

CHAPTER 11

## Integrity

A mentor is called to a life of integrity, not merely washing the body, but seeking to keep even the mind and heart clean. Just as dirty hands can make us sick physically, impure thoughts can pollute a person inwardly. Mentors learn first to wash their own life before they wash the lives of others: otherwise, whatever they touch will be soiled with unhealthy ideas and motives. As the wise sage declared centuries ago, “purify yourselves, you who carry vessels of the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> Everyone who mentors others carries sacred vessels. People are like clay jars containing sacred treasures. We are wise to clean our hearts and minds before we seek to help someone else clean their soul vessel. We are easily puffed up with self-importance or deflated by lust and greed. Such forces wreak havoc upon the soul of a mentor. If neglected, such temptations and vices will bring us down.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”<sup>3</sup> This prayer for purity was first written thirty centuries ago by a man who had so deeply dirtied his heart he feared being abandoned by God forever. God invites us all to bring out into the open impurities within our lives that we are powerless to cleanse, and to seek God’s cleansing mercy. Ancient prayers speak across centuries, calling us back into a life of integrity and wholeness.

Our culture often presents a message of self-empowerment and overcoming impurities and inner troubles with positive thinking. Unfortunately, we are not like self-cleaning ovens. We don’t have a self-cleaning button we can push and, like technological magic, be clean inside. Most humans struggle with inner impurities, in thought, word, and deed. Everyone also has inner struggles with ongoing habits we know are unhealthy and unwholesome. Consider the sign displayed at public pools: “Please shower before entering pool.” Soul mentors seek to live with as much integrity as possible as we step into lives of others.

Gregory writes visually. In the opening chapter of Part Two, he describes people as sacred vessels. I own a pottery wheel and have some

2. Isaiah 52:11.

3. Psalm 51:10.

experience throwing clay pots. My potter friends make throwing clay look easy; it is not. Your hands and arms are caked with clay. Your apron, pants, floors, and walls get spattered with the wet clay slip. If you are successful in throwing a clay pot, you still have to trim it, fire it, glaze it, and fire it again. But when you finally open the kiln and pull out your cooled, finished work, you have a beautiful piece of handmade pottery ready for use.

We too are being crafted into vessels for use. God loves a hands-on approach to this labor of love. With hands of truth and grace surrounding our lives, God centers us, opens us, and shapes us into sacred vessels to be used by God in the lives of others. Gregory's vision of soul care offers practical guidance and a deep sense of hope. For this work is not primarily ours—unseen hands are upon us, cleansing, centering, opening, shaping, firing, filling, using. We are being shaped and filled to pour out our lives into others, bringing soul refreshment.

Throughout his book on *Pastoral Care*, Gregory gives quiet tribute to his mentor Benedict, drawing upon principles and wisdom from *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Benedict instructed his community regarding living with integrity:

We urge the entire community . . . to keep its manner of life most pure and to wash away . . . the negligences of other times. This we can do in a fitting manner by refusing to indulge evil habits and by devoting ourselves to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart and self-denial.<sup>4</sup>

If our lives are disturbed or discolored by the stain of soul impurities, we are wise to seek the gift of divine grace to cleanse our life through forgiveness, “to wash away the negligences,” and to purify our mind and heart through prayers, readings, and acts of spiritual renewal. Only then can we truly “carry the sacred vessels”—the lives of others—into the beautiful sacred space of the heart.

## Key to Mentoring

Become aware of the unseen hands are upon our lives, cleansing, centering, opening, shaping, firing, filling, and using us to bring refreshment to others.

4. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 71, RB 49:2–4. All quotations from *The Rule of St. Benedict* are from Timothy Fry, ed., *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, listed in the notes as RB with chapter and verse.

CHAPTER 12

## Walking the Talk

Having spent many summers with my family backpacking in mountainous national parks, I feel a connection in my muscles and bones with Gregory's picture of ascending high places as a pattern for soul care. During our family hikes, we have often climbed to the highest ridge or peak in an area, surveying the landscape from the mountaintop, gaining new perspectives on life once we return to the valleys, lakes, and meadows below.

Drawing upon an ancient metaphor for faith, that of walking along a path, Gregory calls mentors to "walk the talk," calling all who enter into soul care to match our words with our lives. Reading trail guides is one way to experience the wonder and beauty of the high country of such a place as Glacier National Park. I study such trail guides for months before stepping out from a trailhead. When looking for a reliable trail guidebook, I look for an author who has personally walked those trails, and thus writes from personal experience hiking and climbing in the high country, not just theoretical knowledge of those paths and places.

