

"In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change." Psalm 15:4

I Promise I Will!

Integrity - Psalm 15:4 - Integrity in Commitments

"He who promises more than he is able to perform, is false to himself; and he who does not perform what he has promised, is a traitor to his friend." - George Shelley

We make promises all the time.

- I'll pray for you.
- I'll be there if you need me.
- I promise to do better next time.
- This won't hurt a bit!

And the list could go on, but few, if any, of these promises are kept. We have been on both sides. Whether it was a baseball game that your dad promised to take you to or a vacation that you promised for your family, we are people of broken promises.

When was the last time someone broke a commitment they had made to you and how did you feel?

When was the last time you broke a commitment to someone else? How did you feel in that instance?

By way of review, Psalm 15 as a whole deals with the marks of a genuinely godly person, a true worshiper of God. In verse one David asks, "God who are the genuine believers, the true citizens of heaven who worship you and truly know you?" The genuine believer not only possesses personal integrity but also interpersonal integrity, which is displayed in both how we relate to others and what we commit to others.

Now, the final area of interpersonal integrity we want to look at is found in Psalm 15:4, the second half of the verse. There we read that the man who is a true believer, the man who really knows God "swears to his own hurt and does not change" (NASB). The NIV says this genuine worshiper "keeps his oath, even when it hurts." This last area of interpersonal integrity concerns what we commit to others. Let me warn you, though some of the other principles were painful, wait till we talk about this one.

Notice here the progression of making and following through with commitments to others in a spirit of integrity.

First of all, we must have integrity in the decision of what we commit to others. Psalm 15:4 says the man of Godly character swears. Now obviously, the Old Testament idea of swearing was to make a commitment and does not refer to taking God's name in vain. The word swear is sometimes used with descriptive words such as vow, or oath, as in Leviticus 5:4, "Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his

*"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king."
Matthew 5:33-35*

lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it--when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters."

The Bible makes it clear that swearing an oath with a very serious thing. But as the Jewish system began to decay and become corrupt, the people began to use little tricks, like saying, "I swear to you by heaven, or by earth." In today's vernacular, we may say something along the lines of, "I swear on my dead mother's grave."

Sometimes our mother is not even passed yet!

What's the purpose, the idea of swearing that way? Well, the person is simply saying, if you can't count on my word, at least you can count on heaven. This person is trying to bolster their lack of integrity by swearing in connection with something else. Jesus hits this situation head on and shows the absolute worthlessness of it in Matthew 5:33-37. In other words, say what you mean, mean what you say, and leave it at that.

Secondly, notice the difficulty that may result after making a commitment. Psalm 15:4 says the man of integrity "swears to his own hurt." This simply points out the fact that things may get tough after you make a decision, after you have given your word about something to someone. Circumstances may change. Plans may turn out contrary to what originally was thought. This phrase speaks of the time when following through becomes inconvenient, when keeping your word no longer serves your purpose. In fact it may undercut your own purpose. When this happens, notice what the genuinely godly person does. This is the third point, integrity involves determination.

Has there been someone in your life that backed out because it got rough? How did it make you feel?

Integrity results in a determination to keep our commitments to others. Psalm 15:4 says, "He swears to his own hurt and does not change". This phrase simply points out that a true worshipper of God who really knows God's will does not break his commitment; he is not fickle or flighty; he is good for his word despite circumstances.

Now, let's make it practical, because we live in a day of broken commitments, don't we? I mean we seldom really take people at their word, do we? Often, that is because we have been conditioned that we can't.

What are some specific areas where we see these broken words and broken promises in our society, and in our own lives?

Consider the following areas in which we frequently display a lack of commitment.

“Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.”
Matthew 5:36-37

Divorce – This is an obvious area in our culture. We’re told one of two marriages of Christians end in divorce. This is a very explicit example of our failure to practice swearing to our own hurt and not changing. Consider the Bible Study: One Plus One Equals One

Studying – Maybe you don’t even remember what this word means anymore. But you knew what it meant when you made the commitment at the beginning of your courses to make good use of the money being spent, not to mention the commitment made to God to do your work to His glory.

Personal finances – Do you follow through on the debts you owe others? What about in small amounts of money loaned? Are you committed to give even if it hurts?

Business – This may include verbal agreements and verbal guarantees.

Being places on time – Some people are consistently late. Though this often turns into a joke, it is still an area of integrity and commitment.

Family – We often make promises to our spouses or children, to spend time with them, for instance, and then don’t follow through with them.

Which area above do you most struggle with?

Commit that area to God and seek out ways to improve.

Are you a person who keeps your word even when it's not convenient, no matter what? If you are not, then a major part of God-defined integrity is missing in your life and you need to submit that area and allow Jesus to change it if you want to be a pleasing, obedient, and blessed disciple.

Say what you mean, mean what you say, and follow through with what you said you would do.

Life would be simpler if we did that.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
