
Losing
It All

HOW TO
PICK UP THE
PIECES AND
START ANEW

&

Finding
Yourself

Richard W. Dortch

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Richard W. Dortch

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Dedication

to
Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Parsons

A certain man went down,
 fell, stripped and wounded.
He was left half-dead.
By chance a righteous person passed by.
Another looked on him and passed on the
 other side.
But a certain Samaritan came where he was.
When he saw him he had compassion on him.
He went to him, bound up his wounds,
 poured in oil and wine,
 and put him on his journey,
 and took care of him.
Which one of these three was a friend
 to him who fell?

Jesus said, "He that showed mercy on him."
(Luke 10:30-37, paraphrased)

I understand Jesus better now because of Arthur
and Usteena Parsons. They were, for me, the Sa-
maritans who helped restore my life and ministry.

Preface

This book is unique. It contains a message you won't get anywhere else. You won't hear it on talk radio or read about it in the *Wall Street Journal*. College professors and school textbooks don't include it in their course material. It's doubtful that you will hear anyone admit the kinds of things that you will read about in this book.

This message is not for the close-minded or the weak-willed. You may not need the truths found here until later, but at some point they will keep you from making a few of life's biggest mistakes.

This is preventive medicine from a man who has earned the right to speak on this topic. He lived a life of integrity for 35 years. Then he put one foot over the edge and found himself careening down the slippery slope to destruction and failure. At the bottom, he landed among the debris of his own soiled reputation.

The name Richard Dortch is connected with PTL, Jim Bakker, and Heritage USA. It sounds familiar, doesn't it? As the former PTL president and television host, Richard Dortch was indicted in 1989 on charges of conspiracy and wire and mail fraud. Sentenced to eight years in a federal prison,

this once highly respected pastor and leader of his denomination was labeled a convicted felon.

For the next 18 months, Richard Dortch battled not only with his own guilt but for his life and health as well. Diagnosed with cancer that resulted in the loss of one kidney, he received an early release from prison.

The journey back began. With soul-searching honesty, Richard Dortch confronted himself and discovered the weak link in the chain. Like corroded metal, his integrity, now rusty and tarnished, had slowly been eaten away during the years at PTL. The silent process had gone unnoticed until it was too late.

How could he keep others from experiencing the slow, subtle erosion of their integrity? As the stages in the process became clear to him, he longed to share them with others — to somehow prevent them from making the same mistakes.

Let the message of this book sink deep into your heart, and determine in your mind to be a person of integrity — whatever the cost.

Tim Dudley
Publisher

Introduction

As I came to the end of completing my second book, *Fatal Conceit*, I faced another turning point in my life. Pastors Larry and Pat Freeman of the Pinellas Park Wesleyan Church in Florida had reached out to us and really cared. He and his congregation were doing everything they could possibly do to encourage me and get me back to my calling. But there was another person and another place that I had to encounter. My dear friend, Pastor Ben Leonard, asked me to return to Granite City, Illinois, my hometown, the city where I was born and raised. It was the place of my beginnings, both as a person and as a Christian.

As soon as the pastor extended the invitation, I knew that God had something more in mind for me than simply delivering a sermon. Somehow I knew that in returning home, I was going to have an encounter with myself.

It was in Illinois where I had been chosen to be the state leader of our denomination. It was there that I had achieved so much of my life's work. I and others had kept the scorecard in my steps to success, but somewhere along the pathway, I lost it all.

Now I had to ask myself: *When I left my hometown, what went wrong? How could a boy raised in a steel mill town, in a very humble home and surroundings, become involved in a national scandal?*

The Granite City church had sent out over 140 young people into the ministry. I was one of the few who had publicly failed. But most people really did not know what was going on in my heart.

Why did I lose my integrity and go to prison?

Why? That is the question.

I didn't have an answer before I went to prison, but I do now. I had to go back to the place where I lost myself in order to find myself — at the place of my beginnings.

I am reminded of Mary and Joseph. They went a full day's journey without Jesus before they noticed He was missing.

