

Temple Maintenance (Integrity - Chapter 6)

Ready:

Do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Set

Josh Davis is thankful for a lot of things. He's accomplished greatness as a world-class swimmer, winning a combined five Olympic medals (including three gold medals) and breaking American and world records. As a family man, he is a devoted husband and proud father of five children. Davis is also thankful to have a nice house and a big car that's spacious enough for the entire bunch. He even has had a building named after him—the Josh Davis Natatorium—in his hometown of San Antonio.

It certainly sounds great, but Davis will be the first to admit that everything on that list and more doesn't mean much without one key ingredient.

"The most valuable thing I have, the most treasured asset I have, the thing I have to guard above everything else is my integrity, my character, my reputation," he says. "It is the most valuable thing I have."

The road that led Davis to that astute realization can be traced back to his strong ancestry—a family that moved to Texas in the late 1800s and has been there for the five generations ever since. Much of the groundwork for who he is today was laid long before he was born on September 1, 1972—ironically the same day that swimming legend Mark Spitz earned one of his seven gold medals at the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany.

"I've got a strong sense of identity rooted in my Irish heritage," Davis says. "It was fun for me to look back at my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather and many uncles and great-uncles and their involvement in the community as leaders and lawyers and speakers. So that's subconsciously been a factor in me figuring out what it means to be a man of integrity. I had a respect for going to church and a respect for spiritual things, but that's about as far as it went."

When Davis was 13 years old, he decided to take up swimming. The late start didn't afford him the best opportunity to succeed. His first coach, in fact, told him he should quit and switch sports. Davis made a change, but it was to get a new coach, not to leave the pool. From that point on, everything started to improve.

By the end of his freshman year, Davis was one of the best swimmers in the state for his age group. At the age of 15, just two years into his swimming career, he became a freestyle state champion. Davis repeated that feat the following year, and by the time he was 17, he was the fastest swimmer in the country. That accomplishment opened the door to a full scholarship at the University of Texas, which has one of the most prestigious collegiate swimming programs in the country.

Davis says he was excited to go to college and gain the freedom that comes from life outside of the home. The sky was the limit, and he had the next four years of his life precisely mapped out.

“I was going to make good grades, swim real fast and if I had the time, I’d go to church,” Davis says. “And then I was going to try to meet all 25,000 girls on the UT campus. Of course, I didn’t have time for church. Swimming had become my god. When I was swimming good, I felt good. When I was swimming bad, I felt bad. My identity and my value came from my sport instead of God.”

It didn’t take long for Davis’s poor choices to start catching up with him. He vividly remembers the toll that the stereotypical college life quickly took on him physically and emotionally. But even during his lowest moments, Davis now recognizes how God’s grace and patience were present all along.

“Basically I was partying too hard and I got very, very ill at the end of my freshman year,” Davis says. “God used that experience to bring me to a bottom-of-the-barrel moment where I had to look up. I explain it with good theology now. Some people say I found God. Well, God was never lost. I was the one who was lost. God gave me the strength and courage to respond to His truth.

“For the first time in my life, I realized that God created me. God knows how I best operate, so surely I can trust God with every area of my life. It seems so simple, but yet I think it flies over most people’s heads, and we don’t consult our Maker. We don’t consult the playbook or the guidebook or the manufacturer’s directions. I came to the point where I realized what I was doing with my life wasn’t working. Even if I did want to do what was right, I don’t think I had the power to do it anyway.”

At the time, Davis didn’t fully understand the spiritual dynamic at play. As is typical of the average college freshman, he was salivating at the chance for freedom from the regulations and responsibilities that come with parental guidance. Now, he could go where he wanted. He could eat what he wanted. He could do, really, whatever he wanted to do. As long as he went to class and made swim practice, Davis was his own man.

Instead, the star swimmer became enslaved to what he refers to as “the three *Ds* of the freshman year.” Davis was drinking too much, he was involved in dysfunctional relationships, and he was making bad decisions.

