

LIVE LARGE

BE DIFFERENT

SHINE BRIGHT

**12 CONTAGIOUS QUALITIES
FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

DOUG FIELDS & JOSHUA GRIFFIN



simply for students

Live Large. Be Different. Shine Bright.

12 Contagious Qualities for Healthy Relationships

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DEDICATION

To the teenagers at Saddleback Church:

Thank you for living large, being different and shining bright in our community. It is an honor to teach you and watch you change the world.

To our current and former teenagers—Torie, Cody and Cassie:

You are loved immeasurably and it's exciting to watch you grow into caring adults.

To our future teenagers—Christian, Austin, Alexis and Jadin:

May you walk with Jesus every day as you grow into the person God created you to be.

table of contents

INTRODUCTION

chapter 1: INTEGRITY

The Pursuit of Truth

9

chapter 2: ENTHUSIASM

The Contagiousness of Happiness

21

chapter 3: MANAGING CONFLICT

The Tough Road to Better Relationships

31

chapter 4: GIVING

The Percentage Game

39

chapter 5: ENCOURAGEMENT

The Life-Changing Power of Words

47

chapter 6: TRANSPARENCY

An Honest Look at Genuine Relationships

55

chapter 7: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

When Actions Speak Louder Than Words

63

chapter 8: MEEKNESS

A Gentle Strength

73

chapter 9: CLIQUES

Creating a Welcoming Environment

81

chapter 10: COMPETITION

Do You Always Have to Win?

89

chapter 11: LAUGHTER

Adding Joy to Your Life

99

chapter 12: REFLECTION

Taking Time to Think About God and Yourself

109



INTRODUCTION

by Doug and Josh

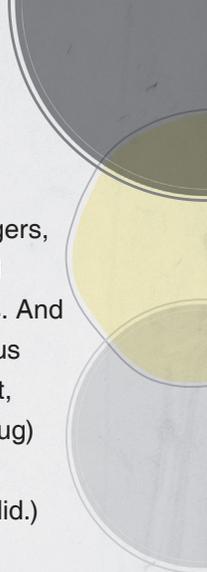
It's way too easy for teenagers to get on the front page of the newspaper these days!

You may be thinking, "What's a newspaper?" Funny. But we old guys still read them, and we've noticed it doesn't take much for a teenager to get noticed. Why is that? Well, we believe it's because adults set the expectation bar so low! If you round up shoes for homeless people or collect a few cans of food for the local shelter or perform some other good deed, you'll make the newspaper.

Those actions are all good and noble! If you're doing good things, by all means, continue. But it's kind of sad that our culture expects so little of teenagers. Honestly, we think teenagers ought to be insulted by low expectations placed on them.

We believe it's time you rise up and do things no one expects. To seize today's opportunities and change the future by the way you live. We want to challenge you to live large, be different, and shine bright. That's what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, and he wasn't just speaking to adults—his message matters to all of his followers, no matter how young or old.

This book tackles 12 character qualities that will help you live large, be different, and shine bright. Obviously, we could have written a whole lot more, but we wanted to focus on some of the traits that are rarely taught at church. We hope your church is different, but in many churches, people assume that you'll automatically adopt these qualities as soon as you begin following Jesus. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen automatically—developing important character qualities requires time, thought, focus, and intention. Our prayer is that what you read will cause you to think about how you might live large, shine bright, and be different.



We wrote this book as two friends who love Jesus, hang out with teenagers, and dream about what would happen if teenagers were more intentional about their spiritual and personal growth. We had a lot of fun writing this. And about halfway through the book, we realized that it was getting obnoxious when we tried to explain whose illustration was whose. Then we thought, “Who cares?” So instead of writing “I (Josh) ate four burgers” and “I (Doug) drove a car into a wall,” we ditched using our names and assumed you wouldn’t care. (When we felt like it was important to add our name, we did.)

Our prayer is that the qualities discussed in this book will help you become someone who reflects more of what Jesus spoke about when he said, *“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket! Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father”* (Matthew 5:14-16 NLT).

As followers of Jesus we are called to be the light of the world. What a challenge! And what an opportunity! We beg you to live a life that shines bright—and in doing so, you will be different and will live larger than those who don’t. Notice why Jesus wants you to be the light—not to live large for your own glory or recognition, but so that others will praise your heavenly Father. That’s the goal!

We believe in you!

Doug Fields & Josh Griffin

In a world of half-truths and outright lies, Jesus calls us to a life of truth. Will you take on the challenge? You *can* handle the truth.

1

INTEGRITY

The Pursuit of Truth

One of my life goals is to be a man of integrity. I want to be someone who is different and lives large. I'm guessing you do too—which is great!