Mentors lead by example, so that their way of life might show others a good way to live. Those who speak of the highest principles are wise to live out those lofty ideals in the lowest places of daily life. What we say will enter the hearts of hearers more fully when the way we live reflects the way we speak, our words fully supported by our lives. As the prophet cried out centuries ago, "Get you up to a high mountain . . . lift up your voice with strength . . ."<sup>5</sup> Any who dare to declare good tidings through lofty words must leave behind the lower ways of the world, and strive to climb above corrupt paths in their way of living as well as in their way of speaking. We can guide others to the high places more easily when we have previously walked that higher path in our own life.

In the same way, we who dare to mentor another must strive to walk along the paths to the heights of faith, hope, and love, struggling and stumbling along the way to be sure, yet pressing on to attain the summits of maturity. As Benedict wrote regarding leading others by example: "Point out to

5. Isaiah 40:9.

them all that is good . . . more by example than by words . . . demonstrating God's instructions . . . by a living example.”<sup>6</sup> Only when we have worn out several pairs of hiking boots will we begin to truly gain perspective on the terrain and trail wisdom involved in guiding others to great heights, with our words flowing from the integrity of our hearts like cascading streams that flow into the valleys from mountain heights.

## Key to Mentoring

Strive to walk the talk, intentionally living according to the truths you speak, walking spiritual paths to the heights of faith, hope, and love, pressing on to attain the summits of maturity.

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## CHAPTER 13

### Wisdom in Silence and Speech

An ancient Jewish proverb reads, “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”<sup>7</sup> Words are like salt. Mentors are salty people with their words. We choose words sparingly, but sprinkle vigorously when necessary. Some dishes need more salt. Likewise, some people need the preserving and correcting salt of truth sprinkled liberally upon their lives. Fail to do this, and we allow people to decay like raw meat in the sun.

Mentors need to be discerning in our silence and salty in our words. Too much silence and we hold back wise words that need to be said; but too many words and we say what should not be said. Both silence and speech can lead to error. Indiscreet mentors talk too much, often out of insecurity in silence, and thus fail to attend to the needs of the people they are mentoring. Timid mentors are silent, too often out of fear of doing something wrong, and thus fail to assist in correcting faults when they are discovered. A word of correction can be like a key that opens hidden doors into the

6. RB 2:12.

7. Mark 9:50.

soul. Therefore, use a little salt in your speech with people, for as the ancient proverb asserts, “Salt is good.”

We are wise to keep guard over our lips, even avoiding saying the right words too often, for what is said can easily be overlooked or lost when it is spoken in haste or without care. When looking for a wise mentor, seek someone who uses words wisely, and who knows the value of silence. As Solomon said in ancient times,

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil. Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.<sup>8</sup>

The second half of the ancient Jewish proverb Gregory cites invites salty people to live at peace with others. “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” The right amount of salt in our lives is healthy. With the right amount of salt in our words, we live at peace with one another. Too many words, like too much salt, ruins the meal. Failing to practice silence allows noise and excess words to bring discord into our lives like a pack of yelping dogs. One of the sure marks of a wise mentor is someone well-seasoned and balanced in the practice of silence and speech. Echoing *The Rule of St Benedict*, Gregory holds silence in high esteem, especially in mentoring. As Benedict wrote,

Indeed, so important is silence that permission to speak should seldom be granted even to mature disciples, no matter how good or holy or constructive their talk, because it is written: ‘In a flood of words you will not avoid sin (Prov 10:19)’; and elsewhere, ‘The tongue holds the key to life and death (Prov 18:21)’. Speaking and teaching are the master’s task; the disciple is to be silent and listen.”<sup>9</sup>

Every person is given a different measure of faith to shake out upon this world. Better to think before opening our mouths and pouring out a torrent of salty speech. We might as well open our mouths every now and then and insert a shoe before we trouble others with our hasty and unwise flurry of words.

8. Ecclesiastes 5:1–2.

9. RB 6:3–6.

## Key to Mentoring

One of the sure marks of a wise mentor is someone well-seasoned and balanced in the practices of silence and speech.

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### CHAPTER 14

## Compassion and Contemplation

In the summer of 2011, our family hiked to the 13,310' summit of Mount Alice in Rocky Mountain National Park. From that sunny vantage point, we feasted our eyes north and south along the Continental Divide, the tallest spine in North America. We looked down into the beautiful mountain valley between Mount Alice and Longs Peak, a meadowland filled with small lakes including Snowbank Lake, Lion lakes, and Castle Lake. We also looked down on Thunder Lake thousands of feet below us sparkling in the afternoon sun. Later that evening, we stood at the shore of Thunder Lake near our campsite, looking back up at the golden peak of Mount Alice, with a sense of wonder that just a few hours earlier we were standing upon those heights. I've always loved the new perspective that comes from hiking in the backcountry of a national park. Once we get a few miles away from the trailhead, out into the wildness, our eyes and souls are filled with a renewed sense of wonder at the beauty and quiet of nature away from the distractions and noise of civilization.

