

Masterclass – Integrity

Luke 12:1-12 (NIV)

¹ Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. ⁴ "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ⁸ "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. ⁹ But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ¹¹ "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

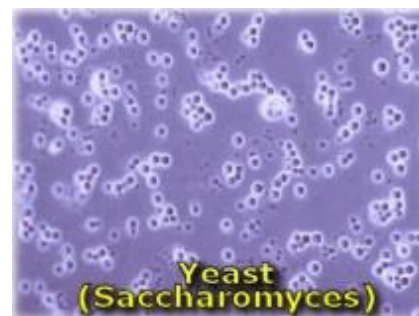
Introduction

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have the physical flesh and blood Jesus as your teacher? I think it would be the most challenging experience of your life, because while good teachers show you, great teachers know you and grow you, wonderfully and painfully, and the Son of God more than anyone. So for the next four weeks we are going to take a masterclass with the master and try to experience a little of what it might have been like to be taught by Jesus. But to do that properly we don't want to take the easy path. There are passages we could take that are straight forward and relatively easy, but where's the fun in that? We are going to expose ourselves to a collection of Jesus teachings in Luke 12 that is more like having a cattle prod stuck in your brain. Which is to say; that it's very challenging.

As we open up with the first 12 verses I want you to keep in mind our last series on the harvest. In that series we looked at specific things we can **do** in order to share our life and faith with others. In this series we are looking at specific things we can **be** that impact on people's view of God. You see people are watching us, often over a lot of years and they get a pretty good read on the testimony of our life. Specifically we are going to look at the way people read our testimony of integrity, freedom, trust and faithfulness. To kick us off today - integrity.

Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.
(Luke 12:1b)

Now you all know that yeast is a single cell fungus that feeds on sugars and excretes alcohol and carbon dioxide. Yes that's right, your favourite beer and wine are just fungus wee. But it is the ability of just a little bit of yeast to spread through a whole batch of dough that Jesus is drawing to the attention of the disciples. His warning to his friends is to be careful, because hypocrisy can spread through your life like a yeast infection.



Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.
(Luke 12:1b)

Hypocrisy is the exception we make to our beliefs while believing we have no exceptions. For example the Pharisees believed they were completely and utterly dedicated to their God and to God's law. They were fiercely committed to loving God and their neighbour (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18), except in the case of Samaritans, tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles and especially Jesus, who although he was a Jew, was right at the top of their hate list. They disliked Jesus so much that they were prepared to ignore the love your neighbour commandment and shatter at least two of the big Ten Commandments, the ones about not lying about people in court (Exodus 20:16, bearing false witness) and not murdering (Exodus 20:14). The reasons why the Pharisees had these attitudes towards Jesus are probably many and various, fear of losing power and position, envy, revenge - you have to remember that Jesus pointed out their shortcomings on a fairly regular basis. The cause doesn't matter so much as the fact that they had these holes in their moral code that they failed to recognise, but what is most disturbing is that according to Jesus we are all susceptible to this infection - *"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.* (Luke 12:1b)

Some years ago I was at a pastors and ministers event for a conference called oxygen and I found myself eating lunch with this group of young Anglican Ministers who assumed that I was an Anglican because somewhere in the conversation they started to give it to the Uniting Church – but good. Criticisms and caricatures, some fair and some very unfair, flew around the group and my blood started to boil and I decided that the best revenge would be to let them go on bagging out my denomination and then I would tell them who I was and watch the expression on their stupid faces – yeeah (metaphorical fist punching the air). Unfortunately before that could happen the bell rang for the start of the next session and everyone got up and moved into the conference room leaving me somewhat shattered.

Later that evening I was at a meeting with some other Uniting Church ministers seething about what had happened earlier on in the day so I did what I almost never do, I had a big whinge about the Anglicans, and you want to know something, it felt pretty good. I discovered there's something quite intoxicating about being in a group that's bagging out another group. It makes you feel more than a little righteous, you know, they're so bad and we're so good. It kind of brings you all together, gives you sense of identity, you know who we are - we're not like them. *"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.* (Luke 12:1b)

As I was driving home from the meeting something was beginning to bother me. It was actually the Spirit of God, who had been trying to get my attention all day without much success. God suddenly reminded me of a particular meeting of

ministers years before this, where people had been doing a lot of criticising of the Hillsong church and I had gone off my nut, and told them it was not a good or a Godly thing to do, that it was in fact the sin of factionalism that Paul on two different occasions lists as a totally unacceptable practice for believers. (2 Corinthians 12:20 and Galatians 5:20). Then the penny dropped, today I had been doing exactly the same thing, I was being a hypocrite. Jesus said; *Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

I really don't enjoy discovering that I have feet of clay, but if we are to be people of integrity we have to grow our capacity to face the truth about ourselves. Integrity happens when our beliefs are integrated with our behaviour. When what we say we believe matches what we do. The word integrity is derived from the Latin word *integer* which means "a whole number; a complete entity." Therefore, the essence of integrity is wholeness, sameness, oneness. Practically speaking a person of integrity is someone you can trust. This is the point the Presbyterian minister Dr Steven Riser makes.

Just as honesty is essential for trust and trust is essential for any healthy relationship and for the ability to lead, so integrity is essential to becoming trustworthy. It has been said that if you can't trust someone in all areas, you can't trust them in any. We compromise our integrity whenever we betray a trust. Integrity is a prerequisite to credibility. It involves an inner sense of wholeness which results from being consistently honest and morally upright. Integrity is crucial in all aspects of life: professional, personal, social and spiritual. (Dr. Steven C. Riser)

The Bible teaches us that integrity protects us from personal self-destruction.

