

“To Your Soul Be True: Living with Integrity”  
Matthew 5:33-37

I recently watched a funny video with a little boy listening to his mother’s instructions about being a good boy. Here is the short clip: [Honesty in Humor: A Funny Take on Church Expectations | TikTok](#). It is very funny and cute because it is very honest about our human experience of learning to mask who we are and how we feel for the sake of fitting in. We get confused in childhood about our identity and our social behaviors. We learn that some parts of us are not acceptable while others get rewarded. With that division, we lose our sense of wholeness.

Parker Palmer speaks of this as living divided. As he explains in his video, humans are born "whole" and integral, with no distinction between their inner feelings and their outward expression. This changes for most people in childhood when we learn that it is not safe to be our authentic selves for fear of being marginalized, disliked, or hated: <https://youtu.be/gCvIZpMo8aY>.

Palmer writes, “Afraid that our inner light will be extinguished, or our inner darkness exposed, we hide our true identities and become separated from our own souls. We end up leading divided lives, far removed from our birthright wholeness. The divided life comes in many and varied forms. To cite just a few examples, it is the life we lead when:

- We refuse to invest ourselves in our work, diminishing its quality and distancing ourselves from those it is meant to serve
- We remain in settings or relationships that steadily kill off our spirit
- We hide our beliefs from those who disagree with us to avoid conflict, challenge, and change
- We conceal our true identities for fear of being criticized, shunned, or attacked.
- We sense that something is missing in our lives and search the world for it, not understanding that what is missing is us.
- We feel fraudulent, even invisible, because we are not in the world as who we really are.”

Living authentically where our outer actions are aligned with our inner truth is one of the many gifts of our deep connection to the soul. When we lie, hide our light, doubt our goodness, we shut out our connection to God which often leads us to feeling disconnected from life and who we truly are. As a result, we find ourselves adding to the suffering of life.

Psychologist Ron Siegel who specializes in the psychology of pain, injury, illness, insomnia, and gastrointestinal issues, offers a tool called, “separating the two arrows.” He says that the first arrow comes from life shooting the first arrow: something challenging happening like an injury, a loss, an illness, etc. The second arrow comes from our own pain and suffering by how we talk to ourselves and to others about the first arrow. In other words, it is about how we respond to life’s challenges.

In her book, *The Wisdom of the Body*, psychologist Hillary L. McBride writes this, “Something happens (the first arrow), it hurts because our nervous system gets amped up (tightens), and we are in psychological distress. What we do in response contributes to the cycle. We might stop doing things we enjoy, which increases our stress, and then our capacity to move with ease decreases and the cycle repeats... Once we understand the pain cycle, we can identify the parts we can work with and do something about. This often starts with the second arrow using a skill called mindfulness, which helps us become aware of how we are thinking about our pain, illness, or injury.”

Jesus offered this kind of mindfulness of the soul when we are faced with pressures and challenges that threaten to derail our sense of peace. In the teachings of Jesus found in Matthew 5, a theme emerges. Jesus affirmed the teachings of the Jewish faith by helping his followers get to the heart of the matter. Jesus knew that in order for people to reclaim their wholeness, they needed to align their inner and outer realities of social interactions, thoughts, and the soul. Jesus was not interested in just changing the symptoms of the problem. He was interested in dealing with the root causes of our human struggles. Let’s listen to the scripture for today from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew 5:33-37:

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.”

Jesus emphasizes the integrity of our speech. In Jesus’ time people used to take an oath with their god as their witness. This was supported by the understanding that if they lied under oath then their god would punish them. That is why Jesus calls the people to reexamine the honesty of their speech without the fear of God as their motivation. Instead, the motivation would come from within. The common thread in all of the teachings of Jesus in this chapter is his community of followers to restore integrity and love to human relationships by accessing the love of God instead of the external fears and pressures of their society. Jesus was calling his community to a greater faithfulness to the laws of God. His vision for his community was for them to live in the

ways of the heart of God, the soul, and not just the letter of the law. His vision was a call to move away from the motivations of fear and punishment to embrace the ways of the heart.

Love as the Motivation: Jesus challenged the people to greater faithfulness to the Law. He invited people to look deeper than the surface of their actions because that is where the transformation needs to happen the most. Our actions are the result of our thoughts. We often live in the reactionary cycles of our deeply embedded fears and hurts which cause us and others so much pain. These cycles are at the core of our human wars, cruelty to ourselves and to others, exploitation, separation, and selfishness.

This chapter in the Gospel of Matthew begins with the Beatitudes which ground our motivations in God's blessings and love instead of our fears and hurts. The Beatitudes remind us that no matter what brokenness we might be experiencing in life, God's love and blessings are always with us. All we have to do is look inside of our hearts and listen to our own souls.

External teachings, no matter how wonderful they are, never end up transforming our behaviors or breaking the cycles of suffering, at least not in the long run. Knowing the laws of God does not always translate into following them. The example of lying in our scripture is powerful because lying is something that we learn from an early age, whether it is the big lies or just the little white lies we often tell or believe. Living with integrity is not limited to a moral code. It is also about our inner soul guiding us each day.

Living with integrity is a sacred practice. It is the practice of listening to the voice of God within, the voice of your own soul, and allowing it to guide your every word and action. It's the courageous act of choosing wholeness over division, truth over fear.

The next time you catch yourself responding with anger, deceit, frustration, or disdain to any situation in life, take a few moments to breathe deeply and to get in touch with your soul. Notice the moment before you shoot the second arrow and pause there. Explore where God is in that situation. Listen for the voice that says, "Yes, Yes," or "No, No," not out of fear of punishment, but out of a deep and unwavering truth that comes from within. The integrity Jesus calls for is not a heavy burden, but a liberation—a way to reclaim the wholeness we were born with and to live a life fully aligned with our deepest, truest self. This is how we find peace, not by masking who we are, but by being who we are, honestly and truly, in the presence of God. Amen.