Just so we're on the same page here (and since you're reading this book, I hope we are), the definition I'm using for the word "integrity" is the one synonymous with honesty, trustworthiness, and faithfulness. I'm sure you'd agree that someone who possesses these character qualities is worthy of admiration, especially in an age of declining morals and standards. A person with integrity shines bright in the midst of darkness.

You may also agree that the specific quality of integrity that seems most difficult to maintain is honesty.

We are faced with multiple decisions each day—both large and small—that require us to choose between doing right and wrong, telling the truth or lying, or deciding whether or not to keep a secret. Here's a personal example.

Not too long ago, in the space of just a few hours, I was faced with three decisions that forced me to draw upon my rising reserves of integrity. Early one morning an organization called to inform me they were going to send a check for \$1,485, since I had sent them a check for \$1,500

instead of \$15. A quick glance at my personal records proved they had simply put the decimal point in the wrong place and posted the wrong amount—to my advantage.

To be honest (which is important for a chapter on integrity, right?) I did think about how nice it would be to have the extra cash in my pocket. After all, they made the mistake, not me. I even visualized the laptop computer I had been lusting over for months, the one way out of my price range. How nice it would be to write my books on that! They would probably sell much better, and then more people would learn about Jesus. Hey! Maybe I could view that free money as a “gift” from the Lord! (OK, maybe not! Those thoughts definitely lacked integrity.)

A few hours later, I discovered that my car had been broken into, and that my stereo had been stolen. When I called my insurance agent I was told that all they needed from me was a list of what had been stolen, and they would reimburse me. I wondered, “Just think how easy it would be to say that there were all kinds of things in the car that actually weren’t there and add a couple hundred dollars to the price of the stereo. They would never know...right? As a matter of fact, how would they know whether or not I stored my golf clubs in my trunk, or if I even played golf?” I tried to justify my thoughts by saying that I had been ripped off, so why not rip off someone else? “Insurance is so expensive,” I reasoned, “so why not get something for all of the money I had been paying every month?” It would have been easy to do, but it would have lacked integrity.

That same evening my wife and I went to the theater to see an early movie. After it ended, we bumped into some friends in the lobby who invited us to join them for the film they were about to see. Of course, since we didn’t pay for the second movie, it could have been viewed as stealing if we did walk in. But since we were already in the theater lobby where no one was taking tickets, it would have been very easy to do.

Decisions. Decisions. Decisions. Those were just three of my examples. Now take a minute to think of all of the daily (and hourly!) decisions

you face that require you to determine if you'll be honest or not. It isn't always easy to make the right choices, is it? I know it isn't easy for me! For example, I completely blew it on one of the three decisions I just wrote about. Of course, I felt lousy afterward (especially because I knew beforehand that what I was going to do was wrong) and the guilt I experienced wasn't worth it! Besides, the second movie wasn't even close to being as good as the one I paid for.

But the truth is, even though it can be challenging at times to make the right decisions, those of us who choose to follow Jesus need to pursue his example as well.

JESUS SPEAKS OUT ON INTEGRITY

Jesus was clear and concise when he spoke of integrity in Matthew 5:37 (NIV): “*Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’*” In other words, speak the truth. In doing so, others will learn to trust and believe you.

One day after reading Jesus' words (let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”), I decided to count how many times I didn't speak the *absolute* truth. I was amazed—and more than a little embarrassed—at the results. Of course, none of the things I said were meant to be harmful displays of dishonesty. In fact, most were quite the opposite.

For example, I would see one of my friends at school and say, “Hey is that a new shirt? It looks great!” Yet in the back of my mind I would be thinking, “Dude, put that blouse back in your mom's closet!” Or I would say, “I'm so grateful for the invitation to your party, it sounds like a lot of fun, but my grandparents are flying in from Colorado” even though I really did not want to go to the party. I was continually catching myself trying to find ways around the absolute truth. This has been a struggle of mine for a long time, and it may have been for you as well.

When I struggle with something, I'll eventually try to figure something specific to help me in my struggle. For example, when I told my wife about my truth-telling experiment, we came up with the idea of an integrity beeper that would help us hold each other accountable in our pursuit of being absolute truth-tellers and people of integrity. Fortunately, there were no wires or electricity involved. It was simple: Every time either one of us would say or do something that was not completely honest, the other person would make a "beep" sound to remind us that we had fallen short. For example, I might have said, "Jake, thanks for dropping over; it was great timing" and my wife would "beep" because she knew Jake had come by at a time when I really needed to get something done. We have a lot of fun with this system and although we treat it like a little game, it's a helpful reminder of how easy it is to stray from the truth (Although, for some reason, my wife tends to beep more than I do. Hmm.)

