



The Virtues and Character Development Project

The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

I Thessalonians 5:24

BOOK REVIEW

Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp

Doug Sherman & William Hendricks

In their book, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, Doug Sherman and William Hendricks present an introduction to *integrity*, in particular, *biblical integrity*. *This book is about how to have biblical integrity in the midst of a world that does not recognize God or His laws for day-to-day living.* While the target audience is those in the workplace, the principles and recommendations given apply to a much broader group of people. The authors provide a biblical foundation for these conclusions. For this reason, this book is important for Christians to read as the content can be helpful in learning how to live a life of *integrity* that is pleasing to God. The virtue of *integrity* is never fully achieved in one's lifetime, but the Holy Spirit enables the believer to grow more and more in Christlikeness, in *biblical integrity*. This involves both obeying prohibitions (what one should not do) and obeying positive commands (what one should do).

The authors point out that there is a price to pay to maintain one's *integrity*. Accordingly, they contrast the price of *integrity* to the cost of compromise. They compare *integrity* to the edge of a knife that is continually being blunted by the environment around each individual and needs to be sharpened. Their challenge to the reader is to keep the ethical edge sharp. While many people seek ego-biscuits, i.e., short-term rewards that temporarily satisfy one's quest for personal significance, the goal should be to improve one's workstyle (how one works) and lifestyle (how one lives). In today's culture, a career (one's work) has become a sacred idol, defining one's self-worth and the controlling center of one's life. The Christian comes to the marketplace with a unique value system and style of conduct. If it is God's work, then it must be done His way.

Integrity involves understanding what is the right thing to do, and doing it, regardless of the price that a person must pay. The benefits of integrity include self-respect, a closer walk with God, a passion for *integrity* and the courage to do what is right, and an opportunity to exert moral leadership in the workplace. They also provide a framework to reconcile with others when one fails. These provide a perspective for living a life of integrity in front of coworkers. One's consistency will enable others to be challenged in how they work and live their lives. *Integrity is a treasure worth paying **any** price to preserve....Our character and behavior must match His [God's] character and behavior.*

The common use of *integrity* suggests being basically honest, i.e., being a person of honor and reputation. This common understanding of *integrity* focuses on what you don't, and won't, do. The actual meaning relates to *the soundness and authenticity of something or someone*. *Biblical integrity* focuses on what one should do. The impact of living this way falls on us, our families, the people around us, our workplace, and our relationship with God. An exposition of Proverbs 7 is used to address why people fail to maintain their integrity, describing 7 principles in the psychology of compromise. To help people avoid this outcome, the authors use six chapters to delineate the acronym HONEST, where each letter represents a principle as a foundation for living with integrity.

H is for Honest. This deals with not *cheating* (getting an unfair advantage) or *stealing* (getting something that does not rightfully belong to you or keeping someone from getting what is rightfully theirs). The authors explain three levels of integrity: *out of trouble honesty* (trying to get away with whatever one can as long as reprisal is avoided), *selective honesty* (obedience in some areas and disobedience in others), and *progressive integrity* (desiring to honor Christ by doing His work in His way). The final level is a life-long journey.

O is for Obey authority. There are multiple forms of authority: employer, teacher, government, parent, pastor. However, all legitimate authority is from God and is an expression of God's authority. He is the ultimate authority to maintain control in society. *Everyone is accountable to someone and everyone is*

accountable to God. We submit to laws that are clear and unequivocal, which enables us to learn how to submit when they are not. Since a significant portion of our lives is spent in the workplace, submission to our employers is vital as we are to work as if Jesus Christ Himself is the boss. *Since integrity has to do with our behavior when no one is looking, we need to carry out our assignment to the best of our ability....A lack of submissiveness to your employer injures God's reputation.*

N is for No Deception. Results of a poll of average Americans revealed that the vast majority would often lie for some reason. The authors remind the reader that *Lies are lies whether they are small or big.* Since *God delights in those who deal faithfully and honestly*, three suggestions are proposed: *Commit yourself to truth ahead of time, make amends where necessary for past deception, and review your decisions and statements with others whom you trust.*

E is for Encourage Conflict Resolution. Many conflicts arise when someone (or more than one person) allows pride to overtake a situation. The authors present relationships as sacred. So, we need to do all we can to maintain healthy relationships by showing God's love. In a sense, coworkers are a second family. *Let your attitude reflect that you like being with the people around you.* Four areas of conflict resolution are identified: irritations, insults, injustice, and persecution. Sometimes, it is necessary to contain one's anger. *No one make us angry; it is our choice.* We ought to seek reconciliation since we are called to do that (II Corinthians 5:18). If we are wrong, we need to apologize. However, some situations may require us to endure persecution for Jesus' sake. *Integrity is more than just having high standards or living a morally correct lifestyle....It also has to do with the way we treat people.*

S is for Sexual fidelity. *Marriage is God's institution for an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, of which sexual intimacy is a part.* Since many hours at work often lead to emotional release, the temptation for infidelity is great. A caution is given to avoid overwork and emotional exhaustion. *Sexual infidelity almost always begins with emotional infidelity first.* Concrete examples of ways to establish safeguard are presented.

T is for Trustworthiness. *Integrity is ultimately a matter of trust.* People lacking integrity will *agree to something until something better comes along.* There are two edges to trustworthiness: faithfulness (keeping your word even if it becomes inconvenient) and reliability (fulfilling your responsibilities). The failure of Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites (I Samuel 15) is used to show a failure in trustworthiness. Several suggestions are given to help the reader regarding making and keeping promises.

The authors remind the reader that the Bible provides principles for all areas of life, but it does not directly speak to every issue. The Bible serves as a lamp to show the path (Psalm 119:105). So, biblical *wisdom* (the skill in living the way God desires) and moral maturity regarding one's *integrity* are vital. A distinction between direct and indirect participation in evil is given to aid in determining what actions to follow. Furthermore, discussion of the importance of resisting conformity and compromise is given as a means to maintain one's *integrity*, even in the face of adversity. *If we are too concerned with what people think, we'll live in bondage to them.* In contrast, *you can be a leader for moral and ethical influence where you work....The workplace has become the most strategic arena for Christian thinking and influence today.* You can influence your coworkers through your *integrity*, which ought to be beyond question. You can influence through leadership over others and throughout the organization. *Whatever position of leadership you have is a responsibility and a resource given to you by God.*

There are times when someone fails to live up to the standard that God has. The authors recognize this and propose steps to reconcile with God and with others. These steps may include making restitution. Then, when it is appropriate, moving forward with life is encouraged. Learning from this experience will be helpful as one develops habits that reinforce one's commitment to *integrity*. Thus, integrity is an attitude and a way of life that is chosen, resulting in intimacy with God. We learn to relate to God as a Person. We identify ways to have a balanced life through applying God's truths. Since there are both positive and negative consequences to one's behavior, establishing accountability can be very helpful as it leads to positive changes and motivation to do good work, both literally and figuratively, as coworkers with God.

The book concludes with a manual for leading small groups in discussions regarding the ideas expressed in it. Six sessions are delineated to facilitate their success.

In conclusion, this book provides insight into living with *integrity*, especially in the workplace. It is highly recommended for anyone who wants to have practical ways to be a person of *integrity*.