They lost Jesus in a day. They found Him after three days of frantic searching. It took three times longer to find Jesus than it did to lose Him.

It usually takes us much longer to regain what we have lost than it took for us to lose it in the first place.

After she found Jesus, Mary kept all these things in her heart. She knew in order never to lose Jesus again, she had to remember how she had lost Him the first time. Like Mary and Joseph, we can lose Jesus in the temple — at the place of our most spiritual activity. To find Him, we must go back to the place where we lost Him.

I lost it all. But on the way back, I found Jesus in a way I had never known Him before. Allow me to share with you from my heart what God has taught me on this difficult and painful journey.

1

Losing It All

In the summer of 1986, I received a telephone call from a man whom I believe is one of the few prophetic figures of our time — David Wilkerson. In fact, I considered him then, as I do now, to be more than just a “man of God.” I believed he was a principled person who would not compromise his values. He was not for sale at any cost.

His telephone call caught me by surprise. After a few brief pleasantries, in a genuine straightforward fashion, he quickly addressed the issues on his heart.

He said, “Brother Dortch, I have been on a mountain seeking God’s face and praying. In listening to the voice of the Lord, God has spoken to me. I have a word from the Lord. God will destroy PTL. The spirit of the Lord has departed from that place. But God is going to give you one last chance.”

“It’s not my ministry,” I explained. “I’m not the head of this ministry.”

“I know that. When I was in prayer, the Lord told me to call you, Brother Dortch,” he said solemnly.

“You must do something, and it must be done quickly. What is going on at PTL is an abomination to God, and it must be stopped. Brother Dortch, you are the hope of getting some of these problems solved.”

In a stunned manner, I responded, “You may well be right, but we need to hear it from you. I am certainly open to the possibility of your coming and sharing your vision with our entire staff.”

Without responding to my invitation, he continued, “If something isn’t done quickly, God is going to write *ICHABOD* over the doors of Heritage USA. The birds are going to be flying in that hotel within a year — unless something is done and there is true repentance.”

I implored him to come, but he said it would be impossible at that time. I pleaded with him to meet with Jim Bakker and/or me. He encouraged me to address the staff myself.

“Won’t you please come and tell us what you feel? Would you meet with Jim and me?” I begged, my tone becoming more and more insistent.

At the time David Wilkerson called, Jim Bakker was in California. I did my best to get Brother David to come and unburden his soul to us, but he felt that he could not do it.

Warnings

I called an entire staff meeting for the next Friday afternoon at 2:30 p.m. Everyone was to be released from their jobs and assemble at the PTL television studio.

By that Friday, Jim Bakker had returned from California, and I shared with him David Wilkerson’s prophetic word. I told him about the scheduled

meeting and asked him to introduce me that day before I spoke. I wanted the staff to know that Jim Bakker was standing with me in what I had to say. Jim cheerfully responded and said he would be glad to do so.

I addressed the staff that Friday afternoon in a way I had never done before at Heritage USA. I dealt with every known sin that I felt God leading me to address, including infidelity in marriage, adultery, homosexuality, drinking, pornography, conversation, and language. I discussed the importance of paying our tithes and living a life pleasing to God. I felt it was necessary to cover the fundamentals of Christian living and the conduct expected of believers.

“Our partners and viewers have a right to expect every one of us to have proper moral values in harmony with our Christian witness,” I told the PTL staff. “They have a right to expect us to live an overcoming life — a life above reproach.”

At the conclusion of my message, a holy silence hovered over the auditorium.

Upon returning to the dressing room, Jim remarked to me, “If there’s anything you missed today, I don’t know what it was. And it all needed to be said.”

In my soul I felt that I had delivered the message that, in a sense, had been laid upon someone else’s heart. But it was a message I knew had to be communicated.

I then called David Wilkerson and pleaded with him once again to meet with us. He reluctantly consented to meet with Jim Bakker and me on the following Thursday in Chattanooga or Knoxville,

Tennessee. The next morning, however, his secretary phoned to say he would be unable to come. I was extremely disappointed.

