

SESSION 4

LIVING WITH INTEGRITY

Hypocrisy is a slow-growing cancer. It's a lazy replacement of an interior that chases after God with an exterior that only seems to. No one ever sets out to be a hypocrite, but many end up there.

EUGENE H. PETERSON, *TELL IT SLANT*

Group Discussion: Checking In (5 Minutes)

Welcome to Session 4 of *Altar Ego*. A key part of getting to know God better is sharing your journey with others. Before watching the video, briefly check in with each other about your experiences since the last session. For example:

- What insights did you discover in the personal study or in the chapters you read from the *Altar Ego* book?
- How did the last session impact your daily life or your relationship with God?
- What questions would you like to ask the other members of your group?

Video: Living with Integrity (10 Minutes)

Play the video segment for Session 4. As you watch, use the accompanying outline to follow along or to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

We live in a world where lack of integrity is the norm.

Integrity is when your behavior matches your beliefs. It's who you are when no one is looking.

Example: The prophet Samuel

Four benefits of integrity:

1. You can walk closely with God.
2. You have a built-in guide (divine GPS).
3. You'll have constant peace.
4. You build trust, honor, respect, and influence.

The opposite of integrity is hypocrisy.

The big question: What is your integrity worth?

If you don't have integrity, you don't have anything; but if you have integrity, you have everything that matters.

Group Discussion (40 Minutes)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

Shocking Integrity

2. Craig told a story about a cashier who was shocked — and grateful — when he did the right thing by returning the extra change she had given him by mistake.

Briefly describe a recent experience of integrity that surprised you or someone you know. What was the expected response that made doing the right thing so surprising?

3. Craig also shared a story about honoring a promise to give his expensive tennis racket to a young student who beat him in a match. In the case of the cashier, his small act of integrity had a big and immediate impact (she got to keep her job). In the case of the tennis racket, the impact was ultimately even bigger (a man committing his life to Christ), but Craig didn't know about it until many years later.
 - To what degree would you say that your decisions about whether or not to do the right thing are influenced by how much impact you think your actions will have? In other words, if you think it won't have much of an impact, you might let it slide; if you think it will have an impact, you're more likely to do the right thing.

- How do these stories of immediate and delayed impact challenge or encourage you about something in your life right now? What relationship, situation, or decision comes to mind?

Integrity versus Hypocrisy

4. Integrity is a significant concern addressed by the apostle Paul in his second letter to the church at Corinth. His integrity is at stake because an element in the church has questioned his motives and challenged his authority as an apostle. In defending himself and his companion Timothy, Paul writes:

Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with *integrity* and godly *sincerity*. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace (2 Corinthians 1:12, emphasis added).

The Greek word translated here as “integrity” is *haplotēs* (hap-lot'-ace). Its root is a compound of the words *ha* (together) and *pel* (to fold), meaning single or singleness. When used by Paul and other New Testament writers, it suggests “personal wholeness, undividedness . . . uncomplicated simplicity . . . oneness of heart.”⁴ It can also be translated as “holiness.” Paul provides both emphasis and a compelling image when he follows up with the word “sincerity,” which is the Greek word *eilikrineia* (i-lik-ree'-ni-ah). *Eilikrineia* refers to something “examined by the light of the sun and found pure.”⁵

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4. Burkhard Gartner, “*haplotēs*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 1986), 572.
 5. R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), 54. Quoted in David E. Garland, *The New American Commentary, 2 Corinthians*, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 90.

- Which of the images or words used to define the two Greek words stands out most to you? How does it inform your understanding of what it means to have integrity?
 - Paul notes that integrity and sincerity characterize both his conduct and his relationships. Do you think it's possible to make a distinction between the two — to have integrity in one area but not the other? Why or why not?
 - Paul also notes that integrity and sincerity characterize his work in both the world and in the church. What demands does each context place on your integrity and sincerity? In other words, how is your integrity uniquely challenged within the Christian community? And how is it uniquely challenged in the world?
5. The opposite of integrity is hypocrisy, a condition Jesus repeatedly condemned, especially in religious leaders of the day.

Jesus turned first to his disciples and warned them, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees — their *hypocrisy*. The time is coming when everything that is covered up will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!” (Luke 12:1b–3 NLT, emphasis added).

The Greek and English words for “hypocrisy” are virtually identical. In ancient Greece, *hypokrisis* (hoop-ok'-ree-sis) referred to the action of a stage actor — called a *hypokritēs* (hoop-ok-ree-tace') — who wore a mask to play a role. New Testament

writers use *hypokrisis* to describe “behavior that attempts to cover up sin by putting oneself in a favorable light at the expense of truth.”⁶

In warning his disciples against hypocrisy, Jesus uses a series of contrasts. For example, he contrasts “covered up” with “revealed.” Use the following chart to briefly identify all the contrasts in the passage.

HYPOCRISY	THE OPPOSITE OF HYPOCRISY
<p><i>Example:</i> covered up</p>	<p><i>Example:</i> revealed</p>

6. Walther Günther, “*hypokrisis, hypokritēs*” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 1986), 468 – 69.

- What stands out most to you about the two lists of words on the chart? What additional clarity do the lists provide about what it means to have integrity?
- Note Jesus' use of the words *whatever* and *everything*, as well as his repeated use of the word *all*. How does Jesus' use of these words inform your understanding about the relative impact of an integrity decision (discussed in question 3)?
- One theologian describes the hypocrisy Jesus condemns in religious leaders as a “self-deluding blindness.”⁷ In other words, they start out trying to deceive others but end up deceiving only themselves. How do you recognize this dynamic in yourself? In other words, how might your attempts at image management — sacrificing truth to put yourself in a more favorable light — ultimately prevent you from seeing the true state of your heart?

