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ETHICAL DEPENDABILITY: A MEASURE OF OUR TRUSTWORTHINESS IN PRACTICAL MATTERS

We were considering several remodeling projects that were critical to the success of our Russian medical programs. Although we had solved the design and financing problems, the toughest challenges were still ahead. Russian construction standards were arcane at best and we knew that there would be dishonest building inspectors at every turn, trying to squeeze bribes out of us with trumped up issues. We had interviewed a number of construction companies, even some from Finland and Germany, but they were all far too expensive or lacked the experience we needed. We decided to investigate the possibility of doing the work ourselves, but to do so we had to have someone who really knew his way around a construction site and could handle the pressures of managing a crew of Russian laborers. However, there was one thing sadly lacking—ethically dependable men from which to choose a construction manager.

Russia's tradesmen had been trained to operate within the confines of a godless bureaucracy. Their daily activities were shaped by time-consuming and wasteful rules that were strictly imposed and anyone who got out of step could easily suffer the loss of his job, social standing, or much worse. A man's work was not judged on its merits, but on how it supported the narrow doctrines of the

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Soviet “vision.” Over time, the cynical effects of loyalty to inept and corrupt managers and a doctrinally controlled culture that could not fulfill its own mandates, had caused most workers to abandon any thought of doing things efficiently or with excellence. In order to advance in pay grade they had to lie, manipulate the facts, and report progress, even where there was none. It was the same kind of mentality that’s found in mafia-run labor unions. I knew it was asking a lot, but I was sure that the Lord could lead us to the right person.

I was scheduled to attend a chapel service at one of the prisons and was looking forward to the diversion it would bring from my construction planning. Visiting inmates has been a vital part of my ministry and in Russia it was an especially rewarding experience. Russian prisons are brutal and when you meet a fellow-believer in one of them, he is likely to be a serious man of God. To fellowship with such men is an honor that I greatly appreciated. A local priest (with help from an accommodating prison official) had been sneaking communion in to a small group of believers in this particular prison for several years. Now that they were free to assemble and have Bible studies, they had a thriving fellowship of about fifty men and they were beginning to have a very stabilizing affect on the compound. Violence among inmates was down and the warden had given them permission to have regular meetings. In fact, on the day of my visit, they were planning to dedicate a new chapel, which was usually little more than a small one-man prayer closet, but precious to them.

The leader of the prayer group met us just inside the gates and escorted us across the compound. His name was Gregori. He was a middle-aged man with clear blue eyes, gray hair, and the humility of an elder. He bear-hugged the priest and then me and I felt as comfortable and welcome as if I were attending someone’s home church. As we walked across the compound, Gregori introduced us to various inmates and officers who were also on their way to the chapel. There was an excitement or “buzz” among the men that was quite unusual for a prison. And as we cut through a run-down dormitory and out into an enthusiastic crowd, I understood why. Gregori’s face beamed with pride as he pointed toward a beautifully

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constructed miniature of a Russian Orthodox cathedral, spires and all. About sixty people could jam into it and there were several hundred men gathered in and around it for the dedication.

The families of the inmates, and even some prison guards, had donated every brick, board, and nail. Gregori had designed, organized, and managed the entire project using volunteer inmate labor. It was an astonishing accomplishment and the quality of the work was outstanding. “It is for the Lord,” Gregori said, “we did our best work for Him.” It was a special triumph for Gregori because he had just completed two years of a five year sentence for “mismanaging” a construction project. Actually, he was more of a political prisoner than anything else. He had become a believer during the period of “Glasnost” (or openness) that had preceded the fall of communism and had refused to cooperate with corrupt administrators who were routinely stealing materials from the jobs they supervised to either sell on the black market or use them to build their summer homes. He had also finished his project under budget and ahead of schedule making the “skim” that his colleagues were trying to run more difficult to disguise and exposing their mindless work ethic. So he was charged and convicted—a common event in Soviet Russia, but he was the hero of the men who had defiantly stood with him.

Gregori was a “stand up” guy who had the courage to take the heat for doing what was right. Because of his consistent testimony for Christ, he was respected by believers and non-believers alike within the prison, and had even won the admiration of the staff. He was the real thing, and I knew he was God’s man for our project. Sometimes our most impressive credentials are related to the reputation of our enemies or the groups or organizations that have rejected us. It helped that Gregori had a legitimate argument for release and with political support from some friends and local dignitaries, the corrections officials were soon convinced to release him back to society where he could return to a productive life. As soon as he was released from prison he came to work for us. He did a phenomenal job and everyone who visited our facilities was impressed by the work that had been done, under budget and ahead of schedule.