“Here I was this disciplined, straight-A student,” he says. “I built up my résumé all through high school, but when I got to college and thought I had real freedom, I really didn’t have it at all. I didn’t have true freedom. True freedom is the ability to do the right thing when you want to do it, regardless of what anybody else is doing around you. I didn’t have that and I needed that. I needed something more. I needed something outside of myself for wisdom and guidance and

power to have true freedom.”

At that point, Davis says he made Jesus his head coach; but, more importantly, he accepted Christ as his Savior, his Lord and his King. He also began diving into the Bible and gained a new perspective on life. One of Davis’s favorite Scriptures is John 10:10, in which Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.”

It didn’t take long for Davis to acknowledge the need to study and memorize God’s Word. The truth and relevance found within its pages were a source of power to which he had never before had access. And one of the first nuggets of wisdom he learned was in Psalm 119:9: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping Your word.”

Another way Davis grew in his spiritual walk was through intense fellowship and accountability through various organizations, including Fellowship of Christian Athletes. “I got involved in FCA right away,” Davis recalls. “I got involved in leadership and Bible studies, and I started going to church. In fact, during my sophomore year, I was involved in an FCA Bible study, a church Bible study and an AIA [Athletes in Action] Bible study. My grades weren’t so good that year, but boy, I was soaking up the Word.”

That commitment to devotion, prayer and community reaped a multitude of benefits. Davis learned how to share his faith; and, more importantly, he learned what it meant to be a man of integrity.

“Real men love Jesus,” he says. “Real men are so filled with the love that Jesus has for them, they love God more than anything else in the world—more than the lust of the flesh like fame or pornography or being the life of the party. That’s what integrity means to me, and really it’s the essence of the Christian life. You fall more in love with God than anything else around you. All those things that the world has to offer seem kind of silly.”

The next three years of his college career were completely different from the first. Davis’s teammates thought he had lost his mind. But had they been able to fast-forward and see the future, he is convinced they might have thought differently about the drastic changes that God took him through.

“They went on their way, messing around with a couple different girls a year and partying,” Davis says. “Some of them figured it out and got married, and they’re doing fine. But a lot of them aren’t. A lot of them look old; and I wonder as they approach 40 if they’re thinking, *Man, it would be nice to have a spouse or a family or maybe be a little further along in my vocation and my journey in life, but I’m not.*”

“I just feel very blessed,” he adds. “I love having these five kids. I love my wife. I love that I’ve found a vocation that I really like. This is cool. I mean, all those decisions that seemed so weird and old-fashioned back then are producing a bountiful harvest now.”

As Davis continued to study the Bible, he discovered further instructions on how to live a life of integrity. The apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians became especially important in his quest for purity. Davis took to heart the teaching in Ephesians 4:29: “No rotten talk should come from your mouth.”

“I realized the power of my words and that I needed to choose my words carefully and say only things that built people up,” Davis says. “I didn’t need to cuss anymore. I didn’t need to gossip anymore. I didn’t need to talk bad about people. Obviously a huge part of integrity is

talking right.”

Davis continued through Ephesians 5 and discovered that “sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you” (v. 3).

“I thought to myself, *Holy cow! I don’t have a clue how to treat ladies,*” Davis says. “*I don’t have a clue how to find a life mate.* I had to do some serious business with God to figure out about courting and marriage and what it means to be a man in that way—preparing to be a husband and a father.”

Another wake-up call came in the form of Ephesians 5:18, a Scripture that tells believers: “Don’t get drunk with wine, which [leads to] reckless actions.” Davis read that passage and suddenly realized that not only was his underage, heavy consumption of alcohol hindering his performance as a swimmer, but it was also against the law, not to mention physically destructive.

“Drinking is hard on your liver because your liver has to try to get that toxin out,” Davis explains. “It puts stress on your digestive system. It slows down your nervous system. It is not a good thing. It does nothing for you. If you need that to meet people and to dance better, you’re in a sad place.”

