac and the two servants came to the foot of the mountain and there Abraham asked the servants to wait with the donkey. (*Gen 22:5*) He and the boy would worship and they would return. This was a wrong statement for Abraham knew that he was going to sacrifice the boy and so how could he say that both of them would return?

He was able to make that statement for Abraham knew that God would not go back on His word. His blessing that Israel would be His chosen people was through Isaac and God was also able to raise Isaac from the dead. This shows the tremendous faith that Abraham had in God.

If this test was a test of faith then the test should have stopped at that point where Abraham established his faith in God. The test did not stop. This was not a test of Abraham's faith.

Hope

Abraham and Isaac now start walking up the mountain with the wood on Isaac's shoulder. Isaac asks his father an innocent but pertinent question. Where is the lamb for the burnt offering? (*Gen 22:7-8*) Imagine what would have gone through the heart and mind of Abraham. How could he have answered the boy honestly without crumbling? Yet, we see Abraham's character coming out.

"God would provide" Abraham answered, but he said more. "God would provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering". Miraculously, Abraham with spiritual discernment, saw that God would one day provide His Son as the lamb for the sin of the whole world. Abraham's hope was in God.

Three aspects of Abraham's character were in place – Obedience, Faith, and Hope in God. Yet, the test did not stop. There was something deeper in the character of Abraham that God was concerned about that needed correction.

The lesson of first love

Isaac was on the altar and Abraham stretched his knife to slay the boy. (*Gen 22:10-12*) Then the angel called from heaven and stopped Abraham from killing the lad. What was the verdict? God said, "Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son."

Deep in the heart of Abraham, he was becoming attached to the boy. He saw his life was now fulfilled and it was all related to the boy. Abraham's first love had become Isaac, not God. God saw the flaw in Abraham and this flaw needed to be corrected in a man who had obedience, faith and hope. Through the test, it was established that God was now Abraham's first love.

The lesson was learnt through an integrity check.

The second stage

Was the encounter complete? No. The second stage of the test had now begun. (*Gen 22:15-18*) The Lord called out and told Abraham how his offspring would be blessed. "In your seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed" How would Abraham have understood this blessing? He could not see too far ahead but today, after 4200 years, we are blessed through Christ because Christ is the seed of Abraham.

There are therefore two parts in an integrity check. The first is the lesson that God wants us to learn that will make us align with the character of Christ. The second is that when we go through the integrity check and learn the lesson that God wants us to learn, we will participate in the grand narrative of God, which our minds will not comprehend.

The Maturity Cycle

As we go through life, God takes us through integrity checks. Every integrity check comes in a maturity crucible. What is the maturity crucible? The maturity crucible is the surrounding circumstances in which the integrity check is hidden. The maturity crucible is when the circumstances around you will tell you to dodge, bypass or opt for an easier way out of the integrity check, without obeying God. This is our opportunity to make a choice.

We must choose to obey God in the integrity check. Our obedience will result in our growth in our alignment with the character of Christ. Our growth in corresponding with the character of Christ will widen our circle of influence for Christ. We will then participate in the grand narrative of God, which is beyond our life and our time. The journey continues.

Failing our integrity checks (I Cor 10:1-11)

If we disobey God in our integrity checks, we will have missed the lessons that the Lord would have us learn to be aligned with His character. In not being aligned to His character we will hinder others from believing and entering into His kingdom. We will also hinder ourselves from the grand narrative of God that He is working out through us.

Many of the Israelites perished in the wilderness because they did not learn the lessons that God wanted them to learn through the integrity checks that God sent into their lives. God had chosen them to be His holy people. God's purposes remain but individuals missed out on being a part of the grand narrative of God.

The power of the powerless

Jesus is teaching us that we must become powerless to enter into His kingdom. He said that unless we are converted and become like little children, we cannot enter into His kingdom. (*Matt 18:3*) There is a conversion required here for the self in us which is the cause of sin, made us to push God out and we sought to be enthroned in our hearts.

So, when we come to Jesus there needs to be the conversion of denying the self and placing our trust in Jesus. Children teach us the lesson of trust. We must learn trust from children. We must stop trusting ourselves and place our trust in Jesus, only then we can enter into His kingdom.