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Ethical dependability is a measure of our trustworthiness in practical matters. It's an indicator of the confidence that others have in us that we will be honest, fair, and faithful. These qualities are critical in a man if people are going to rely on him to make good decisions. They are essential not only in his personal life and family, but also to the success of any career he will have. If a man wants to be trusted, he should strive to develop reliable ethics and good judgment because "even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right" (Proverbs 20:11).

I know from personal experience what the Lord can do with a man's life. When I first became a follower of Christ and began to rethink my values, I was shocked to discover the mess I had made both at home and at work. I had become unethical, immoral, and generally a tyrant. I had not been a reliable man, especially at home, and the Lord was challenging me to make things right with my wife, son, and many others. Because of all the instability and chaos I had caused, my family had been afraid to follow me. I knew that I had to earn back their trust, and rebuild their confidence in my ideas and judgments. My primary goal was to improve enough to be able to credibly say to my family, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

For instance, I knew that I had to stop lying to others and myself. I had become very adept at disguising my failures and avoiding accountability, but the more I lied, the more tangled my life became. So one of the first things I did was establish a new value of *truthfulness*. When we decide to change our values we must carefully consider the strategies that support them. Old ways of thinking can undermine new values, and they must be eliminated and replaced so that we can be more certain of reaching our goals. The strategy required to support my new value was very simple. When I was asked a question, all I had to do was tell the truth about the facts, as I knew them. But it was not long until I realized from reading the Scriptures that I needed to raise my standard again to "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). This more demanding value required a more refined communications strategy. When asked a question, I would still speak the truth, but hopefully with sensitivity to the circumstances of the listener and how what I say might cause them pain or suffering.

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This would be one of many corrections that the Lord would require of me. Each improvement not only set me free from the causes of sin, but also increased my credibility and made me a more reliable man. As followers of Christ, one of our primary activities should be evaluating what we believe and how we do things, comparing them to what the Scriptures describe, and, with His help, making the appropriate changes. Learning from the Lord can become life's greatest adventure. It can also bring tremendous relief from its uncertainties. Jesus said, "He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from Him, I tell the world" (John 8:26).

Acquire a Disciplined and Prudent Life

Who among us has not said, "I would like to do that all over again with what I now know"? When we look back at how things "could have been," we can see how some of the most important decisions we have made were affected by our character. Greed, passion, or the personal need for power may have caused us to say "yes" to a risky idea when a more secure, disciplined person would have declined. Or careful and prudent analysis could have helped us properly evaluate the ethics of a business relationship that would later prove to be unsavory. There might also have been times when the fear of failure or our questionable judgment neutralized us, and left us unable to take advantage of reasonable opportunities when they occurred. As we gain experience in life, we can begin to figure out what did or did not work for us in different situations, and decide how things can be done better in the future. When these reflective times reveal problems with our values and strategies, they become opportunities "for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life" and "doing what is right and just and fair" (Proverbs 1:3).

In Romans 12:2 the Apostle Paul exhorts us not to "conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This is a difficult concept for most men because we don't easily change how we think. We often have "war stories" about how we have learned our lessons, and why and how we do things. While these stories may be colorful and interesting, they tend to disguise the weaknesses of our logic. There may also be an underlying trauma or emotional reaction that has shaped our

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thinking. Along with the unique facets of each person's personality, these things can blur our ability to see and accept our flaws. Our pride can also get in the way and cause us to resist the insights and opinions that could help us improve. For most of us it will take a deliberate act of our will to humbly reconsider our viewpoint. But as Jesus said in Matthew 23:12 (NAS), "whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

A person's value system operates like a program in a computer. It is a complex set of interrelated ideas, learned experiences, and personal theories through which information is processed, analyzed, and converted to action. It includes all the values and strategies a man has collected over his lifetime along with the various priorities he has assigned them. When he has to make a decision, this program with all of its preset ideas and concepts (good and bad, accurate and inaccurate) begin to converge on the problem in an effort to come to a conclusion about the correct action to take and the strength with which it should be executed. Changing the viewpoint of just one item in our program from a worldly to a biblical pattern can have enormously positive effects.

So when the Apostle Paul exhorts us to "be transformed by the renewing of our mind," his purpose is for us to change some of our ideas and concepts so that we may "prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2 NAS). Actually, the man who wants to be a follower of Christ should settle for nothing less. But Paul knew how hard it would be for men to so easily give up the things they have learned in the world. So he further challenges us in verse 3, "for through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

Too often, I have heard someone describe a very questionable attribute about a man's behaviors or methods only to hear another person come to his defense and say "maybe so, but he gets results." The possibility that the behavior could be an indicator of a deeper, more serious problem with his values or strategies is naively overlooked because of what appears to be the achievement of the "desired results." This unrealistically tolerant attitude has a tendency

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to change when you are the person who has to endure the consequences of someone's faulty methods or personality quirks, or if the results of his inappropriate actions end up on the front page of the newspaper. Achieving desired results is no license for misbehavior. Nothing is more essential to a family or an organization than having a man's practiced values be consistent with his stated values.