Contemplation is like looking from a mountain top into a valley where you normally live. From that height, the whole valley takes on a new perspective. Little stuff doesn't seem quite so important. Petty squabbles and irritations lose their grip from the heights of contemplation, where we can survey the glory of the landscape around us. Whether it is simply the thin air or the late afternoon sun glinting in our eyes, from atop the mountain the world seems filled with wonder and beauty. Heading up the mountain is truly a labor, every step taken with intention and exertion. Coming back down, after contemplative time on the mountain top, our feet seem lighter and filled with new life. The whole mountainside seems eager to move downward into the valleys below, with little brooklets singing their simple

melodies of joy as they cascade over stones, around clumps of wildflowers bowing with delight in the late afternoon wind. From the heights of contemplation, the soul moves joyfully into the valleys below with compassion, where we pour ourselves out on behalf of people in their low places.

A soul mentor is someone who is willing to walk in the valleys because they have journeyed to the heights, someone moved with compassion because they have been seasoned with contemplation. A mentor welcomes the burdens of others, willing to descend into the deep places of human suffering out of the depths of love. A mentor also ascends with those burdens, through paths of meditation and contemplation, lifting others beyond narrow horizons into the radiant visions on the heights.

Those who only pursue lofty things often neglect the needs of neighbors. Those who only bear the burdens of neighbors often neglect the pursuit of paradise. Saints guide us along this sacred way: up into unspeakable wonders of light through contemplation, and down into darkness to attend to the lowly needs of the weak.<sup>10</sup>

Consider Jacob and Moses, who both stood face-to-face with God. Jacob beheld angels ascending and descending the ladder of heaven, showing us the importance of both ascending in contemplation and descending in compassion. In the same way, Moses went up the mountain to be in the presence of God, in order to better attend to the needs and burdens of the people in the valley below. Whenever Moses was uncertain how to deal with a person's problem, he went back up the mountain before the presence of God.

When we are unsure how to best care for the life of another, we are wise to return to the inward journey, to go back up the sacred mountain to renew our vision. The life of Jesus of Nazareth shows us the same pattern. He spent time on the mountaintop in intimacy with God to be spiritually renewed before going back down into the valley to live among people in the ordinary places. A mentor's path keeps calling us higher through times of contemplation. There, upon the heights of love, we begin to see the mist clear away. There we are renewed, that we might walk in love among the depths of human suffering. Contemplation finds her highest delight when moved with compassion to the lowest places in people's lives.

Gregory spent joyful portions of his life within the cloister, devoting his days to quiet contemplation from the heights of spiritual ascent into the presence of God. Gregory recalled the examples of Moses and Jesus, who

10. Gregory refers to 2 Corinthians 12:2–3 and 1 Corinthians 7:2, 5 in this passage.

both went up to mountain heights to encounter God, and went down to the valleys to bring compassion to the people. As in Jacob's vision of angels ascending and descending, Gregory invites us to ascend and descend, living a well-balanced life of contemplation and compassion. We ascend to the heights of contemplation in order to joyfully cascade into the valley to serve others with compassion.

Like hiking up a mountain, there are no shortcuts into the practice of contemplation. Every time I've hiked along switchbacks up a steep mountainside, I've been tempted to cut corners and shorten the journey. But such shortcuts only increase the difficulties and dangers of the journey. Step by faithful step, as we intentionally move away from our busy lives and step out upon the contemplative way, we begin to discover a new rhythm, a new way of seeing, a new way of living. Here are five ways to begin to practice the ancient art of contemplation.

First, sit still and breathe. Take a few minutes in the morning to sit in the same place, perhaps in a comfortable chair by a window. Just sit. Try not to fidget. Step away from doing and enjoy time for being. Be still. Quiet your body. Quiet your mind. Quiet your soul. Take ten slow, deep breaths, and exhale them slowly, feeling your body fill with breath, then empty of breath. Relax your body as you breathe in and out.

Second, be aware. Feel the touch of your feet on the floor, your legs touching the chair, the weight of your body resting on your seat, your back touching the back of the chair, your shoulder muscles, neck, lips, nose, eyes, ears, and scalp. Become aware of the air around you. Smell, see, feel, hear, and taste the world around you and within you at this moment.

