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# The Challenge of Integrity

Clearly, the student was not telling the truth. He was not a good liar, though, so as I continued to probe, he talked himself farther and farther into a corner, until eventually he stopped and went quiet. Then he said, “Oh dear,” and I asked, “Shall we start again?”

We did. The truth was told and dealt with. At the end, I knew he felt devastated, more about the way he had lied than about the actual incident and the agreed-upon discipline. So we talked for a while about forgiveness, and why—despite everything—he could still hold up his head as he left my office because he had chosen to walk the route of integrity by facing himself and the truth. I heard later that he told another staff member: “I felt as though I was just lying flat on the ground, but then I was gently lifted up, and I could walk again.”

I like the word *integrity*, although I am not sure I can completely explain what it means. In a recent Sabbath school class, I heard someone use this term to describe the life of Daniel. I agree. Daniel’s life was exemplified by honesty and consistency. He lived his discipleship in all he said and did. He didn’t waver, despite the possible implications to his career and even his life. This consistency in representing the character of his God also meant caring about his colleagues, even unbelievers. So when he interpreted the king’s dream, his first recorded action in the Bible was to save the other wise men under threat of death. He was a person I would want to work with!

So integrity is about transparent honesty—not just in what we do, but also in who we are. It’s about living, working, and studying in a way that is consistently truthful. For a Christian educator, that includes being faithful advocates of the gospel we have embraced—in the way we teach, serve on a committee, administer, discipline, and interact. It is about living (and helping others live) the fullness of the gospel. There may be nothing more important we can do for our colleagues and students.

How does this play out in practice? Here are two possible applications.

*In our relationships with students:* When we become Christian educators, we do more than accept the responsibility of teaching information and skills. We commit ourselves to showing the reality of the gospel and building faith. This does not mean avoiding the complexities that often accompany higher education, or skimming over the difficult questions. It does mean recognizing that we must consistently speak and teach from the context of faith. That is our professional and Christian responsibility.

*In our personal relationships:* I remember the shock I felt at my first academic meeting as a doctoral student to see the callous disregard academics could show toward one another. The disdain cut much deeper than mere scholarly disagreement. An academic community is not naturally respectful of the dignity of others. However, when we are tempted to run roughshod over the opinions of others, make judgments about them personally, or deride their opinions, we do the gospel a disservice. Why do we act in such a way? Is it self-protection? Disdain for other perspectives? Fear that another person will be promoted instead of us? The route of integrity is to express disagreement with grace and transparency, and treat others honestly, without personal attack or agenda.

As the student walked away from my office, his head a little higher, I prayed for him silently—that he would commit himself to a life known for integrity. I pray the same for myself, and for all of us as a community of Christian educators.—**Andrea Luxton**.