Other Christians were also sending warnings to PTL. Some of them, without fanfare, privately attempted to lay a foundation on which to get our attention. They were unsuccessful. I'm not sure we wanted to listen to anyone.

As the year progressed, the rumors, stories, and allegations concerning Jim Bakker and a woman continued. I found myself frequently trying to answer the questions that were coming, never imagining the whole matter would explode in our faces.

Losing It All

Within one year of David Wilkerson's phone call I was fired from my position as executive director of PTL Ministries, and my wife and I were forced to move from our home in Charlotte, North Carolina.

For two and one-half years I lived in torment! What was to happen to us? Every day I hastened to read the newspapers, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *St. Petersburg Times*. What was happening to me? It was on all the major television networks each night. When the indictments came it was as if execution day had arrived for us. We lived in a dark place of pain.

We lost almost everything. My money went to cover legal fees. My denomination revoked my ministerial credentials. Friends whom I had known for years neither phoned nor wrote.

I lost my integrity, my reputation, my freedom, and my sense of self-respect. Prison robbed me of privacy, my family, and my income. I lost it all.

After serving 18 months I was released from prison to go to a halfway house for 5 months. The cancer had cost me a kidney. I was not well. I walked with a cane for almost one year, but I began my journey back.

Over the next year there were many turning points. One in particular brought God's purpose for my life into clear focus.

Don George, pastor of Calvary Temple in the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex, invited me to speak to his congregation and guests. I knew Pastor George very well. He had been a true friend to my wife and me down through the years. His congregation had always received us warmly in the past. I had spoken at Calvary Temple many times before they built their beautiful, mammoth cathedral, and later participated in the dedication of their completed facility.

During the two months prior to my scheduled engagement at Calvary anxiety had gripped me almost every day. The thought was constantly on my mind that the Christian Booksellers Association's annual convention was being held in Dallas at the same time. I was filled with fear at the thought of speaking before many nationally known ministers, business persons, authors, singers, and television personalities who would be in the service.

But it was more than that. I knew this was not going to be just an encounter with a congregation or even well-known Christian ministers and celebrities. This was going to be an encounter with me. An encounter I had to face sooner or later.

Unfinished Business

When the day arrived and we were driving to the church I wondered, *Would there be the crowd I*

was expecting? Perhaps only the local congregation would know I was going to speak.

My hopes dissipated as we came to the freeway exit for the church. There before us loomed a giant marquee announcing Richard Dortch as that morning's guest speaker. Most of the convention attendees would surely have seen the sign on their way in from the airport. There was no hope of escape now.

Immediately I knew what I had to do. I was "made to know" — this is the way I describe God's revelations to me — that I must confess my sins and ask forgiveness, apologizing to the people in the church that morning for the hurt and reproach I had brought on the gospel. I knew that was the right thing to do, and with God's grace I could do it.

The members and Pastor George lovingly greeted Mildred and me as we made our way into the church. After a few choruses and the opening prayer, I stood to my feet and, with trembling knees and breaking heart, approached the pulpit.

"Pastor George," I began, my voice barely above a whisper, "thank you for your kind introduction, but please stay here at the pulpit with me. There is some unfinished business I need to do before I speak."

Silence filled the cathedral. I could sense the audience's waiting for my next word.

"This church," I continued, "has been a friend to Mildred and me for many years. I hurt you, Pastor. I brought shame to my friends, this church, and the Body of Christ. I brought reproach to you as a person and to this group of people, and for this I am very sorry. I ask each of you to forgive me, and I plead with this congregation to forgive me. I know

God has forgiven me, but now I need to ask you to forgive me because I so regret the pain I brought into your lives.”

As I ceased talking, I felt as if time itself had stopped. The audience appeared stunned by my confession. All the respected people I had expected to be there were seated throughout the church that morning. Yet, through God’s grace, I faced my sins and publicly confessed the things I had done wrong.