Third, focus. Center your attention upon a single focal point. Try lighting a candle and focusing your attention on the flame. Some focus their mind and heart on a sacred word or phrase, breathing a short prayer, inhaling and exhaling the word or phrase. Others play quiet music to help focus the soul. Gently turn away from any distraction that comes along (whether physical or mental), and return to your focal point. Or select a beautiful tree, a nature photo, or a work of art to center your attention on. In his best-selling book *The Nature Principle*, Richard Louv writes of the power of focusing upon the natural world to find renewal:

My eyes settled on a single cottonwood at the river, its branches and upper leaves waving in a slow rhythm above all the others. An hour, perhaps more, went by. Tension crawled up and out of me. It seemed to twist in the air above the green field. Then it was



## MOTHERING AND FATHERING

gone. And something better took its place. Twenty-four years later, I often think about that cottonwood at the river's edge, and similar moments of inexplicable wonder, times when I received from nature just what I needed: an elusive *it* for which I have no name.<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, relax. Pace yourself. Try not to get impatient. Begin with small steps and take them slowly. Try not to be in a hurry. Laugh a lot. Raise your shoulders up to your cheeks, count to ten, then drop them to relax the muscles around your neck. Squeeze up your face into a tight contortion as you breathe in a long inhale, then let all the muscles in your face and body relax as you breathe out a long sigh of relief.

Fifth, drink deeply of God's presence. Like a deer at a stream, stoop low and drink deeply. Fill your soul with God's goodness and love. God is the highest goal of our contemplation. Our lives come from God and go to God. Why not go now to the source of refreshment and renewal? Once filled, go and pour your life out in compassion to help others who are thirsty.

### Key to Mentoring

Seek to live a well-balanced life of contemplation and compassion, both ascending to the heights of contemplation and descending into the valley of compassionate service.

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## CHAPTER 15

### Mothering and Fathering

My favorite Vincent van Gogh painting is titled "First Steps." In the scene, a baby girl dressed in pink is taking her first steps. The mother has just set the one-year-old child down in the backyard vegetable garden of a simple cottage. The father kneels in the foreground with outstretched arms to receive his daughter. A child's first steps are one of the sweetest moments in the life

11. Louv, *The Nature Principle*, 2.

of a father and mother. As a baby stands up and steps forward for the first time, she seeks an inner balance—left foot, right foot, left, right.

A soul mentor, regardless of their gender, learns to skillfully balance the gentle discipline of a father and the disciplined gentleness of a mother. As Gregory writes, “Either discipline or kindness is lacking if one is ever exercised independently of the other.”<sup>12</sup> Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan applied both wine and oil to the stranger’s wounds as an act of loving his neighbor.<sup>13</sup> In seeking to heal inner wounds of the soul, use both strictness and gentleness. As the beloved ancient poem instructs us, “Your rod and your staff—they comfort me.”<sup>14</sup> With the rod, we are corrected and trained. With the staff, we are supported and restored. Do not allow your love to grow soft, and do not let your discipline exasperate. Wise mentors keep their spiritual zeal in control, and let their kindness overflow—but not more than is appropriate. St. Peter instructed mentors to serve eagerly, telling us, “Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.”<sup>15</sup> The art of mentoring unites justice and mercy in the fire of the soul, inspiring both respect and wonder in those under our care.

Gregory understood mentoring in terms of balance. Soul care seeks to balance grace and truth, mercy and justice, gentleness and discipline. On one hand, we correct, exhort, and train others, seeking to do so with love. On the other hand, we nurture, comfort, and care for others, seeking to do so with truth. Mentors learn the inner skill of balancing opposing forces, holding them together in the fire of the soul, and forging them into discernment tools to bring about healing of inner wounds and growth of the soul.

Gregory compares this balance to the influence of a mother and a father upon a child, keeping in mind the kindness of a mother and the discipline of a father. Of course, these are stereotypes of parenting, yet they are worthy of consideration when seeking to influence the growth of another person. Either side of the careful balance of leniency or legalism tends to stifle growth in a family. In the same way, the ancient art of soul mentoring holds mercy and justice in balance for the sake of inner growth in others. Gregory draws once again upon the teachings of Benedict, who wrote about the role of a mentor in a monastery:

12. Gregory, *Pastoral Rule*, 67. Cf. Gregory, *Morals on the Book of Job*, 20.5.14.

13. See Luke 10:25–37.

14. Psalm 23:4.

15. 1 Peter 5:2–3.

