



Adventist
Health Ministries
GENERAL CONFERENCE



Seventh-day
Adventist Church

LET'S CELEBRATE **INTEGRITY**

I is for integrity—truth in life



CELEBRATIONS
LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST



It is a motivational ingredient

The ninth British--expedition attempt to scale the height of Everest, the world's highest mountain, took place in May 1953. Led by John Hunt, the climbers were put into pairs. Tom Bourdillon and his partner, Charles Evans, came to within 300 feet of the peak. Oxygen problems forced their return to camp, but by creating a trail and leaving behind equipment, they facilitated the successful ascent by Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay. For the millions of people celebrating the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on June 2, 1953, this news added a frenzy of exhilaration to the already excited populace.

For several years, this first ascent of Everest was labeled a "team effort," the news release reading, "We reached the top together." A few years later, however, Norgay said that "only the truth is good enough for Everest." He revealed that Hillary had put his foot on the peak first. Such honesty speaks to the integrity of Tensing Norgay.

Integrity — as strange as it may seem — is an essential factor in the prescription for vital and exuberant health. It's a motivational ingredient that is very much at work in the implementation of health practices.

At times, the distinction between integrity and simple honesty may be unclear. Integrity is a lived concordance between theory and practice. It's the transparency and trustworthiness that should characterize our every action, even when no one is watching. When there is a difference



between what we say and what we do, we demonstrate a need for integrity. On the web forum Yahoo Answers, the meaning of honesty and integrity and the difference between the two has been debated. Here's an example of how users described the two terms:

1. "Honesty means that whatever you've done — good or bad — you speak the truth about it. In other words, you don't lie."
2. "Integrity means that you adhere to a moral conviction or code of honor that won't allow you to do certain things that you feel would debase you."

While not dictionary definitions, these explanations illustrate the role integrity plays in determining our actions. Honesty may lead to confession or admission of guilt, but it may not be sufficient to influence behavior. Integrity means there is a commitment to principles.

While still a young South African lawyer, Mahatma Gandhi committed to the cause of justice and, by example, taught others the power and influence of integrity. George Ludwig recounts the following story:

"A mother once brought her child to him, asking him to tell the young boy not to eat sugar because it was not good for his diet or his developing teeth. Gandhi replied, 'I cannot tell him that. But you may bring him back in a month.'

"The mother was angry as Gandhi moved on, brushing her aside. She had traveled some distance and had expected the mighty leader to support her parenting. She had little recourse, so she left for her home. One month later she returned, not knowing what to expect.

"The great Gandhi took the small child's hands into his own, knelt down before him, and tenderly communicated, 'Do not eat sugar, my child. It is not good for you.' Then he embraced him and returned the boy to his mother. The mother, grateful but perplexed, queried, 'Why didn't you say that a month ago?'

"'Well,' said Gandhi, 'a month ago I was still eating sugar.'" ¹ What power in example! What power in integrity!

INTEGRITY AND PERSONAL HEALTH

Integrity has personal as well as public health ramifications. Michelangelo, perhaps the world's most renowned of artists, wrote, "The world's frivolities have robbed me of the time that I was given for reflecting upon God." Integrity focuses our minds on truth, meaningfulness, value, and reality. When we address issues of health in this way, we'll find that we're dishonest most often with ourselves. When we are truly honest, the trite, frivolous, faddish, exotic, improbable, and sheer idiotic cease to captivate us. Integrity helps us examine the evidence and recognize our own biases. It demands of us high standards and requires us to base our beliefs upon evidence, not fancy. In essence, integrity denies us hypocrisy.



INTEGRITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Integrity can influence both an individual's as well as community's health because it calls for both loyalty and commitment to honest codes of belief and behavior.

In dealing with community health, it's essential to recognize the subtle aspects of values, morality, ethics and beliefs. In fact, in 2002, the Public Health Leadership Society published "Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health," a document representing a consensus on a code of behavior for public health personnel.² One of the key principles reads, "Humans are inherently social and interdependent." As the document points out, "The rightful concern for the physical individuality of humans and one's right to make decisions for oneself must be balanced against the fact that each person's actions affect other people."