Proverbs 29:19 (NAS) says, "A slave will not be instructed by words alone; for though he understands, there will be no response." In other words, people need a consistent role model of what is being said before they will trust someone and respond to them properly. Without it people will either refuse to follow the one who is trying to lead them or will cooperate for the wrong reasons, such as fear, idolatry, or intimidation. The influence character has on good judgment and behavior cannot be minimized. It is the real issue behind many of the failures that occur at home and at work. In fact, reliable character is a man's most important asset.

We begin to shape our character early in life as we learn the principles that will become the foundation for our values and strategies. They include the significance of truth, what is just and fair, the difference between responsible and irresponsible actions, respect for the rights and property of others, the need for compassion and faithfulness in relationships, and how to exercise moral restraint. Everything else we learn or do is affected by these fundamentals. Since many of us didn't become followers of Christ until adulthood, it's always a good idea to renew our ethics according to the Scriptures.

Communicate with Intellectual Integrity

A person with intellectual integrity thinks and communicates with honesty and fairness. He presents his opinions and evaluations honorably and with propriety, always trying to give an accurate representation of what he believes are the facts in any situation. He is guided by a sense of principle that is above self-interest and which is comfortable with even the most intense scrutiny. These are essential attributes in any man because the credibility of political, social, or economic debate, the soundness of democratic processes, and the reliability of relationships are in question when the

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intellectual integrity of a person is in doubt. Solomon said that “Truth stands the test of time; lies are soon exposed” (Proverbs 12:19 TLB).

Breaches of intellectual integrity are emerging in all parts of our society. The honest representation of facts and figures is routinely being displaced by lying, deception, and various forms of manipulation. A war of perception—waged through what is tactically viable for the moment, not on what is fair, right, or true—dominates the media and the marketplace. In advertising, social actions, and political debates, the presenters are often depending on the listeners’ ignorance of the manipulative methods they have used in their opinion polls. Or they may be relying on their ability to sway the listener with deliberately inaccurate rhetoric. The self-serving manipulation of words—or spin—has become an accepted professional skill. Although spin can produce the desired results in sales, memberships, contributions, and votes, its benefits are short-lived. Solomon said that we should “have two goals: wisdom—that is, knowing and doing right—and common sense” (Proverbs 3:21 TLB). But more often we see men making decisions based upon what is good for them alone, notwithstanding what is fair or just.

I worked with a client a few years ago who asked me to help him review the organizational design of his already quite profitable business. As we went through the preliminary training with his senior staff, we quickly discovered that there were serious differences of opinion about how the company’s goals would be changed. This kind of conflict is not unusual, since there is always some resistance associated with organizational change. We knew that we would have to discuss the ideas and viewpoints of everyone that would be affected until we reached agreement. It was important to patiently move toward the new vision. But as our training progressed, this particular situation became unusually combative.

One day during a coffee break, we were all sharing stories about week-end interests, when I realized what was wrong. Everyone in the room was much younger than the CEO and myself and had participated in what is commonly referred to as public education’s Values Clarification Programs. These programs were intended to make them free thinkers by teaching them not to allow anyone to

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impose values on them. While the CEO and I had been educated in a public school environment which taught the importance of intellectual integrity, the others had been taught that integrity was a relative concept with no absolute borders. They had been trained to resist values-based accountability and thus had been intellectually and morally crippled, unable to unselfishly negotiate for the common good. This is one reason that so many people we encounter each day really do not believe that “a good man is guided by his honesty” (Proverbs 11:3 TLB).

In Matthew 23:21 (NAS) Jesus said, “He who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.” This implies that when a follower of Christ speaks, what he says is spoken in the presence of God because the Holy Spirit dwells within him. So we have a great responsibility to speak with intellectual integrity. Only a few months after I became a believer, I went on a sales call with an important prospect for whom I had been designing a pension plan. Earl was a coarse old man who had made his fortune selling sand for construction projects. I followed him around that day from one sand mine to the next, answering his questions and hoping that the relationship we were building would help lead to a sale. Earl was a careful buyer and he kept asking me the same questions in different ways during the day. It wasn't long until I noticed that I was repeating myself. Finally, growing frustrated, I asked him if he had read the proposal I had given him. He responded sharply, “Of course I've read it. And I know all of these figures by heart. I'm just checking out your honesty.” At first I was stunned and a little bit disoriented. Then I blurted back, “Did you think I might be lying to you?” For just a moment the gentle fatherly side of him came through and I felt the kindness in his voice. “Son,” he said, “you can never be too careful.” “But Earl,” I said, “I could never lie to you about these things, I am a Christian.”

