Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out World
Sermon Title: Whole-Hearted Faith

Text: **Proverbs 2:7-8 -- God stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints; 10:9 -- He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out; 11:3 -- The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.**

Introduction: The marathon is one of the most strenuous athletic events in sport. **The Boston Marathon** attracts the best runners in the world. The winner is automatically placed among the great athletes of our time. A few years ago, **Rosie Ruiz** was the first woman to cross the finish line. She had the laurel wreath placed on her head in a blaze of lights and cheering. She was completely unknown in the world of running. An incredible feat! Her first race was a victory in the prestigious Boston Marathon! **Then someone noticed her legs—loose flesh, cellulite**. Questions were asked. No one had seen her along the 26.2-mile course. **The truth came out: she had jumped into the race during the last mile**. There was immediate and widespread interest in Rosie. Why would she do that when it was certain that she would be found out? Athletic performance cannot be faked. But she never admitted her fraud. She repeatedly said that she would run another marathon to validate her ability. **Somehow, she never did**. People interviewed her, searching for a clue to her personality. She was analyzed as a **SOCIOPATH**. She lied CONVINCINGLY AND NATURALLY with no sense of conscience, no sense of reality in terms of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

In reading about Rosie, we can think of people we know in the church who GIVE THE IMPRESSION THEY FOLLOW CHRIST because they want to get in on the finish (eternal life). But their reality is SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT. They appear in church on Sunday wreathed in smiles, entering into the celebration, but there is no personal life that leads UP TO IT OR OUT FROM IT. Certainly, they are plausible and convincing. But in the end, it is one grand deception. They BELIEVE only when it suits them, seldom pray and rarely open their Bibles. IF THE PROPER TERM FOR A RACE-FAKER LIKE ROSIE IS A SOCIOPATH, WE MIGHT SAY THE PROPER TERM FOR THE CHURCH-FAKER IS

A RELIGIOPATH – *SOMEONE WHO IS GOOD AT DECEIVING OTHERS BUT WHEN YOU GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT, HAS NEVER ENTERED THE RACE THAT GOD HAS SET BEFORE US.*

As we continue in our series called "**Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out (Crazy) World**, I want to talk about an important character quality that seems to be the antithesis of what Rose demonstrated. It is mentioned often in Proverbs. I'm referring to INTEGRITY. The dictionary defines it as "**the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles**. **In Proverbs, the word describes something or someone whole, complete, finished**. As it pertains to THE PEOPLE OF GOD, it refers to those who are **whole-heartedly committed to a moral and ethical life in obedience to God**. BELIEVERS WITH INTEGRITY ARE NOT FAKING ANYTHING!

Here are some verses about integrity found in the Book of Proverbs:

- **Proverbs 2:21 -- For the upright will live in the land and the blameless (those with integrity) will remain in it.**
- **Proverbs 10:29 -- The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity.**
- **Proverbs 13:6 -- Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless, But wickedness subverts the sinner.**
- **Proverbs 19:1 -- Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.**
- **Proverbs 20:7 -- A righteous man who walks in his integrity—How blessed are his sons after him. (Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego – descendants of Hezekiah)**
- **Proverbs 28:18 -- He who walks blamelessly (with integrity) will be delivered, but he who is crooked will fall all at once.**

I would like to share with you 4 MARKS OF INTEGRITY from the life of a person who took God seriously named Daniel. As you probably know, he was a prophet of Israel who may well have been a descendant of one of Judah's greatest kings, Hezekiah (**See 2 Kings 20:18; Daniel 1:3**). Along with many other Jews, as a young man Daniel was exiled to Babylon in 586 BC just as the prophet Jeremiah had foretold because of Judah's sin and unrepentance. ***Imagine what that must have been like for him***. One moment he was in the country he loved with the people he loved, and the next he was **far away in a foreign land** not knowing what would become of him. Still, even in these incredibly trying circumstances, **Daniel was a young man of godly character who held on to his integrity, and this is what we can learn from his life**.

