

chapter five

The Four Pillars of Moral Integrity

1. **Accountability** – Proverbs 18:1 says, “*A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.*”

This Scripture hits the nail on the head concerning the motives of people who isolate themselves from accountability; they seek their own desires. In other words, they’re doing their own thing, not God’s thing. Also they argue against counsel and input. They don’t ask for advice and won’t take it if you offer it to them. These are two classic characteristics of the person who is headed for a moral train wreck.

Everyone needs accountability and input. Not only do these factors provide protection from temptation and sin, but they also supply a wealth of wisdom and greater perspective. As a pastor of a church of over eight thousand people and a host of a national television ministry, I rarely go anywhere without being recognized. People often ask if that bothers me. I tell them quickly that I am thankful for such a high level of accountability and protection.

I love being accountable. I think I am one of the most blessed people in the world to have so many eyes watching me – some I know about and many I don’t. Not only does it protect me from sin, but it also gives me an opportunity to be a witness for Christ because I’m being watched.

Besides the eyes of church members or television viewers, I am also directly accountable to the elders of our church and the board of our television ministry. In all, there are over thirty people to whom I give account related to my ministry and

personal life. Words could never describe how much these people mean to me. Their input and accountability have protected me and enriched me in ways I could never express. Without a doubt, I would not be where I am today without them. They are gifts from God.

I cherish accountability as a blessing and a virtue. I also reject independence as a sin and a set-up for destruction. As a pastor and marriage counselor, I see many lives in a candid way others never see. One of the truths I have repeatedly observed in ministry to people is that personal, moral, and marriage failures always hatch out of the cocoon of independence and non-accountability.

On the other hand, those I see who are successful in life are accountable. They go to church and build relationships. They open their lives to spiritual leaders, experts, and close friends for examination and correction. They seek counsel when they are struggling or are making important decisions. Far from the cocoon of independence, these butterflies are free because they have broken from the darkness to live in the light.

Satan is the prince of darkness, and God is the Father of light (James 1:17). They both perform their works in their respective environments – Satan in darkness and God in the light. Here is what Jesus said in John 3:19–21 about light and darkness and what it reveals about our hearts:

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have

been done in God.”

When people plan on doing something good or godly, they don't mind others watching because they are proud of their actions. However, when people are going to do something sinful, they hide themselves from scrutiny. People who plan on living righteously don't mind accountability. In fact, they seek it. However, refusing accountability is planning to sin and reveals one's true character. Moral integrity demands accountability.

2. **Righteous Fellowship** –

1 Corinthians 15:33 says, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”* This issue has deceived many people. That's why this Scripture begins with a warning not to be deceived before it explains the dangers of evil company. This verse offers an eternal and universal truth – evil company corrupts good habits. This truth pertains to children and adults, men and women, Christians and non-Christians. However, many people believe they are the exception.

The important point of 1 Corinthians 15:33 is that bad company overcomes good habits. This is where many people are deceived. For example, some Christian parents who have diligently trained their children will allow them to run with a group of unrighteous, but popular, friends. Their justification many times is the deceived belief that their children will evangelize the others. I have comforted many heartbroken parents on the other end of this lie.

Many adults make the same mistake. They think they can closely associate with people who are living a sinful lifestyle without being affected. I have seen hundreds of Christian men and women leave their spouses and fall into immorality, drug

abuse, alcohol abuse, and other sins because of the influence of a close relationship with an ungodly co-worker or friend.

Of course, we as Christians should befriend and evangelize non-Christians. However, our base of fellowship must be with those who share our values and faith in Christ. Evangelism reaches out from that base of Christian relationships to draw non-Christians into it. Never should we make our regular, close group of friends those who don't share our values and/or faith in Christ. The word *company* in 1 Corinthians 15:33 refers to regular fellowship or frequent companionship. Therefore, bad people aren't the issue; bad company is.

This is the truth: you will not be different from your close friends for long. If you run around with godly people, they have an effect on you. You are inspired to do better and to live higher because of their influence. Also, because their values are based on Christian principles, a moral protection is built in. This isn't to say Christians are always perfect or even better than non-Christians. But you must carefully choose all of the close friends you have (even Christians) because they will greatly influence your life – good or bad.

The issue of bad company also relates to the entertainment we choose and the environment of our homes. I enjoy watching television, but I am careful to avoid immoral programs. I realize you can't completely avoid anything negative, but you can certainly avoid most of it.