He laughed, shrugged his shoulders and said, “Come with me.” He led me across the parking lot to his shiny Cadillac. Then he said, “What do you see on the front seat of this car?” I looked in and, of course, saw the big black Bible which I had noticed the first time I got in the car. It had made me feel comfortable because I thought it meant I was dealing with a brother, although some of

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the things Earl had said throughout the day had made me wonder. I answered, “Do you mean the Bible?” “Yes,” he said, “And do you know why I carry that Bible with me in the car everywhere I go? It is to remind me that the biggest mistake I ever made in a business deal was trusting the word of a man who was carrying one just like it. I know you are a Christian, but as to my dealings with you in business, it means absolutely nothing, until you prove yourself.”

Earl said he was not a believer because he had seen enough of what Christians could do to him and to one another. I spent several hours listening to him unload his frustrations about the church. Earl is a reminder that the church has had a great audience who has seen and heard our behaviors over the years and been disappointed. It has been difficult at times to understand the behaviors of some of our leaders. Too often what we have seen and heard has been inconsistent with intellectual integrity. But when a man chooses to risk the consequences of dishonesty for some immediate gain, he is sacrificing a far more important goal in life. As David said in Psalm 15:1-2 (NAS), “O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.”

Be Governed by Moral Conscience

Moral conscience is the power source for our moral behavior. It refers to much more than the chasteness or modesty of our sexual life and other private behaviors. It includes the concepts of self-restraint, the decent and humane treatment of others, respect for life and authority, principled and responsible policies, and all of the values which consider the common good as an outcome. It is broader than intellectual integrity. Moral conscience is the traffic director of our thought processes and moral behaviors. It gives us the strength to make difficult choices and stay the course in hard times.

The loss of our moral conscience as a nation has become very problematic. People have dramatically lowered their moral standards. Rape, sexual harassment, pedophilia, drug abuse, and fraud, along with other dangerous expressions of personal moral failures, have hit our country like an epidemic. The lack of moral conscience that has been demonstrated by some of our leaders has resulted in defiant

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attitudes which are astonishing when compared with the heritage we have as a nation. We in the church are supposed to be different. We should be prepared to offer hope and demonstrate moral authority to the world around us. There must be trustworthy, reliable people in our society where others can turn for solace, support, and direction. Proverbs 28:2 (TLB) tells us that “When there is moral rot within a nation, its government topples easily; but with honest, sensible leaders there is stability.”

In Matthew 23:27-28 (NAS) Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders by saying,

For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

This Scripture reminds me of how many men I have known who were faking their morality. They attended church regularly and had learned how to act moral, but inwardly they were tormented and like volcanoes ready to erupt. They were “on the verge of total ruin, in the midst of the assembly and the congregation” (Proverbs 5:14 NKJ). This is particularly the case regarding sexual lust. We expect that God can deliver us from drugs or a life of crime, but to live life free from the torment of fantasies or unclean thoughts and desires is considered by too many men as impossible. I have often heard preachers describe the battle with lust as though it were an unsolvable problem. One pastor exhorted the men in his congregation to avoid the temptation of lust by volunteering at the church to change light bulbs. The idea was to occupy the mind and body doing some godly activity.

I have both bad news and good news for the man who has heard and believed such unbiblical views about sexual immorality. The bad news is that unhealed sexual lust will undermine your manliness. It softens your character and confuses your ability to make sharp, clear decisions. It can destroy your finances, weaken your self-confidence, torment you with guilt, and leave you unable to lead

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effectively at home and at work. If you have any doubt about these consequences, read chapters five through seven of Proverbs in any version of the Bible. Scattered among these chapters is an astounding compendium of the results of lust, and the margin references will take you to other Scriptures throughout the Bible.

The good news is that you can be healed and set free. The reason most men think it is impossible is because it is not easy. Getting free from lust requires gritty determination and the right spiritual strategy. There must be a severe split in your friendship with lust and all of its sources. As someone once said, “It is hard enough to be delivered from your enemies, but you can’t be delivered from your friends.” If lust is secretly your friend—forget it! You will not get free.

Being set free from sexual immorality and lust is a big part of my own testimony, so when I approach this subject with men I have both sympathy and no misgivings about what is required. Over the years, I have counseled with dozens of men about how to solve problems in their business, finances, or family only to discover that the root problem in their lives was lust. After going through the routine reviews of their business disciplines, financial management, family lives, etc., without uncovering a clear root cause for the apparent problem, I would ask them this question; “Is there some kind of secret and/or sexual sin in your life?” The following paragraphs recap their most common responses, my comments, and a strategy for eliminating lust:

“Well, I do have a little problem with pornography, but it is not real bad.” Men sometimes think they are not doing anything really bad if they are not physically committing adultery with another woman (or man). Looking at pornography is sinful in and of itself because it is mental fornication (or adultery, if you are married); it also sows seeds of rebellion throughout your soul. Remember, under the new covenant, if you even fantasize about it, you have done it. Saying you have a little problem with pornography is like saying you have a little problem with cancer. Left unopposed it can destroy you.