Like Daniel, people of integrity LIVE THEIR CONVICTIONS – In Daniel chapter one we learn that he was selected to serve in Nebuchadnezzar's palace along with several other young Hebrews of royal descent. Each was described as being **"without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand". (Obviously, certain blessings came to them because back in Israel they were of royal descent.)** The chief of the king's court officials, a man named **Ashpenaz**, was given responsibility for teaching them **the language and literature of the Chaldeans** for three years. They were also expected to eat from the King's table for the entire time. **Turns out this was a problem for Daniel and three of his friends who did not wish to defile** (**pollute, desecrate**) **themselves. This they would have done by accepting the Nebuchadnezzar's friendship and patronage**. ***As a young man whole-heartedly committed to God***, he decided to ask Ashpenaz to permit them to eat only vegetables and drink only water for ten days and then VISIBLY JUDGE which youths appeared healthier. At first, we're told that Ashpenaz was reticent to say yes because he feared the King's retribution if they looked worse off than the others. **But God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel and he agreed to the test**. Ten days later, the verdict was in and Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the others who ate from the King's table. So, Ashpenaz continued to give them only vegetables and water until the three years of training were complete**. How did it turn out for these young Hebrews? Daniel 1:17-20** tells us, "**To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom**." NOW, IT TURNED OUT PRETTY WELL FOR DANIEL, BUT I HAVE TO I'M CONFIDENT THAT HE WOULD HAVE REFUSED TO EAT FROM THE KING'S TABLE EVEN IF ASHPENAZ HAD DENIED HIS REQUEST BECAUSE HE WAS A YOUNG MAN OF INTEGRITY. He had the kind of faith in God that provided him with the ***moral backbone*** to do what was right and trust THE LORD with the result. **Listen to what PROVERBS 2:7-8 says about a person of strong moral character -- God stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield (protector) to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. WHY FEAR BEING WHOLE-HEARTEDLY DEVOTED TO GOD WHEN YOU KNOW HE'S LOOKING AFTER YOU? (Review: People of integrity live their convictions.)**

People of Integrity RECEIVE GOD'S FAVOR – **Later in the book of Daniel, we discover that the Babylonians had been conquered literally overnight by the Medes and the Persians**. A man named ***Darius was now in power***. One of his first orders of business was to find some capable men to lead his empire. "**It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps (MAYORS/GOVENORS?), to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom**" (**Daniel 6:1-3**). **DANIEL STOOD OUT AMONG THE THREE WHO PRESIDED OVER ALL THE SATRAPS SO THAT DARIUS MADE PLANS TO PROMOTE HIM TO SECOND IN CHARGE. This happened because God continued to bless this man of integrity who took no credit for his accomplishments, but constantly gave Him glory (For an example of this kind of character, see Daniel 2, especially verses 27-28 - Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come). WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS? GOD'S BLESSING IS SOMETHING THAT A BELIEVER WITH INTEGRITY CAN EXPECT! CERTAINLY, THE BOOK OF PROVERBS AGREES. In Proverbs 11:20 it says, "Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight**." The word for "**delight**" implies God's **favor**. That's how it is used in several other places in the Old Testament (**Deuteronomy 33:16; Isaiah 49:8; 58:5**). THE POINT IS THAT WHEN WE LIVE OUT OUR CONVICTIONS, WE CAN ANTICIPATE THE LORD'S BLESSING.

Donald Wills Douglas was the founder and president of Douglas Aircraft from **1921 to 1967**. Raised by his parents to honor Christian virtues, none was more important to him than his integrity. In the 1950s, his company was competing with **Boeing** to sell **Eastern Air Lines** its first big jets. After receiving proposals from both companies, **Eddie Rickenbacker**, who headed Eastern, came to Donald Douglas and revealed that his specifications and claims for the **DC-8** were close to his competition on everything but noise suppression. He then gave Douglas one last chance to out-promise Boeing on this feature. After consulting his engineers. Douglas reported back that he did not feel he could make that promise. Rickenbacker replied, "**I know you can't. I wanted to see if you were still honest. You just got yourself an order for $135,000,000**." You may be thinking, "**That's not all that much money**."

Remember that was in the 1950s. Today, the equivalent would be **1.75 billion dollars**! GOD'S FAVOR RESTS ON PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY! (**Review: People of integrity LIVE THEIR CONVICTIONS, RECEIVE GOD'S FAVOR**.)