Preserve your Life!



Acceptance of this belief raises questions of integrity regarding issues such as smoking and immunization and their effect on public health. Immunization programs, for example, may challenge us to consider our responsibility to the group when it comes to accepting or refusing immunization. We should keep in mind factors such as recent outbreaks of measles and their resultant morbidity and mortality, which have been traced to pockets of religious adherents who have declined immunization for their members and children. This belief also will pose questions about the regulation of the availability of drugs, including prescription medications, alcohol, and substances often used in a so-called "recreational" fashion.

Additionally, integrity leads to transparency and accountability and is the measure of our reliability. All of these provide the basis for trust, which undergirds the use and effectiveness of health-care institutions, physicians, and allied health professionals.

INTEGRITY CAN HELP US AVOID PROBLEMS

Have you ever wondered how many addicts started down the road to ruin because they ignored dangers of which they were well aware? How many smokers ignore known facts in an effort to “fit in” or appear sophisticated? Integrity has protected thousands who have declined an offer of drugs even though fascinated by their potential pleasure.

When we know that 7% of persons taking their first alcoholic drink will become alcoholics, and some 15% will be victims of alcohol-related problems, such as accidents or abuse,³ shouldn't we question our integrity if we serve such beverages?

Perhaps the most dangerous area regarding integrity is sexual behavior. The media trivializes marital infidelity and encourages sexual irresponsibility in the face of staggering numbers of single-parent homes, as well as economic insecurity and emotional distress; this raises a question of corporate integrity. And sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS, challenge personal integrity; think about persons who willfully infect others, partners who deny the other the protection of a condom, and clerics who interfere without sufficient knowledge of the marital interactions of their parishioners.





LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1

Do I consider myself to be an honest person? What moral values have I adopted that prevent me from doing anything that would conflict with that code of honor? What sources have formed that set of values?

2

When considering my own personal health, do I also take into account the needs of the community and how my choices could affect others? What choices have I made with respect to personal hygiene, such as hand washing and staying away from contact with others when ill, that have positively affected my community? What practices am I ashamed of because of the negative effects they may have on someone else?

3

A local church health ministries leader regularly presents lectures to church members in which she advocates a total vegetarian diet. She also favors an organic diet although she is aware that many of the members cannot afford the higher prices for organic foods. Sometimes, however, she invites others to go with her to an ice cream parlor where she enjoys ice cream as a "special treat." What lifestyle practices do I have that may conflict with what I preach? Am I truly walking the talk?

4

Which of my personal choices fly in the face of evidence but are comfortable or desirable just because they are what I want to do? What evidence presented in this booklet have I disregarded because it would be difficult or unpleasant to have to fit certain practices into my lifestyle?

5

Have I violated my code of honor? Do I admit my wrongdoing? What do I do with the guilt I feel because I have not lived up to my values? Do I punish myself by dwelling on my guilt or fall into a cycle of repeating the behavior again and again? Or can I accept the mercy and forgiveness that Jesus freely offers?



MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

At one time or another, everyone has failed to meet the standard of integrity. We may have failed so miserably that someone else has suffered. We may bear a burden of guilt and remorse.

Forgiveness is not easy for individuals to extend to others, but God is a forgiving God. All the religions of the world teach that forgiveness is attainable. Some require penance, but the Lord Jesus Christ says forgiveness is a free gift from God. Even here, integrity is essential. We have to be honest enough to admit wrongdoing; it is by such a confession that grace supplies peace and rest. If we are to celebrate the completeness of whole-person health, integrity is essential.

1 George Ludwig, "Leadership 101: Integrity by Example," Evan Carmichael, accessed June 12, 2012, www.evancarmichael.com/Sales/3443/Leadership-101-Integrity-by-Example.html. 2 Public Health Leadership Society, "Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health," 2002, accessed May 3, 2012, <http://phls.org/CMSuploads/Principles-of-the-Ethical-Practice-of-PH-Version-2.2-68496.pdf>. 3 Bridget F. Grant and Deborah A. Dawson, "Age at Onset of Alcohol Use and Its Association with DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey, Journal of Substance Abuse 9, vol. 9 (1997) 103-10.



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