Integrity

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0:00] Psalm 26, verses 1 to 12. I'll read it out loud.

Of David, vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me.
Test my heart and my mind, for your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness. I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites.
I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling all your wondrous deeds.
O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are evil devices and whose right hands are full of bribes.
[1:17] But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity. Redeem me and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground in the great assembly.

I will bless the Lord. This whole psalm is really about integrity, the need to walk with integrity. So verse 1 begins, Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trust in the Lord without wavering.
And then it ends, concludes the psalm in verse 11, with this referencing integrity again. But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity. Redeem me and be gracious to me.
And when we normally think of integrity, we think of honesty, right, and moral uprightness. And that's true, but that's because that's an entailment, an implication of integrity.
The fundamental meaning of integrity is to be whole, to be undivided. So it's kind of what David talks about and prays for in Psalm 86, 11, where he says, Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness, give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.
[2:32] So because someone who has integrity before God is wholly devoted to God, in every way given to God, that person behaves consistently in every manner of life, in every aspect of life, which is why that person behaves with honesty and moral uprightness.

And that's where we get that secondary definition of integrity. And if there were, you know, multiple gods that demand our allegiance, then there would be a cause for, you know, having divided allegiances and loyalties.
But because there's only one true God, that's why the Bible calls for integrity, that we should be whole and undivided, complete in our devotion to God. And there's two parts to living with integrity, two aspects of it, really, that this passage talks about, the psalm talks about.
And the first part is to live before God's steadfast love. And the second part is to live before God's faithfulness. And those are the two kind of cardinal attributes of God revealed in Exodus 34.
It says, 34 verse 6, it says, declares that God is abounding in love and faithfulness. That's steadfast love and faithfulness, so two characteristics of God. And so let's start with talking about faithfulness.
[3:47] What does it mean to live before God's faithfulness? We usually think of, you know, when we hear the word faithfulness, of God's faithfulness toward us, right? He's good to us. He's always faithful to us.

We think about it that way. But faithfulness, biblically, has first to do with God's faithfulness to himself. When it talks about the word faithful, it's sometimes translated as truth.
It's the same word. So it's God's truthfulness, his truth. That's his faithfulness. And the reason why we think about that is the reason why God's always good toward us is because he's always true to himself.

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And he is a merciful and gracious God. And because he's always true to himself, that's where we get the sense that he's faithful to us, always good to us. So it really is speaking of the fact that God's not contingent on anything.
He doesn't change. His posture toward us is not dependent on the circumstances. He's not subject to changing whims or moods.
[4:46] He doesn't have mood swings like we do. And so he's always faithful and true, as Revelation 3.14 says. And that's in contrast to us as human beings.

We have frequently changing moods. We are situations, our character is frequently swayed back and forth depending on the circumstances.
It's contingent often on the circumstances. So for example, when we're lured by the prospect of wealth, right, or blinded by fear of scarcity, of having not enough, then we resort to greed and selfishness, right?
Our character is affected by that. When pressured by approaching deadlines, right, whether it be from work or school, right, we become impatient with people, right?
When tired or hungry, we become liable to anger, right? When praised by other people, we kind of swell up, you know, with pride and think more highly of ourselves than others.
[5:49] When we are criticized or unrecognized by other people for what we are doing and who we are, then we shrivel up, right, and we turn to self-pity or self-loathing, right?

And so it's, it's for us, it's often that we, you know, James 1.14 talks about this, each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own desire and enticed, right?
That's, that's often describes us, right? The root of sin is the desire of our hearts and so often for us, it's our internal condition, it's our external circumstances that affect us more than our internal condition, our character.
And of course, but, but in contrast, God's unchanging and that's what he's talking about when he says that God is always faithful and true. That, and that's why walking with integrity, living before God in wholeness and undividedness entails living not according to our circumstances but according to God's truth.
That no matter what's happening around us, no matter the storms in our lives, the whirlwinds in our lives, we're able to live according to God's truth that he's faithful and he's true to himself.
[7:02] And so that's, that's one part, but if, you know, if we understand God's faithfulness, however, apart from God's love, then that becomes scary, right?

Because if God's always true to himself and he's always true to his holiness but we don't understand his love toward us, then that's a scary prospect. I don't know if you guys have read George Orwell's book, 1984, right?
So it talks about how the big brother is watching you, right? It says the refrain. It's a big brother. You guys know the concept of the big brother. There's someone always watching you and controlling you. It's in a totalitarian state, right?
And that would be what it's like. If God's always true, he's sovereign, he's omnipresent, he's everywhere, he's always faithful, true to himself, and he's holy, that would be a scary thing to live under if we understand God's truthfulness, his faithfulness apart from God's love.
So it's important that we live also before God's steadfast love and that's what verse 3 is talking about. Your steadfast love is before my eyes. And God is loving, so the fact that God's true to himself always means that God's always loving toward us as well.
[8:05] And this is so important in our walk with God, in our communion with God. And John Owen is a 17th century Oxford theologian and he writes about the importance of keeping God's love in his book Communion with God.

And he writes that nothing grieves God more than our hard thoughts, he says. Meaning, hard thoughts about him, like the thoughts that doubt God's goodness toward us.
The hard thoughts, believing that God's not really gracious and compassionate toward us. So these kind of hard thoughts, thinking that he's hard toward us, it grieves God more than anything else, he writes.
And the reason why, he says, is because God knows how unwilling is a child to come into the presence of an angry father. So Owen continues, if our soul only knew this love of the father, it could not bear an hour's absence from him, whereas now perhaps it cannot watch with him one hour.

