

Character That Will Sustain In Tough Times

God wants to develop His character in us so we can persevere for the long haul. Yet how he does it is often anything but easy.

We are not born with integrity. Integrity is something that is developed in our lives through the choices we make every day.

Integrity is an internal standard and conviction. It is having a sensitive conscience before God. The more sensitive your conscience is, the more in tune with the Holy Spirit you will be. As you follow your conscience, you will develop integrity in your life. True character and integrity are revealed in the choices you make when no one else is around.

Integrity is very similar to the process a horse goes through to harness its tremendous strength and power. Integrity involves a process of brokenness. But when we yield to this process, God's power within us is able to reach its fullest and highest potential.

Just as it is vital that a rider builds a bond of trust between him and his horse to make the horse easier to train, so our trust for God enables Him to train us by His Spirit in the most productive and life-giving way. When we submit to God's dealings in our lives, He gently breaks the areas of our stubborn wills that need to come under submission, and He empowers us to reach our maximum potential. As areas of self are broken, God's power within us becomes harnessed to produce the greatest results through our lives.

The key is having a heart that can endure the test of extreme pressure and time. Many people are born with God-given strengths and abilities. They are graced and gifted by God with certain capabilities. They start out strong; they are

sprinters who appear to be the ones who will finish first.

But when the test of time sets in and the pressure builds up from a long-distance race, their hearts burst. Their triumph ends in tragedy, taking many other people out in the process. The well-known healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman observed this and noted, "Whether life grinds a man down or polishes him depends on what he's made of."

Power for the Long Haul

God doesn't want us just to start strong. He doesn't just want us to be champions at short races. He wants to create in us the ability to run fast and hard for the long haul. He wants to undergird His power in our lives so that it will carry us all the way through to the end. Integrity is what will keep your heart strong and enduring. Integrity is what will ultimately qualify you to be a thoroughbred champion. It's what will empower you to run your race and win.

We have been created to be vessels of God's power. Developing a life of integrity is crucial to harnessing, maintaining and increasing God's power in our lives. When we only focus on the gifts God gives us and neglect the process of cultivating a life of integrity, we can become disqualified in the process. Integrity will be our keeping grace! Integrity will enable us to carry God's power for the long haul in our lives. Integrity is produced through brokenness.

Smith Wigglesworth, a man powerfully used by God in the healing ministry, testified, "Before God could bring me to this place, He has broken me a thousand times."

Brokenness Brings Victory

Let's look at how power is released through brokenness in a strategy the Lord gave to Gideon in Judges 7:16-22. In this portion of Scripture, Gideon divided 300 men into three companies. He put into their hands trumpets and empty pitchers

with torches of fire inside them.

When they got to the edge of the enemy's camp, they blew the trumpets and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" (v. 18). When they blew the trumpets they also broke the pitchers in their hands, releasing the fire that was hidden inside.

In their left hand they held the fire; in their right hand they held the trumpets. When the sound of the Lord was released through their shout, the Midianite army turned on itself and fled before Gideon and his men! The battle and victory were won.

It's interesting that both hands were occupied with a torch and trumpet. Neither hand was free to hold a sword. Why? Because the sword was in God's hand.

The principle here is simple. When the vessel is broken, the fire is released. Combined with the sound of the trumpet, the enemy is sent into confusion and defeated. When we are broken and release a sound of praise to God, our enemy is defeated. God's power is released on our behalf through this divine strategy.

True brokenness releases the power of God in our lives. It enables God to fight our battles for us, so the enemy is completely defeated. True heart integrity comes as a result of godly brokenness.

Leading With Integrity

Two men in the Bible clearly demonstrate the power of brokenness and integrity. Saul and David were both imperfect. Both made mistakes. Both sinned. One had his power taken from him. The other was able to maintain it in his life. One had integrity. The other did not. What was the difference?

Saul made a lot of mistakes as king. He fell into insecurity,

jealousy, anger, hatred, pride, rebellion, fear of man and witchcraft. He was an imperfect vessel. Yet when he was first called by God, he was humble and lowly in his own eyes. But pride soon took over his heart.

When the prophet Samuel confronted his sin, Saul freely admitted it (1 Sam. 15:30). But in his next breath he asks to be honored before the people. Saul was not truly broken or repentant before God. He had a worldly sorrow. He was sorry that he got caught. He was sorry for the consequences he now had to face.

But he still cared more about his own reputation than he did about hurting God's heart. His heart was not pure. It was not truly broken or repentant. He was still seeking honor before men.

A fellow minister whose ministry has substantially grown and who now reaches the masses told me about how his first pastor publicly shared from the pulpit that he was sorry for how he had been in the past. He wanted people to know that he had changed and was not the same person any more. Under his years of ministry there was a wake of wounded and hurt people left on the sidelines, including my friend.

For years his pastor had used control, fear and anger to manipulate the people he was called to serve. After losing a lot of people from his church he came to a place of brokenness. He wanted people publicly to know he had changed.

Then my friend received a private email from the pastor. In the letter he wanted to know why he hadn't received more public recognition and honor from my friend. This email came at the same time he was publicly sharing his supposed brokenness from the pulpit.

Like Saul, this leader had a type of brokenness but still wanted public honor and recognition. It was not godly brokenness. We must be careful we don't deceive ourselves

about the sorrow we feel.

Let's look at David's brokenness. Like Saul, he made some bad mistakes when he was king. He committed murder and adultery. Yet God called David a man after His own heart. How can this be? How can a man who commits such horrible things be after God's heart? When David was confronted for his sin, we see his response in Psalm 51.

David was not concerned about his reputation. He was concerned about grieving God's heart and losing God's presence in his life. His relationship with God was the most important thing to him. It was because of his godly brokenness that he did not lose the kingdom; nor did he lose God's power in his life.

He sinned, but he received forgiveness through godly repentance. Even though he still faced consequences for his bad choices and actions, he didn't lose his relationship with God or his authority and power. Godly brokenness brought restoration in his life.

The integrity produced in David's heart through his testings—including both the ones he passed and failed—caused God's power to be harnessed, maintained and sustained in his life, maintaining his kingship.

David's response meant everything to God. Even though he failed at times, he won in the end because he really had a heart after God. He allowed God to work integrity into his life.

Cultivating a repentant heart is the essential key to living a life of integrity. A broken and contrite heart will fully turn to God in weakness and receive God's strength to change.

Integrity is an internal conviction that no one else can give you. It has to come from within your own heart.

My own personal goal in life is to be as transparent as

possible so that the person I am in front of people is the same person I am in private. I can keep no secrets. My life is an open book.

If I ever feel I have grieved God's heart in some way, I have to get before God and pray until I feel my heart is clean. This constant sense of repentance and brokenness before God keeps me in His presence. It's how I cultivate His presence and power in my life.

As we cultivate a life of integrity through godly repentance and brokenness, we will harness God's power in our lives for the long haul, enabling us to finish our race strong all the way to the finish line.

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