We wanted to begin the book with this specific chapter because we hang out with a lot of teenagers who struggle with integrity issues and yet they want to live large, be different, and shine bright. But you don't do any of those if you're known as a person who lacks integrity.

Let's first take a look at what can result when we lack integrity, and then focus on some realistic actions to take to aid us in becoming the honest men and women that Jesus intends for us to be as we follow him.

"But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants" (John 3:21 NLT).

RESULTS OF LACKING INTEGRITY

Lies Create Guilt

For the vast majority of us, dishonest behavior brings feelings of guilt. Guilt is a powerful feeling that invades our minds and often causes us to feel as if we are worthless. Guilt is like a tiny Ultimate Fighter living

inside of us. Every time we are dishonest, he beats us up, causing great pain and tension. Although medical and psychological experts don't always agree on why we experience guilt, the cold, hard fact is that we do, and it can be an emotional, spiritual, and physical drain on those who are trying to follow Jesus.

Lies Lead to More Lies... Hope You Have a Good Memory

There's an old saying that goes something like this: "If you always tell the truth, you never have to remember what you said." When I was in high school I knew of a guy who actually kept a small notebook with him at all times to record his "stories," simply so he could remember to whom he had told what lies. Crazy, right? I think he may have gone on to write for the National Enquirer. Unfortunately, his system didn't work, and he jeopardized his relationships when his friends found out that they had been lied to for a long time. Even with all the latest technology and recording devices, it would be an incredible chore to store and file all your lies just so you would not get caught up in them. It just wouldn't be worth it!

I learned very early that lies have a way of catching up with us. I once told my parents that I was going to spend the night at Bob King's house, and (you guessed it) Bob told his parents that he was going to spend the night at mine. We then took two small lounge chairs and jumped the fence of a nearby drive-in movie, where we were going to spend most of our evening. (Ever heard of a drive-in theater? If not, Google it. They were fun—but apparently not profitable.) Before the first movie was over we bumped into Bob's older brother and quickly made up the story that we were there with my parents. After the movie, we went to sleep in our new fort near the riverbed so we could get up early in the morning for the best fishing (I know, very Mark Twain-ish).

When we returned to our homes later the next day, our parents acted as if nothing was out of the ordinary. We each told another little lie about the great time we had at the other friend's home, and they let us

dig ourselves deeper and deeper into the black hole we'd created the night before. Little did we know that the night before, Bob's older brother called to ask my older sister a question, and you can guess how things progressed from that point! We had told so many different lies that Bob and I could not even remember the real story. I would have rather been anywhere in the world instead of standing (squirming, really) where I was, trying to talk my way out of that mess. Dishonesty has a way of getting us in trouble no matter how smart we think we are.

The wicked are trapped by their own words, but the godly escape such trouble (Proverbs 12:13 NLT).

We Begin to Believe Lies

I've done my share of counseling other people through the years as a pastor, and I have found that people who have trouble telling the truth actually begin to believe their own lies. Even if you confront them with all kinds of evidence, they look at you as if you were the liar.

People who continually lie create masks that keep others from knowing the truth, but the masks also keep them from becoming the people God created them to be. They may think a mask provides protection, but it's actually a trap. People become comfortable telling lies—but then they can't escape the trouble those lies bring. In the end, they compound the problem with more lies to keep the truth from being known.

People who lie compulsively and who no longer know whether or not they are telling the truth are often called pathological liars; they have an emotional problem. Do you know someone like this? Could you possibly be this someone? Would you tell me the truth if I asked you in person?

Followers of Jesus are not immune to lying. But a Christian on a journey toward spiritual maturity, should strive to make integrity a quality of his or her life. As this becomes one of your goals in your desire to live large, be different, and shine bright, don't be surprised at other Christians who

struggle with lying. They are human, just like you, and conquering lying can be a process.

Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him (Colossians 3:9-10 NLT).

Lying Affects Others

When we tell lies, we are often doing so to look good or to avoid some type of pain or trouble. We rarely think of the consequences that others experience when they somehow become entwined in our lies. Friends may wind up lying to help protect our original lie just because they cherish our friendship. I would even say that many of us might expect a true friend to lie for us. I once heard a story of a young boy who was told by his mother that when the phone rang, to answer it and tell whoever it was that she was in the bathtub. So the little boy dutifully answered the phone and not wanting to lie said, "We don't have a bathtub, but that's where Mom is."

Another way we can affect others with our speech is by carelessly talking about them. This is gossip, and the negative effect that it can have on another person's life is unbelievable! I have seen relationships broken and people emotionally devastated simply because someone decided to talk about another person behind their back. This is a very harmful and destructive action.

Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an ax, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow (Proverbs 25:18 NLT).

Most of us like to be "people in the know" or "in the loop" who are up on the latest information about other people. Because of that, one of your friends may hear something about someone and relay that information to

you. And that information will most likely cause you to judge the person who was the subject of the gossip. You move into judging because you think what you heard is truth. But gossip is like judging the beauty of a 500-piece puzzle by looking at only five pieces of it. Put simply, your desire to be “in the know” shouldn’t be used as an excuse to engage in gossip. If you’re not part of the problem or part of the solution, it’s gossip.

STEPS LEADING TO INTEGRITY

Even if we are fully aware of the pitfalls of lying and gossip, it remains difficult to maintain our integrity. It becomes increasingly hard to be honest when we feel that the truth will make us look bad, or when the lie is so small that we believe we will never get caught, or even when we think that there is no way we will get by without being dishonest.

I believe with all my heart that there is a road to recovery if you share in this common struggle. Here are four ideas to help you focus on being a person of integrity.

Admit Your Problem

One of the first steps to overcoming a lack of integrity is to admit to yourself that you have a problem; you are no better than other people who struggle with this common issue. I have counseled many teenagers who are unwilling to admit that they may have a problem. Many feel that by confessing they are “lowering” themselves, and that they are going to look bad. My opinion is that this mentality (not wanting to look bad) is the primary reason for the problem in the first place.

It takes a strong person to be able to admit a failing! Several years ago, Lyndsey, a girl in my youth group, had a secret struggle with drinking and drugs. She would come home at least three times a week either drunk or stoned but was still unable to admit she had a problem.

One night at 3:30 a.m. Lyndsey called me from a party and asked me if I could come pick her up. When I arrived at the house, I found her passed out on the bathroom floor lying in her own vomit. The next morning she told me she was finally ready to admit her problem and wanted help. Lyndsey checked herself into a drug rehabilitation hospital to recover from the sickness that had begun to dominate her life. Today, her one and only life has been changed forever because she was strong enough to admit she had a problem.

Can you be as willing as Lyndsey to admit that you have a problem? What if that problem is in the area of honesty or integrity? Are you willing to admit you may have a problem?

Ask Someone to Hold You Accountable

If you have a problem with honesty, you need to honestly admit it to yourself, but to really get healthy you should consider sharing your struggle with a friend. That friend can become a key factor in helping you pursue integrity. I know this is scary and I know firsthand how difficult this is to do!

Who is someone who knows you best and spends the most time with you? Ask him or her to help you adopt a version of the integrity beeper system I described earlier in the chapter. It is really a helpful reminder! (In Chapter 6 on Transparency we discuss how it is essential to have a friend with whom you can share anything, even your faults and struggles.)

Ask God for Truth

God is the source of truth. If we want truth to illuminate our lives, we need to go to God through Jesus, and he promises us we will find it. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6 NIV). Ask God to be a vital part in the process of pursuing integrity. Pray constantly and know that God not only hears your prayers, but he also wants you to grow into

maturity as a follower of Jesus. Jesus said, “I came to bring truth to the world. All who love the truth are my followers” (John 18:37 TLB).

Remember You Are in a Process

Throughout this book, we will constantly remind you that this life of following Jesus is a process. You will not wake up tomorrow without faults. Even if you read this entire book, you’ll still be in the process of becoming more like Jesus. You’re not going to be just like Jesus (sinless) as long as you’re alive on this planet, but don’t be discouraged. Becoming a person of integrity will reveal both victories and failures; this is a natural part of inner character change!

Much of my life as a follower of Jesus can be summed up with this phrase: *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*. That’s my life in a nutshell. I’m guessing you can relate. You start strong in your desire to be like Jesus and you move three steps forward, but then you mess up (and lack the truth) and move two steps back. The good news about growing as a follower of Jesus is that you’ll slowly gain one step in the process. And each one of those is one step closer to maturity in Christ.

Keep stepping toward integrity!

LIVING LARGE TODAY

Use these questions for a time of reflection, as you write in your personal journal, or when you get together with your small group.

1. You find an envelope with \$500 cash inside it while shopping at the mall. What do you do?
2. Think of a time recently when your integrity was tested. Did you win or lose that test?
3. Rate yourself on an integrity scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest). What steps might you take to increase that number?
4. Who in your life is currently holding you accountable to become a person of integrity? If there is no one, consider writing down a name and asking that person to play a vital role in your life. If you do have someone like that, take a minute to call or text him/her a “thank you” for their help in your life.