The death of Jesus on the cross

This denying of the self cannot be done in our own strength. This is why Jesus went for us to the cross. He died for us so that we should no longer live for ourselves. (*II Cor 5:15*) When we come to Jesus at the cross and receive Him as our Saviour and Lord, we surrender to His lordship over us. He enables us to take the EGO to the cross, where we are crucified with Christ. The self in us must be denied by taking the self to the cross, every time we recognise the ego seeking significance.

As long as we are in this body, the fleshly nature in us will seek importance. As a child of God, we appropriate the death of Jesus on the cross, we die with Christ, and the life of Christ is manifested in us. (*Gal 2:20*) This is an ongoing experience and in an ongoing and increasing manner, the life of Christ is revealed in and through us. This is where and how we become powerless to become powerful in Christ.

Ego symptoms

Here is a list of ego symptoms that will help us examine our inner struggles and help us in submitting ourselves to Christ.

Comparative/Competitive thinking - Fear of rejection/seeking acceptance - Win-lose mentality - Poor listener – Defensive – Complaining – Cynical - No vision – Insecure - Autobiographical mindset – Seeking commendation from others – Pursuing my dreams – pushing my agenda - Confessing others sins - Unwillingness to submit to authority - Victim mentality - Poor team worker - Assigning my motives to other's action - Highly critical/ Being judgemental - Blaming others strengths/weakness for my inaction - Unwilling to say, "I'm sorry" - Chronic worrying – unforgiving - ...

This is a wonderful opportunity to recognise, accept, repent, surrender to Christ and invite the Lord to have complete sway over us.

Genuine concern for others – the base for evangelism

It is in this process of being crucified with Christ that the life of Christ is revealed in us. This life of Christ in us makes us people who are genuinely concerned for others. We can reach out genuinely to people and the life of Christ causes us to be a blessing to others. People are impacted by the Gospel.

Loving God and loving people

We now connect with what we had discussed in the first lesson. The first commandment has two parts which are loving God and loving people. We had discussed about loving God. Here we can see that as the ego in us is crucified with Christ, the life of Christ is displayed in us. This life of Christ is the life of loving people.

Stimulus-response interface

To examine the dimension of loving people as the base for evangelism, let us use this tool which is called the stimulus-response interface.

Life is full of stimuli. Every stimulus produces a response. So, life goes from stimulus to response. We experience a stimulus and we produce a corresponding response. Various factors will determine the response that we produce to a stimulus that we experience.

What we do not realise is that in between every stimulus and response, there is an opportunity called space. We generally miss this space and we rush from stimulus to response. It is in this space that we have two options. One option is to respond based on the flesh and the other is to respond based on the Holy Spirit.

When we live out of the flesh, we die. (*Rom 8:13a*) It is by living in the Spirit that we live. (*Rom 8:13b*). It is in the response of the Holy Spirit through us that there is power. We must first die with Christ to allow the Holy Spirit to live out the resurrected life of Jesus through us. (*II Cor 4:10*)

The leadership power of the powerless slave girl (*II Kings 5:1-5*)

We read of this slave girl in the home of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army. She was a young girl and she came from Israel, taken as a captive by the soldiers of Naaman's army. She seems to be a smart girl, having come from a good home upbringing.

Imagine if you and I had been in the place of this girl. What would have been our response to the stimulus that we were going through? Would we have been happy? Would we have thought for the good of the man in whose home we are serving as a slave? Considering that Naaman was a leper and she, a knowledgeable Jewish girl, would she not have felt repulsive to serve him?

In the space between stimulus and response would we not have operated in the flesh, had we been in her place?

This is the miracle in this story. The miracle in this story is about the transformation of a powerless slave girl into a powerful instrument in the hands of God, to impact a Commander and through him, the whole nation.

The power of the powerless in evangelism

This principle of the power of the powerless is the core principle in evangelism. Paul and his team displayed this principle. We read of this as they ministered in Thessalonica. We can read the full

description of their ministry there in *1 Thess 2:4-12*. They were truly powerless but had a powerful impact on the people there through the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

In the first chapter of *1 Thessalonians*, we read of how the Gospel spread to every place in that region because of the ministry that they did in Thessalonica. We can see the power of the powerless in evangelism.