January Soul Connections Resources

What Does It Mean To Take a Path of Integrity?

What better theme to begin the year than exploring what it means to live with integrity.

Integrity means living with honesty, keeping one’s word, attending to brokenness, brokenness not only within ourselves but also within our wider community, and choosing to act on the better angels of our nature. Integrity also has a lot to do with moving toward wholeness--acknowledging the integrity of something or someone.

Integrity is about how we move through the world and whether we honor the many interconnections which support and give meaning to our lives. For we are ultimately shaped by a matrix of relationships in which we find ourselves.

There is perhaps no better way to change our lives than to attend how we move through life with integrity. And no better way to make a difference in the world than connecting with others with a shared commitment to acting with integrity. For as we cultivate agreements and promises with one another--and make good on those micro-promises--we develop a covenantal relationship with others. And this is, I believe, the source of our power, our power as individuals as well as our collective power.

During this month, one specific set of relationships I want us to pay attention to is our community connections. In June, we will be leaving our building for a collective journey of at least 15 months, and we have the exciting opportunity to focus on and engage our connections with one another outside of our beloved worship home. What are you willing to commit to for the sake of our community life? This is a question for us all to explore and then follow with integrity.

Another set of relationships I want us to pay attention to are with those who don’t share our faith but share our core commitments. People who are seeking to live out the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. People who recognize that we need protect our environment for future generations. People who give of themselves for the sake of cultivating compassion, equity, and justice in human relations. People who share our principles but not our faith community.

For as we get clearer on both these sets of relationships, we will become an even more engaged congregation with one another and we will become a more powerful congregation in the wider world.

May 2015 be full of laughter, peace, and joy for us all!

Rev. Alan Taylor
Our Spiritual Exercises:

Option A:
A New Year of Integrity

New Year's resolutions are often about changing oneself. In light of this month's theme, make it about holding on to (or remaining loyal to) yourself instead. Pick one thing that makes you distinctively you and then resolve to protect, celebrate or live into it for at least this month. Think of it as a “resolution to your integrity.” Come to your group prepared to share why you picked the personal characteristic you did and how your resolution to honor it altered your day-to-day living this month.

Option B:
What's The Big Deal about White Lies?

White lies regularly come up in conversations about integrity. Are they really that big of a deal? Spend this month figuring out the role they play in your life. Monitor when you use them. See what patterns emerge. Do you use them to protect the feelings of others? Or to hide something about yourself? Do they serve your sense of integrity or betray it? Come to your group ensure what you learned?

Option C:
Person of the Year

Time magazine names of a "Person of the Year" every January. They choose someone whose impact stands out and whose influence dramatically shifted the events the past year. Likewise, we all have someone in our lives who shaped our sense of integrity just as significantly. Come to your group with the name and story of someone who was a model of integrity in your life.

Option D:
Your Greatest Act of Integrity

All of us have it: that time in our life on the strength of our character stood out and we acted out of our deepest sense of what was morally right or most true to our core. Revisit and re-celebrate that moment by sharing it with your group. Spend some time before your meeting reflecting on how that moment of high resolve not only brought you pride but challenge you to live up to it again and again.

Option E:
A Child's Integrity

One of the most sacred responsibilities of a parent or caretaker is to foster and protect their child's sense of integrity. If you have a child in your life (either as a parent, relative or mentor), use this month to be a bit more intentional about this precious task. Find at least one way to support their sense of integrity and true self.
Your Question:
As always, don’t treat these questions like “homework.” You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find the one that “hooks” you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your Soul Connections meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. As a child or young adult, what did watching those around you teach you about integrity? Where they positive or negative lessons? And maybe most importantly, how has that impacted you today, knowing that young ones around you are also watching you?

2. Has your integrity grown?

3. Does integrity bring you joy? Or does it feel like work?

4. One of our recommended quotes reads, “There are times in this harum-scarum world when figuring out the right thing to do is quite simple, but doing the right thing is simply impossible.” Are you facing such a situation right now? As you struggle, are you being kind to yourself?

5. In her poem, Now I Become Myself, May Sarton, writes, “Now I become myself. It's taken time, many years and places; I have been dissolved and shaken, worn other people's faces…” Are you aware of wearing other people's faces? What's stopping you from taking them off?

6. Parker Palmer writes, "I now know myself to be a person of weakness and strength, liability and giftedness, darkness and light. I now know that to be whole means to reject none of it but to embrace all of it.” What one thing could you embrace right now to feel more whole?

7. Is your workplace a place of integrity? If not, how have you learned to stay true to yourself in the midst of those pressures to do otherwise?

8. Have you raised your children to have integrity?

9. Does your marriage have integrity?

10. Do your friendships have integrity?

11. Does your spiritual life have integrity?
Recommended Resources:

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be “a people of integrity.”

**in·teg·ri·ty**

noun
1. the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness.
2. the state of being whole and undivided.