Television programs, movies, and computers are three mediums that provide great entertainment and education. However, they all have the potential for much evil. If you allow unrighteous television programs, movies, or Internet web sites into your life, you are eventually going to be corrupted by them, regardless of how good or godly a person you are. If you

don't believe this or feel as though you are the exception, you are deceived just as 1 Corinthians 15:33 warned.

There is a saying that goes like this:

Sow a thought; reap an action.

Sow an action; reap a habit.

Sow a habit; reap a character.

Sow that character; reap a destiny.

Even though this saying isn't in the Bible, I believe it is true because of this Scripture that reinforces its message: *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Galatians 6:7–8).

Every thought that comes into your mind plants a seed. We have already discussed how to overcome negative thoughts through biblical meditation. However, even though biblical meditation is powerful, God won't allow it to be used as a weed killer for the crop of unrighteous seeds you willingly invite into your mind. In other words, if you are going to see explicit movies, watch immoral television programs, and view pornography on the Internet and then try to use biblical meditation as a quick fix, you're in for some bad news. It won't work. The only way to kill that crop is through repentance, which requires turning away from and changing your mind about sin.

If you are going to live in moral integrity, you must scrutinize what you allow to come into your mind. I'm not legalistic, but I have learned what forms of entertainment war in my mind against godly living, and I will not allow them in. All entertainment seeds our minds with thoughts that germinate and grow over time.

Don't be deceived; bad company will corrupt you. In every area of your life, you need to wisely choose your friends and entertainment, including music. Also, if you're struggling with Internet pornography or something else, confess it to a pastor or godly friend and become accountable. Don't be ashamed and don't allow it to remain in the darkness. Do everything necessary to create an environment of "good company" around you.

3. **Honesty** – Jesus told us in John 8:32 that the truth would make us free. The other side of that is the fact that dishonesty keeps us in bondage. One of the worst parts of my job as a pastor is dealing with people who are caught in sin and are trying to justify it.

I know many "believers" who have committed adultery and, rather than repenting when they were caught, have calmly explained that God told them to do it. I have never met a hardened sinner who didn't have a justification for his or her behavior. In some cases, the blame is placed on someone else, such as a wife, husband, parent, boss, or the government. In other cases, people compare themselves to someone else and justify the sin because it's not nearly as bad as "so and so's." In other cases, they distort a Scripture or manufacture a voice from heaven and call it holy. In every case, though, they are living a lie.

John 18 records the examination of Jesus by Pontius Pilate before His crucifixion. As Pilate questioned Him, Jesus said little. One thing He did say, though, concerned the issue of truth. Jesus said to Pilate in John 18:37, "*Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.*" Pilate sarcastically retorted, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38).

Jesus' words are still true today. Everyone who is truly of God is willing to hear the truth from Jesus. Also, Jesus is the truth. This is what He told us in John 14:6: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."* When Pilate said, *"What is truth?"* he wasn't asking a question; he was expressing his belief that there was no absolute standard for truth. This is still the belief of many people, and it is how they rationalize sin and justify unrighteous behavior.

If you are going to live in moral integrity, you've got to decide what it means to you. For me, moral integrity means living according to the model of Jesus Christ and the standard of His Word. In a world of shifting-sand values that are constantly changing to fit the new definition of political correctness or popular opinion, the only stable and reliable standard is God's Word. According to Jesus, it is the only standard of eternal truth and the one by which we will be eternally judged. To believe anything else is to believe a lie, which ensures bondage because only the truth can set you free.

Don't lie to yourself, and don't let anyone else, including the devil, tell you lies to justify sin in your life. Come into the light and accept the truth. That is the atmosphere in which God works and the devil is powerless. It is also the environment that ensures sexual purity and moral integrity.

4. **Humility** – My friend's wife called me one morning, crying hysterically. In the background, I could hear her children crying and screaming, "Daddy, don't leave us." Through her sobs, she explained to me that her husband, my friend, was leaving her because of sex. I immediately asked her, "Is there another woman?" She replied, "No, he just wants more sex than I can give him, and he is leaving me to get it. Will you

please talk to him?”

The next thing I heard was the phone drop and her voice begging her husband to talk to me. I had been friends with him for many years, and he had been instrumental in my spiritual development when I first came to Christ. It was difficult for me to comprehend what was happening in this moment, but it hadn't come completely without warning.

A couple of years before this phone call, my friend began withdrawing from me and other Christian relationships in his life. He also began working for a very unrighteous man with whom he traveled regularly for days at a time, away from his wife and children. I shared my concerns with him more than once about his increasing separation from his family and friends and especially about his close working relationship with his boss.