The Worth of Integrity

6. Craig's high school tennis coach said to him, “If you'll steal a golf ball, you'll steal something bigger — you'll lie, you'll compromise, you'll cheat.” The coach was essentially saying, *If you'll trade your integrity for the price of a golf ball, you'll trade it for anything.*

7. Walther Günther, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 470.

- The coach's zero tolerance policy and direct confrontation had a lasting impact on Craig. Has anyone ever challenged you about an integrity lapse? If so, how did you respond? If not, can you recall a time you wish someone had challenged you?
 - If someone within this group were to challenge you about an integrity lapse, how would you want the person to do it? What would make you most receptive to what he or she had to say?
7. Take a moment to touch base with each other about how you're doing in the group. Use one of the sentence starters below, or your own statement, to help the group learn more about how to be good companions to you.

I want to give you permission to challenge me more about ...

An area where I really need your help or sensitivity is ...

It always helps me to feel more connected to the group when ...

Something I've learned about myself because of this group is ...

Individual Activity: What I Want to Remember (2 Minutes)

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session — from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session ...

Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer.

GET A HEAD START ON THE DISCUSSION FOR SESSION 5

As part of the group discussion for Session 5, you'll have an opportunity to talk about what you've learned and experienced together throughout the *Altar Ego* study. Between now and your next meeting, consider taking a few moments to review the previous sessions and identify the teaching, discussions, or activities that stand out most to you. Use the following worksheet to briefly summarize the highlights of what you've learned and experienced.

Session 5 Head Start Worksheet

Take a few moments to reflect on what you've learned and experienced throughout the *Altar Ego* study. You may want to review notes from the video teaching, what you wrote down for "What I Want to Remember" at the end of each group session, responses in the personal studies, etc. Here are some questions you might consider as part of your review:

- What insights did I gain from this session?
- What was the most important thing I learned about myself in this session?
- How did I experience God's presence or leading related to this session?
- How did this session impact my relationships with the other people in the group?

Use the spaces provided to briefly summarize what you've learned and experienced for each session.

Session 1: Overcoming the Labels that Bind You

Session 2: You Are God's Masterpiece**Session 3: Trading the Immediate for the Ultimate****Session 4: Living with Integrity**

Personal Study

● Read and Learn

Read chapters 6–8 of the *Altar Ego* book. Use the space below to note any insights or questions you want to bring to the next group session.

● Study and Reflect

It doesn't make any difference if people appear to be righteous. What matters is to be pure on the inside.

Altar Ego, page 111

1. Practicing integrity requires that behavior match beliefs. The challenge, perhaps especially for people of faith, is that it is possible to *do* everything right and still not *be* right. This was the kind of hypocrisy Jesus ruthlessly condemned in the religious leaders of his day:

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy — full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too” (Matthew 23:25–26 NLT).

If every integrity compromise is for a perceived benefit, how would you describe the benefit(s) the Pharisees got from focusing on right *doing* at the expense of right *being*?

How do you recognize this tendency to focus on right doing at the expense of right being within yourself and others in your faith community? For example, a person displays a meticulous commitment to tithing but is stingy with grace or forgiveness.

What is the perceived benefit you or others in your faith community experience, and how does it compare with the benefit(s) you identified for the Pharisees?

Through Christ, we clean the inside of the cup before we move on to the outside. We sacrifice our selfish, deceitful, ego-driven impulses on the altar of truth so that our behavior reflects God's righteousness. Integrity starts from the inside out, not the outside in.

Altar Ego, page 111

2. Integrity is an inside job — it begins with the heart. The group study for this session defined the Greek word for “integrity,” *haplotēs* (hap-lot'-ace), as “personal wholeness, undividedness . . . oneness of heart.” It's the kind of heart God promises to give us when we surrender ourselves to him:

And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart, so they will obey my

decrees and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 11:19–20 NLT).

In what two or three areas of your life are you most aware of feeling split — that your beliefs and behaviors are consistently at odds?

In what ways, if any, would you say these splits have made your heart stony or stubborn toward God? For example, consider where you are resistant to obedience, unwilling to let go, willfully blind to the state of your heart, etc.

What, if anything, are you afraid might be required of you if God were to give you a tender, responsive heart?

If you could experience an undividedness or oneness of heart, what changes would you hope to experience — in your life and in your relationship with God?

To become a true person of integrity, the first thing you have to do is get to know Jesus . . . you can never live a life of integrity on your own.

Altar Ego, page 118

3. Scripture's promise to a surrendered heart is that God is always at work in you, "giving you the *desire* and the *power* to do what pleases him" (Philippians 2:13 NLT, emphasis added).

Keeping in mind your responses to question 2, where are you most aware of needing a stronger desire for God and more power to please God?

● Guided Prayer

God, thank you for loving me with an undivided heart, and for treating me with integrity. I know you will always keep your promises to me.

I ask that you help me to live with integrity. Sometimes I feel like I'm more concerned with looking good on the outside than I am with being good on the inside. Other times, I don't even try to match up my behaviors with my beliefs, and I really am a hypocrite. I need your help most with ... because ...

I know that integrity is an inside job, and that I need an undivided heart. I believe you can heal the split I feel inside. Please make me tender and responsive to you, especially in connection with ... As much as I want a new heart, I'm also afraid of what it might require of me ...

God, to the degree that I am able, I surrender my heart to you. I claim the promise that you are always at work in me and that you will give me the power and the desire to live for you — this day and every day. Amen.