Wise Words:

"I now know myself to be a person of weakness and strength, liability and giftedness, darkness and light. I now know that to be whole means to reject none of it but to embrace all of it."
- Parker Palmer

"To be human is to become visible while carrying what is hidden as a gift to others. To remember the other world in this world is to live in your true inheritance."
- David Whyte, from his poem “What To Remember When Waking”

"Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people."
- Spencer Johnson

“Before we can even embrace the notion of integrity, we need to develop the ability to intellectually wrestle with the urge to rationalize away our underlying faults and the related consequences.”
- Eric Kail

“A little integrity is better than any career”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

“But there are times in this harum-scarum world when figuring out the right thing to do is quite simple, but doing the right thing is simply impossible....”
— Lemony Snicket, Horseradish: Bitter Truths You Can’t Avoid

"May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing and no holding back, the way it is with children.”
— Rainer Maria Rilke

I’m an Obliger, for sure! I do really well when other people are expecting me to do something, when I have a commitment with someone else … but I tend to let myself off the hook if it’s “only” a commitment to myself.”
- Leo Babauta

“You are only afraid if you are not in harmony with yourself.”
— Hermann Hesse

“Return to the most human, nothing less will nourish the torn spirit, the bewildered heart, the angry mind.”
- May Sarton
“Integrity is doing the right thing, even if nobody is watching.”
— Jim Stovall and C.S. Lewis

“On some questions, Cowardice asks the question, “Is it safe?” Expediency asks the question, “Is it polite?” And Vanity comes along and asks the question, “Is it popular?” But Conscience asks the question, “Is it right?” And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but we must do it because Conscience tells us it is right.”
- Martin Luther King jr

“I believe in integrity. It’s a belief that’s tested in those gut-wrenching moments when conflicting values pull me in opposite directions. Back in the early 1980s, [he wrote] I was in a training session for mental health workers who were volunteering to provide counseling to cancer patients who had a terminal diagnosis. Each of us was given 16 index cards and asked to write on each the names of people, abilities, things, and values we hold dear. In the course of our imagined cancer, we had to surrender cards or somewhat abruptly have them taken from us. At the end [of the exercise] I had two cards: One read “Integrity” and the other read “My Family.” How could I choose between these two; such a choice was unfair and impossible. My initial thought was that I would give up my integrity, because I love my daughters and would want their comfort at my death. But then, I would realize that dying without integrity might be worse.”
- A Soul Matters Minister

A few years ago I took a family systems training for clergy. When discussing how a leader maintains integrity in the midst of intense anxiety, we watched a film about JFK and the Cuban missile crisis. As I watched this film, I began laughing. We saw the iconic image of JFK hunched over the phone in his office as he waited for Russian Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, to call and de-escalate the impending nuclear world war. When he finally received a telegram from Khrushchev it was late at night. He said to his cabinet that he was going to get some sleep. The people in the room were incensed. He said something like, ”The world will be glad that I slept before responding.” I began laughing out loud! How many times have I been intensely anxious in my role as a leader in a church! While I am not at the helm with a pending nuclear world war, I think many people would be just fine with me sleeping before making a decision. I have a printed picture of JFK hunched over his desk near my phone in my office. It is a great reminder to not take myself so seriously. Lightening up helps me manage myself so that my own anxiety does not undermine my ultimate values and goal. In other words, it helps me lead with integrity.”
- A Soul Matters Minister

“Keep fresh before me the moments of my high resolve. Despite the dullness and barrenness of the days that pass, if I search with due diligence, I can always find a deposit left by some former radiance. But I had forgotten. At the time it was full-orbed, glorious, and resplendent. I was sure that I would never forget. I had forgotten how easy it is to forget. There was no intent to betray what seemed so sure at the time. My response was whole, clean, authentic. But little by little, there crept into my life the dust and grit of the journey. Details, lower-level demands, all kinds of cross currents -- nothing momentous, nothing overwhelming, nothing flagrant -- just wear and tear. If there had been some direct challenge --a
clear-cut issue -- I would have fought it to the end, and beyond.
In the quietness of this place, surrounded by the all-pervading Presence of God, my heart whispers: Keep fresh before me the moments of my High Resolve, that in fair weather or in foul, in good times or in tempests, in the days when the darkness and the foe are nameless or familiar, I may not forget that to which my life is committed”
- Howard Thurman

**Articles:**

**The Insufficiency of Honesty**
By Stephen L. Carter
An article exploring the meaning of integrity, and its differentiation from honesty.
Found by googling “THE INSUFFICIENCY OF HONESTY Stephen L. Carter Atlantic Monthly”
Also see:
http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/nicolichsufficiencyd03.pdf

**Seeing Ourselves in the Hunger Games**
By Cynthia Landrum
How do we live with integrity amidst our own dystopian future?
http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/220173.shtml

**Against Innocence**
By Rosemary Bray McNatt
Does our political integrity prevent us from compromise?
http://www.uuworld.org/2003/06/feature2.html

**A Lesson in Academic Integrity: The cost of plagiarism**

**Books:**

*A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*
by Parker Palmer

*On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose*
By Adrienne Rich
http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/07/02/adrienne-rich-honorable-human-relationship/

**Videos & Online:**

**The Calm Within**
http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=2568
Dewey Bozella was locked up for 26 years for a crime he did not commit. This story is about one man's journey to reclaim his life and hold on to his integrity against all odds.

**A Christopher Hitchens Memorial**
http://www.upworthy.com/people-were-outraged-by-what-he-said-his-entire-life-but-right-before-he-died-he-was-still-at-it?c=reccon2

**Movies:**

Locke
To Kill A Mockingbird
Pleasantville

**Constant Gardener**
**Chocolate**
**The Shawshank Redemption**
**On The Waterfront**
**The Mission**
**Dead Poets Society**
**Thank You For Smoking**
**Milk** (Check out the UUA study guide: http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/discuss/125446.shtml)
For Young Souls:

Books:
*The Empty Pot* by Demi

*The Day the Crayons Quit*  
by Drew Daywalt

*Ruthie and the (not so) Teeny Tiny Lie* by  
Laura Rankin

*The Berenstein Bears and the Truth*  
by Stan and Jan Berenstein

*Dear Mr. Rosenwald*  
by Carole Weatherford

*The Story of the Jumping Mouse*  
by John Steptoe

*The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth

Movies:  
Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory  
Brave  
Mary Poppins  
Frozen  
The Miracle Worker