“No, my wife and I have a good sex life, although it’s not completely satisfying to me.” Are you asking her to do things that

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she does not feel comfortable with? There are some things, even between married consenting adults, that are “unnatural.” Just use a little common sense and think about what you are asking her to do.

“I sometimes flirt with women, but it’s not a serious thing with me.” All women should take flirting seriously, because it is serious. It is an enticement for further contact, and you have probably already committed sin in your heart when you flirt.

“I committed adultery. But even though I repented I still have the desire.” When we commit adultery, any kind, we have broken our covenant with our spouse. If we broke our covenant with our wife in any other area, we would know that we had to confess it to her to be completely free. Confessing sexual sin is no different, but it does require some wisdom and God’s timing so that it will be a healing event and not destructive.

Here are some ideas that can be helpful:

1) You must hate the sin of lust, deeply repent, and call on the Lord for deliverance. If you read carefully what the Bible has to say about lust and look closely at what it has done in your life (remember Proverbs chapters 5 through 7), it should be easy to hate this sin. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13 NKJ). Repentance will come naturally when you have a clear revelation of what you have done. Ask the Lord to help you become free of your sinful ways.

2) You must set your will against all sources of lust in your life with a vengeance. Your soul has probably been working in concert with lust for a long time. Being forgiven is wonderful, but learning a new way of life is a little more challenging. The Holy Spirit will convict you of things that are allowing lust into your life. All you have to do is resist by changing the channel, putting down the magazine, etc. If you have any question about what is allowable, I recommend that you err to the side of purity, lest “as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3 NAS).

3) You must confess to everyone who has a right and need to know. The power of lust is very often tied to the secrecy of it, and the appropriate confession can bring deep and permanent healing.

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Once you have had to work through the fear and humiliation of confessing your sins and rebuilding trust in your relationships, you will be much more motivated to resist lust. If you are worried about how your wife will react, you have good reason to be concerned; but you have already done much more damage to her than a confession ever could. She needs healing too. Stand up like a man, take the heat, don't make any excuses, and pray for God's mercy. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Proverbs 28:13 NAS).

Demonstrate Task Faithfulness

Personal responsibility is the hallmark of task faithfulness. A person who is task faithful can be depended upon. He is dutiful, constant, dedicated to his responsibilities, and unwavering in the fulfillment of his word. His stewardship is proven and he has the confidence of his superiors, peers, and subordinates. He is the one people turn to when they want things to work right, run on time, and be there when they are needed. He is devoted to his relationships and his family is carefully nurtured. His presence adds a level of certainty to any endeavor, and he carefully manages his time, energy, and resources. A faithful man generates faith and hope in those around him and brings a sense of security to his family and work.

Proverbs 20:6 (NAS) tells us that "Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy [or faithful, NKJ] man?" This is a question in the mind of most people, especially women. And just like the admonition of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 (NKJ), educators and businessmen are once again seeking "faithful men who will be able to teach others," and steward the processes of service and industry. Over the years, I have had a number of discussions with my son about the management of his business and career. I have assured him that in today's marketplace, his faithfulness, alone, will cause him to stand out among his competitors. By adding to his faithfulness the disciplined mastery of his field, a young man can offer his customers a unique experience of satisfaction. It is ironic that in a time when unfaithfulness is growing, society is more and more demanding of certainty. A faithful and competent man

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can find himself with a great advantage, and have all of the customers or clients he will ever want.

Being faithful is so fundamental to a man's stewardship of authority and processes that when it is not proven, it is certain to create unwanted surprises. Faithful people can be taught the information, skills, and methods they will need to perform well, but building an organization with even the most highly-educated and talented people whose faithfulness is in question, is a recipe for crisis. Every man will face crunch-times when the commitments he has made are tested by the shortage of time, money, and energy. It is when we tackle these challenges that we discover the importance of faithfulness. When I think back through all the instances where I struggled to make a deadline and succeeded; it was faithful people who made the difference, not money or resources. It is during those pressurized events that human bonds are built and trustworthiness is proven. If we have noticed the signs of unfaithfulness in a person and have ignored or rationalized them away, we can be assured that we will pay the penalty when crunch-times come. "Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot [or slippery footing] is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble" (Proverbs 25:19 NAS).

The importance of faithfulness was wisely explained to me by my grandmother when I was only a child. She would tell me stories with scriptural morals and lessons about stewardship. They sounded like proverbs and they always emphasized a simple value like: "Don't take anything that is not yours. If you steal little things when you are little, you will steal bigger things when you are big." She knew that a person who is "faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (Luke 16:10 NAS). She also knew the temptations I would face in life and was teaching me to be faithful as early as possible.