Davis was eventually led to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. These eye-opening verses showed him that the body of a follower of Christ “is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19) and that his body should “glorify God” (v. 20). That’s when Davis made the connection between worship and health. And while he sometimes feels like the street-corner preacher whom the pedestrians try to ignore, he says that nutritional science is becoming more popular as a natural performance-enhancing method.

“Athletes are realizing the benefits of nutritional science and are getting smarter,” Davis says. “There are more good supplements available, good restaurants and those kinds of things. If they want it, it’s out there. I still see plenty who don’t have a clue. They have all of this genetic potential. They work so hard, yet they don’t give themselves a chance to recover and build healthy cells outside of their training.

“I get excited, because when you eat right, drink lots of water and sleep a lot, I really believe you can almost stop the aging process. That’s exciting to me. We’re seeing people prove this in sports and in life. There are people in their 30s and 40s and 50s and they’ve got so much vitality and strength and productivity.”

Of all the challenges facing the integrity of today’s athletes, Davis believes the most difficult are those associated with sexual and emotional purity. In 18 years of experience around the University of Texas campus, he has seen firsthand the long-reaching effects that reckless lifestyles can have on its willing participants.

“This is how I describe it to the hundreds of kids I get to teach every other week: The quality of your relationships ultimately affects the quality of your sports performance,” Davis says. “This is the formula: Healthy relationships produce low stress, or a happy heart, which produces peak performance. So healthy relationships, where you’re serving and respecting others and you’re pursuing purity, create low stress, and that produces peak performance. The opposite is true too. Bad relationships create high stress, which produces low performance.”

Yet there’s an even greater danger that comes with a life that rejects the concept of physical

and emotional purity. Davis says it's a consequence that penetrates the skin, migrates beyond the muscles and bypasses the bones.

"Spiritually, it cuts you off from fellowship with God," Davis warns. "It tarnishes your testimony. It puts you in a tough position to minister to other people and to be an ambassador for Christ. Emotionally it causes a lot of stress."

Davis knows a little something about being an ambassador for Christ. As a member of the 1996 and 2000 U.S. Olympic teams, he had the unique opportunity to not only represent his country but also to share his faith with the masses from a lofty platform. As a member of three swimming relay teams, Davis earned three gold medals in the 1996 Games (the most of any male competitor) and two silver medals in the 2000 Games.

The success brought with it endorsements, television appearances and the opportunity to embark on a career as both a motivational speaker and a master clinician. But for Davis, it's the chance to speak into the lives of young people that most intrigues him. It's his hope that he can share with them the message of integrity through Christ that has long-term ramifications for this life and the life to come.

"When you help people look at life from that long-term perspective of where they want to be when they're 70 or 80 or what they want people to read about in their obituary, you realize just how important it is to pursue integrity above everything else," Davis concludes. "Making the hard decisions early in life will make your life easier later."

Go

1. Josh Davis says that as a hotshot swimmer at the University of Texas, "My identity and my value came from my sport instead of God." What are some of the things for which you are known? Have you ever found yourself—like Davis—wrapped up in those things? If so, how did you come to understand what it means to first be identified with Christ?
2. It took a serious illness at the end of Davis's freshman year to get his attention. Can you describe a time when God went to extreme measures to send a message to you? How did that bottom-of-the-barrel experience inspire you to rethink your concept of integrity?
3. Read Ephesians 4:25-32; 5:3-5,18. What are some of the things Paul tells us will separate us from God's kingdom? What are some other dangers that might accompany these things? What are some of the ways you can keep them out of your life?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. What do you think Paul means when he says that "you were bought at a price"? How might understanding that fact change the way you approach your physical relationships? Your lifestyle choices? Your health? Your reputation?
5. In college, Davis experienced his first taste of freedom but quickly discovered that he wasn't free after all and that, in fact, he was a slave to his bad decisions. Read John 10:10. Where can you find true life and true freedom? Has John 10:10 proven to be true in your life? If so, how?

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Bible Reference:
Ephesians 5



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