According to my friend, he was “temporarily” withdrawing from the relationships with me and other Christian friends because he was “in a busy season.” Also, when I asked him about the close working relationship with his boss, he said he was “ministering” to him when they were on the road. The truth was, my friend was being “ministered” to by his boss. He began drinking, partying, and regularly watching adult movies in his motel rooms when they traveled. This began the fall that ultimately claimed his marriage, Christian witness, and ministry.

Back to the phone call: After a few minutes' wait, my friend picked up the phone. Without a shred of remorse in his voice, he excitedly told me that he was moving in with a friend to explore his expanded sexual interests. I couldn't believe my ears. With the sound of his children crying and screaming in the background, he calmly told me that his wife was perfect in

every way, but she just couldn't give him enough sex.

He went on to tell me that in the previous year, he had been sexually experimenting outside of his marriage and was convinced that he must divorce his wife to continue his pursuits. Above my arguments and the pleading of his wife and kids, he left that morning and never came back. This was the man who was my spiritual mentor just a few years earlier.

Proverbs 16:18 says, *“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”* My friend was proud. He believed he could separate himself from righteous fellowship and Christian accountability and survive the influence of his unrighteous boss on the road. He was proud and foolish. The result was destruction.

I know I could fall morally. There isn't a shadow of doubt in my mind that I am capable of any sin, apart from the grace of God. Because of that, I will not allow myself the arrogant assumption that I can break the rules and survive. If I break the rules, I'm history, and I know it.

Pride thinks it is capable of success apart from humble obedience to God and adherence to the standards of the Word. Just as my friend refused to listen when I cautioned him about his decision to separate from accountability and “minister” to his boss, pride won't listen. It won't admit its weaknesses. It won't seek counsel. It won't recognize the danger signs on the road to ruin. It won't do any of these things because it is intoxicated under the influence of arrogance.

You could fall. You need to admit it to yourself. Because of that, you need God and godly people around you. You need to walk carefully and realize that your enemy is prowling around, seeking an arrogant, careless soul to devour. If you're humble, you will escape him and live securely from his schemes.

However, if you think you can tame him, you're his next meal.

Concerning this very point, James 4:6–7 says, *“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”* Humility submits itself to God and recognizes its need for God. Therefore, God promises honor and authority over the devil to the one who is humble.

However, God “resists” the proud. This literally means that He sets Himself as an enemy against them. You see, when you're walking in pride, the devil is the least of your worries; you've got God against you. For that reason, you will not succeed or prosper for long. God will make sure of it.

It is possible to live in sexual purity and moral integrity. It is simply a matter of making the right choices and then living to honor Christ. As you seek to do this, the Holy Spirit is with you to give you the power you need to live for God and to make any changes you need to make. Submit and surrender to Him daily. He will lead you to a wonderful and prosperous life of sexual purity and moral integrity. I pray God's blessings upon you and hope this book has been a source of encouragement and help.

appendix

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Here is a list of some suggested Scriptures you can meditate on in dealing with specific issues you may face. This is certainly not an exhaustive list. There are hundreds more verses besides these that will equip you for victory in every area of life. This list of Scriptures will give you a starting point in some of the common areas most of us face. I hope they are helpful to you.

LUST/IMMORALITY

**Psalm 101; 1 Corinthians 6:13–20
Proverbs 5:15–21; Proverbs 6:20–7:27**

WORRY/ANXIETY

**Philippians 4:6–7; Matthew 6:24–34
Matthew 11:28–30; Isaiah 40:31**

FEAR

2 Timothy 1:7; Psalm 91; Isaiah 26:3

ANGER/UNFORGIVENESS

**Ephesians 4:26–27; Matthew 18:21–35
Proverbs 14:17; Proverbs 15:1
1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22–23**

DISCOURAGEMENT

**Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 12
Romans 5:3–5; Joshua 1:8–9**

CONDEMNATION

Romans 8:1–4; 1 John 1:9
Revelation 12:10–11; Psalm 103:8–14
Ephesians 2:4–8; 2 Corinthians 12:9

INSECURITY

Philippians 4:13; Psalm 46:1–3

MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

Ephesians 5:21–33; 1 Peter 3:1–12

PRIDE

James 4:6–10; Mark 9:35
Matthew 23:11–12

FINANCIAL ISSUES

1 Timothy 6:6–12; Luke 12:13–21
Matthew 6:19–24; Proverbs 10:22
Malachi 3:8–12; Psalm 37