We should always test people's faithfulness in little things before giving them authority over people or processes. Of course, we can't take them back to their childhood and teach them grandmothers' proverbs. But we can give them little responsibilities and carefully hold them accountable for those little things. If they are found to be faithful, we can give them more little responsibilities. Then, if

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they continue to be found faithful, we can begin to give them a few bigger responsibilities mixed in with the little ones. Eventually we can prove the stewardship of a person who is trustworthy in much. But what are the little things? Believe it or not, the Scriptures teach us that money is one of the little things. “If you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon (or worldly riches, NIV), who will entrust the true riches to you” (Luke 16:11 NAS)? So test a man early with little amounts of money and continue testing him until you are confident that he will handle authority over people and decision-making properly.

There is a Russian proverb which President Ronald Reagan made famous during the negotiation of the nuclear treaties with Russia. It is simply “trust, but verify.” It means that two people can make an agreement that each trusts the other will fulfill. But to be sure, they should verify each other’s actions. Sometimes people act offended when you verify their faithfulness. When you come back to check their work, count the money, or talk to a client or customer, they feel like it is an expression of your lack of trust in them. I have learned to explain to people that I can confidently verify their work because I do trust them, and I am sure that I will find faithfulness in the accounting or analysis. It is helpful to our working relationship for them to know that I trust them because I have verified so many times and found them to be faithful. And it is particularly important for both of us when I must give an account to others about the faithfulness of those under my authority. To a faithful person, accountability is not a threat, it is a friend. It is another opportunity to allow his faithfulness to shine through.

In Matthew 23:23 (NAS) Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” These people had busied themselves with details, giving a tenth of even their spices to the Lord, but had failed to become men who were faithful to dispense justice and mercy through reasonable judgments. By saying, “these are the things you should have done, without neglecting the others,” Jesus is clearly telling them that they are responsible not to neglect any area of their responsibilities. I have counseled many men who were facing

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business failure because they had focused their energies only on those parts of their businesses they most enjoyed. They had either ignored other essential areas or delegated them to people they later discovered to be unfaithful.

Others had failed to show the proper attention to their wives or children while they poured their lives into their businesses. When a crisis developed, they might confess having had a nagging concern that they were not paying enough attention to the areas from which the problems originated. But then they would say something like, “I can’t do everything and be everywhere,” “nobody’s perfect,” “I kept trying to find the time,” or “I’m just not very good at that.” These comments may sound reasonable, but most of the time they are just cop-outs. They are unanswerable defenses which are intended to produce sympathy or deflect guilt. The truth is that men always find a way to do the things that are important to them. When they don’t give a responsibility the time and energy it deserves, there is usually a specific reason. Here are a few to consider:

1) Sometimes it’s inexperience. One of the best ways to gain experience is to be faithful in another man’s business or ministry. Apprenticing can provide insight and wisdom that education alone can’t provide. It can be very enlightening to observe the processes and pressures of leading an organization without having to suffer the full consequences. It is a luxury which is often overlooked by young people who have ambitions and visions of their own. Those of us who didn’t serve an apprenticeship, or who failed to pay attention when we did, have missed important opportunities to learn how to set priorities, test our motivations, and understand the consequences of neglected responsibilities. The things we experience as an apprentice can mature our attitudes and help us gain the advantage of being able to more correctly judge our own or another person’s faithfulness. “If you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12 NAS).

2) Sometimes we’re serving the wrong master. The way a man conducts his responsibilities exposes his motives. For instance, if your primary goal in life is earning money or having things, then everything you do points to that fact. The decisions you make and

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the way you treat people reflects what you think their value is to you in dollars. However, when your primary goal in life is to serve the Lord faithfully, your actions will have more to do with the proper stewarding of your responsibilities, knowing that everything you do is done in His presence. A man really cannot serve two masters, “for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other” (Luke 16:13 NAS). If money is your master, you will consistently treat people in a way that reflects your own desires. If the Lord is your Master, the things you say and do will more commonly reflect God’s purposes and attitudes, and you will prosper. This means more than just being a good guy. It is a commitment to be faithful to the things that are important to Christ. “A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 28:20 NAS).

3) Sometimes we are naive or undisciplined. While I was going to college, I worked at a car dealership. Working there was chaotic and there were all kinds of things that could go wrong to make a customer unhappy and spoil a deal. I learned quickly that unless I followed up on every phase of the sale, financing, preparation, and delivery of a customer’s car, the result could be an unsatisfied customer and the loss of a commission. It made me angry that other people’s mistakes kept costing me money and that I had to do so much follow-up. It probably was unfair, but grumbling didn’t change the circumstances. I finally stopped complaining about everyone else’s failures and disciplined myself to regularly visit the finance office and service department to make sure that the things the customer had specifically asked for, as well as those that I knew he would expect, were completed properly and on time. Sometimes I found that I had made errors in submitting paperwork. But even when I had done everything right, I learned how easily unintentional mistakes could be made by others. This required me to develop relationships in every part of the organization. Doing so helped me to gain a greater appreciation for what each person did in making my sale complete. I learned to “trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness” (Psalms 37:3 NAS). And I made great money doing it.