People of integrity TAKE SOME RISKS – That's what we're reminded of in **Proverbs 29:10 -- Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless and seek the life of the upright (those with integrity)**. ***That's Daniel's story***. If you read on in **Daniel 6**, you discover that many were jealous of his success. They wanted him out of the picture "**so they sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him**" – **Daniel 6:10**. Imagine that! They did a deep dive investigation into his service for the king and came up empty-handed. THAT ALONE SAYS A LOT ABOUT HIS INTEGRITY. **If anyone took similar action against modern-day politicians, how long do you think it take them to discover something negative about most of them**? Eventually, those same people decided that the only way to remove Daniel from his position was to **find a ground of complaint against him in connection with the Law of his God**. **This is the plan they came up with**. They appealed to Darius to make a law declaring that everyone in his kingdom should pray only to him for thirty days. Anyone who chose to do otherwise would be thrown into the lion's den. It was an appeal to Darius' pride and he quickly fell for it. Daniel's enemies knew that this pain-in-the-butt Jew would never do such a thing, so they watched and waited to catch him in the act of praying to his God. ***It didn't take long***! Afterwards, they brought Daniel to the king and said, "**O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day**." Though it distressed Darius to carry out his decree, he eventually consented to Daniel's death sentence and ordered that he be cast into the lion's den. **WHAT HAD DANIEL DONE WRONG? NOTHING ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE. But that's the thing about being whole-hearted in one's commitment to God. Not everyone is going to like it when we do. (Review: People of integrity LIVE THEIR CONVICTIONS, RECEIVE GOD'S FAVOR, TAKE SOME RISKS)**

People of integrity WILL INHERIT GOOD – **If you're familiar with this story in Daniel, then you already know how it plays out**. Daniel is cast into the lions' den until the following morning. Darius doesn't sleep that night, but at the

light of dawn, runs to the den to see if by some miracle Daniel is still alive! ***I love this part***. Darius cries out, "**Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?**" **And that's when Daniel replies**, "**O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den**." Certainly, that was a good outcome for Daniel, but it wasn't the best part. **Neither was what happened next. Darius then ordered that his accusers and their families were to be thrown to the lions and it was not a pretty scene – and that's all I have to say about that**. It's what came next that I'm sure set Daniel's heart to rejoicing. Darius then decreed "**That in all (his) royal dominion people were to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.**" WHEN YOU'RE A BELIEVER, THAT OUTCOME IS ABOUT AS GOOD AS IT GETS. This reminds me of **Proverbs 28:10 -- Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance**. **Proverbs 11:3 -- The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them**. **Now to be fair, it doesn't always play out this way for those who demonstrate integrity in their lives. Sometimes, they only experience God's goodness in the way they depart this life and enter into eternity. Still, it pays to remember that the upright will have goodly inheritance – in this age or the one to come**. (**Review: People of integrity LIVE THEIR CONVICTIONS, RECEIVE GOD'S FAVOR, TAKE SOME RISKS, WILL INHERIT GOOD**.)

How do you become a person of integrity?

- **You must seek to know right from wrong**. ***WHERE do we learn this***? In the Bible, of course. **2 Timothy 3:16** says that God's Word is profitable for teaching what is right, rebuking what is not right, correcting – how to get right, and training in righteousness – how to stay right.
- **You must earnestly desire to walk blamelessly**. ***HOW do we accomplish this***? Two disciplines come to mind:
  - ***By drawing near to God***. Jesus makes this possible according to **Hebrews 10:19-20 -- We have confidence to enter the holy place (the presence of God) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh**.

- ***By examining ourselves***. **Lamentations 3:40 -- Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord**.

Conclusion: When **Desirae Kelly** woke at 5 am, she knew something was off. **Kelly felt an unsettling fluttering sensation in her right ear, but initially dismissed it, thinking it was the comforter on her bed**. She only sought medical attention after being persuaded by her fiancé. Sitting in the clinic's waiting room, Kelly felt the mysterious movement again, this time accompanied by pain near her eardrum. By this point, Kelly thought it was earwax. The nurse, however, made a startling revelation. **There was something in her ear, and it was moving**. The nurse treated Kelly's ear by irrigating it with water, which prompted a black object to fall onto her sweater. **To her horror, it was a live spider, about the size of a nickel**. Fortunately, there was no damage to her eardrum, and no medication was required to prevent infection. Despite the reassurance that her ear was free of spider remnants or eggs, the incident left a lasting impact on Kelly. **Every night since the traumatic event, she has worn earplugs, unable to shake the uneasy and violating feeling of a spider crawling out of her ear**. **Listen: If you want to know what's going on inside your body, contact a medical professional. If you want to know what's going on inside your heart, you need to draw near to God and ask Him to reveal it to you through Spirit-led self-examination. That's what people of integrity do!**