The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out. (Proverbs 10:9)

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. (Proverbs 11:3)

Now I don't have to run through the list of famous people whose lives imploded because of a lack of integrity for us to understand how destructive a lack of integrity can be.

There are a few train wrecks.

Tiger woods



Lance Armstrong



Mel Gibson



Eddie Obeid



The Bible also teaches that integrity is a tremendous asset for a community:

Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed. (Proverbs 11:11)

The psychologist Daria M. Brezinski thinks about it this way:

For many years, I have researched the History of Education discovering that in the 18 and early 19 centuries, the textbooks predominantly educated school children in morals, values, integrity, loyalty and a host of other virtues or what I call 'Soft Skills'. Children read about adventures, faced problems and experienced the challenges of life with the knowledge that these tests and challenges built character. Rather than avoiding them, children were taught to take responsibility for their actions, seek the 'high ground', value human life, and consider the rights and feelings of others, much like the heroes they read about. But the heroes of our modern era display questionable character flaws which are considered the 'norm', subliminally teaching children that this is appropriate and normal behaviour. When did accumulating money, prestige and power over others become the formula for a successful society and culture to survive and thrive? By Daria M. Brezinski, PhD

But the big issue that Jesus is driving at in Luke 12 is that whether we like it or not our integrity is probably the most significant way by which people measure our faith and measure God. Jesus points out that people are watching us all the time.

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Luke 12:2-3)

Which means very simply that over time the underlying integrity of our life becomes obvious to the people around about us. People notice inconsistencies. They notice if we profess to be a Christian but we are less than honest in our business dealings, or we scream profanities at the ref when he rules against Manly, or at the Volvo driver traveling under the speed limit. People notice if we profess to be a Christian but lavish all our money on ourselves, or we're unforgiving, or quick to lose our temper or even abusive. Which brings us to integrity's greatest enemy; excuse making. Earlier I said that *hypocrisy is the exception we make to our beliefs while believing we have no exceptions*, and excuse making is the way we trick ourselves into believing that there are no exceptions in our lives.

This is an ancient and devastating practice. When God came calling on Adam and Eve after they did the thing that God expressly asked them not to do, what was Adam's response?

The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." (Genesis 3:12) - Excuse making

And what was Eve's response?

"The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:13)

Excuse making, is the way we deceive ourselves into believing that our behaviour is excusable and our inconsistencies explainable. But the Bible teaches that a believer needs to think carefully about the way we behave and not fall into the deceptive practice of excuse making.

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception. (Proverbs 14:8)

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. (James 1:26)

Holes in our moral framework and the excuse-making that blinds us to reality, emerge out of powerful emotional desires.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? (James 4:1)

This is what I call the geyser effect

Geysers, like my favourite New Zealand geyser; the Pohutu near Rotorua, occurs when water makes its way to hot volcanic rocks and the resultant boiling water explodes upwards punching through the earth's crust in an impressive fountain. The same thing happens when powerful desires punch through our value system. An explosion of ambition can cause us to conceal information from a rival when normally we would work cooperatively. An explosion of greed can cause us to falsify our tax return when normally we would be truthful. An explosion of anger can cause us to abuse a colleague when we would normally play well with others. An explosion of resentment meant that I bad mouthed Anglicans when I believed that such behaviour is completely wrong.

It is the compelling nature of human desire that causes us to believe that our behaviour is excusable. The big biblical example of this is the story of King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), David saw the beautiful Bathsheba and desired her, and slept with her even though he knew she was married to Uriah the Hittite who he subsequently had killed. Woah - an explosion of desire punched a hole right through David's value system and destroyed his integrity. The other half of this story is the way that David was oblivious to what he had done and the extraordinary lengths God had to go to help David face up to what he had done. God had to send the prophet Nathan to David to tell him the story of a rich man who took the one and only lamb owned by a poor man and fed it to a guest. Without the fog of desire blinding his thinking David new exactly how wrong that was - so he was totally shocked when he was confronted by the truth that he had done exactly that kind of terrible wrong to both Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite.

Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. (Luke 12:1b)

So how can we be on our guard against the yeast of the Pharisees?

1. Focus on behaviour. This is fundamental to Jesus ministry, he constantly challenged people to think about the things that they did because integrity is fundamentally about what we do.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Matthew 23:23)

2. Be aware of your drivers. Don't let your feelings derail your behaviour. We all have a range of emotional drivers that underlay a lot of our behaviour, they are natural parts of being human, but they can turn dark and punch through our beliefs.

Emotional Drivers	Dark side
Love	Hate
Security	Control
Assets	Greed
Significance	Jealousy
Achievement	Selfish ambition
Challenge	Recklessness
Excellence	Arrogance
Contribute	Dominate

Galatians 5:19-23 (NIV)

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

3. Are you harming anyone? A life of integrity seeks to live without harming others

Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law. (Romans 13:10)

4. Are you keeping secrets? Keeping secrets almost always means that we suspect that what we are doing is not kosher.

For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. (Mark 4:22)

5. Are you constantly struggling with moral dilemmas? There is nothing wrong with grappling with moral issues, but constantly struggling with moral issues can be a sign that our beliefs are under attack and that they have been or are about to be broken.

6. Let the Holy Spirit help you make it right. A loss of integrity is hard to face but God’s Holy Spirit is just wonderful at ministering into the cringe of avoidance. You know that cringe, your mind scampers across something you did that you know is wrong, and like a crab running back into its hole, we cringe away from what we have done. You do that one too many times and you stop thinking about it altogether. God’s Holy Spirit is wonderful oi these moments because the Holy Spirit never stops reminding us of God’s love for a second because nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39), not even big ethical moral failure, can separate us from the love of God. So when we place our lives into the hands of God’s Holy Spirit he helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26) and he helps us face up to what we have done (John 16:8). And...

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)