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4) Sometimes our priorities are not properly balanced. Even when we have made Christ the master of our life, keeping our priorities balanced can be difficult. A man's work is usually so much a part of his life that he tends to spend the majority of his time and energy there. And rightly so, because being faithful to our work is an important measure of our faithfulness with our gifts and talents. In Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 (NAS), Solomon says, "I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God." Solomon understood that part of God's design for man is that he would find satisfaction through his work. But men often become so absorbed in their work they forget its purpose—to support a family and God's greater agenda for life. We all have to understand that the time we take away from our businesses to be with our families is time well spent. It is a true measure of our love for our family that we not only support them through our work, but that we nurture them with our time, energy, and wisdom.

5) Sometimes we are escaping. The pressures of leading a family can cause a man to want to escape into his business or ministry. It is interesting to me that a person who is facing work problems rarely escapes into family activities. It's usually golfing, fishing, or worse yet, another woman. Alcoholism and drug addiction are very often the evidence of a man's attempts to escape the pressures and pains of life. A man who is somehow shackled and unable to solve his problems will tend to escape his frustration or fear of failure through some mind-numbing activity. Men are generally uncomfortable facing their fears or vulnerabilities. They don't like to talk about them to their wives or others by seeking counsel. When they do decide to share with others and don't find immediate solutions, they feel insecure or weak. David said, "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in thee" (Psalms 56:3 NAS). Men have to learn to trust God and go to Him with their problems and responsibilities. Being friends with the Lord gives a man a new sense of security, the wisdom and guidance he needs as a steward, and the opportunity to become known as a person like Daniel, who "was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him" (Daniel 6:4 NAS).

Use Reasonable Judgment

Reasonable judgment is the logical product of a person's wisdom and common sense. It supports the concepts of equity and justice in a civil society because a great part of our law hinges on the principle of what a reasonable person would say or do in a given situation. If someone is going to judge our work or make decisions that affect our personal life, we ideally want them to be diligent, logical, and analytical in the pursuit of facts. Then we expect them to be rational, prudent, and discerning in the analysis of those facts. As they sift through the options available to them, we hope that they will be consistent and sensible. And finally, we want their judgment to be wise, judicious, and fair. In short, what we are expecting is that they will deliberate faithfully, with intellectual integrity and moral conscience, in arriving at a reasonable judgment.

Alexis DeTouqueville, in his landmark book, *Democracy in America*, recognized that the strength of America's democracy was related to its goodness and that its goodness was related to "mores" or moral conscience found in expressions of personal faith. He pointed out that if these important fibers in the fabric of public life were to deteriorate, that democracy itself would fail. As Solomon had said centuries before, "The good influence of godly citizens causes a city to prosper, but the moral decay of the wicked drives it downhill" (Proverbs 11:11 TLB). Our concept of a civil society has deteriorated along with its loss of intellectual integrity and moral conscience. As a result, we can no longer depend upon our leaders to produce reasonable judgments.

I learned a great lesson in Russia about what happens to a civil society when their ability to make reasonable judgments degrades. Russia suffers from the effects of what I call a "moral holocaust." Intellectual integrity, moral conscience, and faithfulness in personal actions were systematically extinguished by the policies of the Soviet era. The moral and economic abuses of the Czars, coupled with their selfish misuse of Russia's resources, not only crippled the economy, but presented socialists with both the rationale and opportunity for revolution. The Leninist socialists intended to prevent such future social and economic indulgences as those which occurred under the Czars. To accomplish their goals, they secularized

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society, eliminated individual responsibility, and replaced the social and moral values provided by faith in God with humanistic values. It was a futile attempt to achieve goodness without God. The result is a society that lacks the ability to make reasonable judgments and conduct business fairly. When you intentionally extinguish a system of values that is rooted in Biblical wisdom, “you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men” (Matthew 23:13 NAS).

Whether it is at home or at work, a man must make reasonable judgments to carry out his responsibilities before God. I pray for wisdom in my daily life more than anything else because of the consequences to other people that my actions may bring. The dictionary describes wisdom as “knowledge of what is true or right coupled with good judgment.” Deciding what is true or right in a business proposal, a hiring decision, a performance review, the analysis of a major purchase, which appointment to cancel, who has given a correct explanation, whom to discipline, what counsel you should give, when you should speak or stay silent, where to trim a budget, or any number of decisions we must make in a day require wisdom. Fortunately, Proverbs 8:12 (TLB) tells us that “wisdom and good judgment live together, for wisdom knows where to discover knowledge and understanding.”