He must be chaste, temperate and merciful. He should always *let mercy triumph over judgment* so that he too may win mercy. He must hate faults but love the brothers. When he must [discipline] them, he should use prudence and avoid extremes; otherwise, by rubbing too hard to remove the rust, he may break the vessel. He is to distrust his own frailty and remember *not to crush the bruised reed*. By this we do not mean that he should allow faults to flourish, but rather, as we have already said, he should prune them away with prudence and love as he sees best for each individual.<sup>16</sup>

## Key to Mentoring

Mentors learn the inner skill of balancing gentleness and discipline, holding them together in the fire of the soul, and forging them into discernment tools to bring inner growth.

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## CHAPTER 16

### Inside-Out and Outside-In

Most of us learned in kindergarten what is needed for a seed to grow. Both external and internal forces work upon and within the seed to bring about germination. Without the external elements of oxygen, temperature, and water the seed will never sprout. Likewise, without the awakening inner elements hidden within the embryo of the seed, germination will also never take place.

Excellent mentoring pays attention to both the inside and the outside of life. Two opposite problems are common among people: either we neglect our internal lives by focusing too much attention upon external demands; or we neglect external responsibilities by being too preoccupied with our interior lives. Too much anxiety over external demands and we impoverish our inner life; too much focus on the inner life and we neglect the needs of our neighbor.

16. RB 64:9–14. Italics are original and quotes from James 2:13 and Isaiah 42:3.

Some mentors eagerly volunteer for any external opportunity that comes up. They seem to find their life's purpose in exhausting themselves with activity. When they are finally able to spend a few minutes in quiet, they have forgotten how to find rest for their soul. While enjoying their busy external life, such mentors become inwardly shallow and thus have little to give others. Those who have a desire to grow spiritually stumble over the poor example offered by the very mentors who were supposed to be caring for their soul.

On the other side of the problem, there are those who focus all their attention upon their inner life but neglect of the needs of the others around them. The result is that people are less likely to listen to their guidance, for they fail to take seriously the issues of this present life. Good teaching fails to enter the soil of the mind when sown with disregard for others or lack of compassion.

The seed of wisdom grows best when a mentor plants with love and waters the heart with kindness. For this reason, we need to find ways to provide for both the physical and spiritual needs of people. We must attend to outer concerns of daily life as needed, but keep watch over the inner life as well—both our own inner lives and the inner lives of those in our care.

Personal growth takes place when attention is given to both the exterior and interior lives of others. According to Gregory, wise mentors keep their lives balanced, and are attentive to both physical and spiritual needs. As in Gregory's day, so in our time this balance can be difficult to maintain. Exterior forces demand much of our attention, leaving little time or energy for renewing our interior lives. When we finally come into a time of quiet, we are often so distracted, weary, or restless that we find it hard to settle down to care for our own souls. It can seem like too much work to pray, meditate, journal, wait attentively, listen, or simply sit in silence. How much easier it is to fill such times with television shows, magazines, computers or other electronic devices, phone calls, or other distractions. When we neglect our own inner lives, we will find that we are less able to care for the inner lives of others, simply because we are too busy, distracted, or weary.

Learning to say no to external demands is an ancient tool of soul care. Learning to cease speaking and begin listening is also an ancient way of soul mentoring. How easy is it for you to ignore the ringing of your cell phone or turn off the television? How often do you interrupt a conversation with a person to attend to some electronic distraction? How many minutes each day do you devote to the care of the soul, both your own and those of

others? What does this say about how you are balancing inner and outer life at this time?

Gregory encourages “moderate vigilance of the heart,” aware of some who go overboard, neglecting outside realities around them. Spiritual disciplines have a vital role in personal growth, but they may also be used in unhealthy ways, causing harm to the soul as well as harm to relationships. For example, those who practice fasting may feel superior to others who overeat or disdain those who enjoy a good meal. I knew a man who meditated in his closet day and night, seldom helping around the house or spending quality time with his spouse. Out of neglect for his wife, he harmed his marriage through excessive practice of his spiritual life. As humans we are hybrids, sharing physical and spiritual lives within the same skin. Overload either realm and we bring harm to ourselves and to others.

There are also some who practice spirituality for the sake of impressing others. Jesus warns against showing off our spirituality in order to impress others. Better to “go into your room and shut the door and pray . . . in secret; and [God] who sees in secret will reward you.”<sup>17</sup> Once you’ve finished with your time of quiet meditation or prayer, go and fold the laundry or weed the garden. Like a garden, we too are designed to grow, from the inside out and from the outside in. We are wise to attend with love to both the outer and inner lives of those in our care. The seed of wisdom germinates in the human heart when planted with compassion and watered with kindness.

### Key to Mentoring

Wise mentors keep life in balance, attentive to life from the outside in and from the inside out, in our own lives as well as in the lives of others.

17. Matthew 6:6.