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So if we really understood, I'm going to probably share that on Sunday as well, but if we really understood God's steadfast love toward us, that he really is as gracious as he says he is, and that he always is that way, and without changing, he's always that way, then that would make us long to be in his presence, that would make us want to pursue him, it would make us eager to come into his presence, not reluctant or hesitant.
[9:29] And when we understand this steadfast love and faithfulness, that's when we can be unwavering in our trust, as David says he is here in this psalm. So that's the meaning of integrity, but then what's the key to integrity?

How can we live with integrity? So he unpacks this, so in first, verses four to five, he speaks of the assembly of evildoers, he avoids the assembly of evildoers, and in verses six to seven, he speaks of the assembly of God.
So that's the key to living in integrity, avoiding the assembly of evildoers, and being part of the assembly of God. So verses four to five, read with me, it says, I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites.
I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. And note the contrast here between verse three and verse four, right? It just talked about God's faithfulness, which can also be translated as God's truth, and then immediately after that in verse four, it talks about men of falsehood.
So these men are not characterized by God's truth, they're characterized by falsehood. They're the wicked, they're the assembly of evildoers, they're hypocrites. And in order to keep his integrity, David says that he avoids the company of these men.
[10:44] He refuses to consort with them. And so in doing so, he's exemplifying what Paul commands in verse Corinthians 1533. He says, do not be misled, bad company corrupts good character.

We're badly mistaken if we think that we can walk in integrity amidst bad company. We're always affected by the people around us. And there's a lot of self-help gurus nowadays talk about this.
It's just that you are an average of the five closest associates around you. Even your income. Yes, even your income, they say, right? So they say, you're going to look like the people you're around.
And that's the heart of discipleship, really, imitation. And so he says, David, one of the keys to integrity is avoid bad company. Avoid people who do not follow God, do not honor God.
And then verses, and well, I should add there that this doesn't mean that we should dissociate with unbelievers altogether. We still reach out to them in love.
[11:47] We minister to them, but we don't consort with them in participating in their wickedness and the evil doing and taking counsel with them. And we do not number them as the people who define us and that define our activities and our identity.

And then verses 6 to 8, David then turns to the assembly of God. It says, I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling all your wondrous deeds.
O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. So this is a description of worship in the temple at the time, Davidic times. And it's confirmed by verse 12 where it says, My foot stands on level ground in the great assembly.
I will bless the Lord. That's the same word that was used to describe the assembly of evildoers. So here, it's contrasting those two companies intentionally. And so, in order to walk in integrity then, then we need to live in the midst of the assembly of God, assembly of the righteous.
And that's, assembly is crucial for our spiritual formation. In the New Testament, of course, the assembly, another word for assembly is church. It's the gathered church is called an assembly throughout the New Testament.
[13:08] And if, because if you are in the presence of God, if you're in the company of God's people, then you're going to become more like God and you're going to be able to walk in integrity. Because the spirit of Christ is powerfully active in the body of Christ when they're gathered together in unity.

And that's why corporate worship is important, right? See, Ephesians 4, 15 to 16 says, Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head that is Christ.

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From him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.
It's when the whole body gathered together, each part does its work, that's when the church matures, that's when we mature as individuals also in God's presence, in God's body.
And so, and that's why the assembly is so important here at Tux, but there can be no Christian maturity apart from the assembly of God's people, from the church. And so David says in verse 8, I'd love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.
[14:14] And that's challenging to think about. Do we love the habitation of God's house? Do we love to gather with his people, assemble with them to worship? And so, Christian integrity consists in living in light of God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

And then the key to that integrity is assembly, avoiding the assembly of evildoers and being in, participating in the assembly of God's people. But it's important to note at the conclusion of this that David's not here talking about absolute integrity because he wasn't perfect.
He was a sinful man like all of us. And we know that he understands this because he says in verse 2, prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and my mind.
The word prove here is language that's associated primarily with smelting and refining metal. Right? So where you refine metal to get rid of the dross and to bring out the pure metal.
Right? So when he says prove me, he's not just asking God to test him but he's also asking God to refine him, to purify him. And so, and we see that also in verse 11 where he says, but as for me, I shall walk in my integrity, redeem me and be gracious to me.
[15:28] Right? So he recognizes that even as he's approaching God and saying, you know, compared to those people who are living without reference to you, I am living in integrity. I am following you and living in reference to you.

But even as he says that, he recognizes he needs God's redemption. He needs God's grace. So he says, I will walk in my integrity but redeem me and be gracious to me.
And that's why ultimately, because no one walks with complete integrity, God had to send Jesus who alone walked with perfect integrity, who alone had undivided heart toward God to live the perfect life of obedience and then to die for our sins as an atonement.
And so, and when we believe in him, that's when we're covered by his blood and that's when his integrity becomes our integrity and God can truly say of us and we can truly say to God, prove me, O Lord, and try me, test my heart and my mind and be rest assured that we will be justified because we have been justified by Christ, that we will be accepted by the Father.
And this is so helpful for us because for us, David didn't know Jesus, right? I mean, as a prophet, maybe he looked ahead to Jesus, but he doesn't know Jesus as we know him.
[16:47] And so for us, we have even more reason to be assured of God's steadfast love and faithfulness because we've seen the ultimate demonstration of that in Jesus dying for our sins. And so then when we look at that and we consider the fact that Jesus' integrity is ours, then we don't, when we think of God, we shouldn't think that God's, you know, wagging his finger at us or shaking his head at us in disgust or wagging his finger at us in disappointment.

He's pleased with us. He delights in us in the same way he delights over his son because his son's integrity is ours. He sees Jesus when he sees us.
And so with that in mind, then we can keep God's steadfast love and faithfulness before our eyes and that's what's going to help us to walk in integrity. So let's keep that in mind and turn to him in prayer.
Let's sing God over all and then begin praying a prayer for that oration.

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