The most difficult decisions we make are surely about people. People decisions can be complex and confusing. And they often carry with them consequences that can bring our own motives and intentions into question. If you are a person responsible for employees, volunteers, students, congregants, or a wife and kids, you have had to make countless judgments of people. Sometimes the painful memories of past mistakes or conflicts with people make it more difficult to judge reasonably. And there are times when avoiding judgment altogether becomes a way of avoiding new troubles. But a godly man has no choice but to search for the facts in each situation and fulfill his obligation to make reasonable judgments where he has responsibility.

“Do not love” (1 John 2:15 NAS) and “Do not Judge” (Matthew 7:1 NAS). I have deliberately misstated the Scriptures here to emphasize how easily the intended meaning of a Scripture can be modified by quoting it out of its intended context. Do you know

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which Scripture I have misquoted? It is obvious that “Do not love” could not be an accurate quote from the Bible because we know that there are so many Scriptures actually commanding us *to* love. In 1 John 2:15 (NAS) we are told, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world.” Verse 16 goes on to describe what is meant by “the world”—“the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life.” This passage of Scripture sits in the middle of a wonderful dissertation on loving God and one another. So to quote this Scripture in a way that infers that it literally means “do not love,” would dramatically change its intent, and if we obey it, undermine our ability to follow Christ.

You may be surprised to learn that I misquoted both Scriptures. Matthew 7:1 does not simply say “do not judge” any more than 1 John 2:15 says “do not love.” But you may have heard it misquoted so much that you have come to accept it in this way. The strategic importance of this passage cannot be overstated. In it Jesus is actually warning us to be careful about how we make our judgments. He was not saying that we should not judge anyone at anytime for any reason, as it is sometimes taught. There are too many times in life that reasonable judgment is required and there are too many Scriptures throughout the Bible which support the idea of a man making accurate judgments about people and their behaviors. In fact, if we do not practice making reasonable judgments, we are being unfaithful in our walk with Christ. Hebrews 5:14 (NAS) tells us that, “solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern [or judge] good and evil.”

In Matthew 7:12 (NAS) Jesus said, “Therefore whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Someone once told me that when you see the word “therefore,” always go back and see what it is “there for.” What has become known as the “golden rule” is referring to the previous eleven verses. Jesus is teaching in this passage about how we should treat or “judge” people and that we should do so to them in the manner that we want them to do to us. So let’s review Matthew 7:1-11 in this light.

Matthew 7:1-2 (NAS), “Do not judge, lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you shall be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” This passage is consistent

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with Jesus' wrap-up in verse 12. The way we judge and the standard of measure we use, is exactly the way we will be judged; probably by other people, as well as by Him. So if our method or standard of measure for judging is wrong, it is better that we do not judge.

Matthew 7:3-5 (NAS), "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother's eye." It is a problem, particularly with men, that we do not spend enough of our energy working with the Lord to correct what is wrong in our own lives. Our first line of responsibility for reasonable judgment is to look intently at ourselves and rightly judge ourselves before Him. If we have spent time before Christ in confession and repentance, it will cause us to be humble and understanding, then we can see clearly to help others who might have a need. In fact, what we might have considered to be a log in someone's eye yesterday may look more like a harmless speck today.

Matthew 7:6 (NAS), "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." It is important that we know when and with whom we should share our judgments. This Scripture implies that we can be careless with our judging and that we can be torn to pieces as a result. Besides the obvious conflict with people that offering judgments can cause, we should also be acutely aware of the mercy we have received from the Lord and not carelessly throw it away to indulge in improper judging. "He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding keeps silent" (Proverbs 11:12 NAS).

Matthew 7:7-11 (NAS), "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

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shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" Every man who wants to be faithful in his responsibilities will be required to make judgments about people and will need God's wisdom to do so. Proverbs 9:10 (NAS) tells us that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" and verses 1-6 of Matthew 7 should put the fear of the Lord in anybody. In fact, it is usually so effective that men would rather give up on judging anything at all, rather than ask God for the wisdom to carefully judge what is true and right. But if a man is going to mature in Christ, he must practice making reasonable judgments. Here's how:

1) Be determined to make reasonable judgments and ask God for wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5 NAS).

2) Make reasonable judgments with a right attitude. You will know when you have received God's wisdom because "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy" (James 3:17 NAS).

3) Act with wisdom. Proverbs 9:12 (NAS) tells us that "if you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you alone will bear it." Act on your own judgments and keep your own counsel. Speak judgments only where you have authority and responsibility, and only when it is required. Keep in mind that the responsibility to make judgments carries with it the mandate to be merciful. "So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2: 12-13 NAS).