I waited for what seemed like an eternity, then I heard a sob, and then another. Someone stood and began to weep. Then I felt the warm arm of Pastor George around me. With tears, he hugged me intensely, whispering, “You are forgiven.” At that moment I was lost in a world of love.

When I regained my composure, the congregation was standing, some applauding, some weeping. I looked at them through my tears, wondering what had just happened and what would happen next.

After a few minutes, the people quieted down, and Pastor George stepped to the microphone. “Richard Dortch,” he said, looking directly into my eyes, “you are forgiven. We want you to know the peace we have all found. Never again to this congregation need you say anything about the past. We forgive you, just as we have been forgiven. You are loved.”

The majesty of the moment was overwhelming. Not the majesty of my being center stage, or in front of many of the mighty men and women of faith I knew and respected. The majesty of that moment came from within. It came as I asked forgiveness for my sins. I had lost it all, but I was finding my way back.

Confronting Myself

After my confession before the believers of Calvary Church, I determined that, if I must go before every congregation that invites me to speak and confess my failure, I would do it.

Although confessing my sin and asking and receiving forgiveness brought great healing to my heart and mind, I knew the process was not complete. I needed to do more than confess to others; I needed to confront myself. I knew I had to search my soul to discover the reasons for my transgressions and downfall.

After many months of self-examination and near total despair, I identified the root of my sin: I had violated the power entrusted to me by God and by my brothers and sisters in the faith. I had tried to seize some of God's glory, and He would have none of it.

God shares His glory with no one, but I had wanted some attention. I had wanted acclamation. I had wanted power to do with as I pleased. I got all of that along with a good dose of chastisement and humiliation.

From the time I stepped down as superintendent of my denomination in Illinois to take the position with the PTL ministry until the day I was released from prison, more than five years had passed. During that time I constantly faced the issue of how the violation of power had eroded the integrity I had spent a lifetime building.

What Is Integrity?

During the long months that I was in prison, I had a lot of time to think. Over and over again, I

asked myself, What is integrity? Is it the same as honesty and morality? Or is it more than that?

As I read the newspapers and watched the evening news during those long days at Eglin Federal Prison Camp, I saw countless reports of men and women who had compromised their integrity and now found themselves the objects of media attention. I began to realize that, in today's world, true integrity often eludes us. The loss of integrity, however, raises its ugly head from every corner of our society. What has gone wrong?

A prime-time news telecast exposes the fundraising and spending practices of television ministries and well-known evangelists, sending shock waves throughout the evangelical community.

Reports surface that Stanford and several other prestigious universities admit they took government money — taxpayers' dollars — and fraudulently used it.

Accusations of impropriety in the relationship of priests to their followers surface regularly, embarrassing the Catholic Church and tarnishing its image.

Forty-seven scientists at the Harvard and Emory University Medical Schools are accused of producing hyped and falsified scientific research.

The savings and loan fiasco, the House bank rubber-check debacle, the junk bonds swindle — all these make one wonder: If news reporters, government workers, bank executives, office holders, church leaders, university professors, and the business community have no scruples, does anyone have integrity anymore?

This question involves much more than just an occasional evangelist having an illicit affair, or Ivan

Boesky stealing money from Wall Street, or a *Washington Post* writer making up the story for which she received a Pulitzer prize. It involves people from all walks of life — those involved in the work of the Church and those in the secular community.

It's easy for us to point fingers at Jimmy Swaggart and forget the tens of thousands of other ministers — and lay people — whose private sins have not yet been exposed. The problem also extends beyond Jim Baker and Richard Dortch of the PTL scandal. It involves all of us.

How honest are *you*?

A House subcommittee estimated recently that one out of every three working Americans alters their educational or career credentials in order to get hired for a job.

What's going on? Are the American people dishonest? A survey indicates that 91 percent of the American people lie regularly.

Those same people, however, are firm in their conviction that "others" — up to and including public officials — should be held to high standards of honesty.

Seven out of ten Americans say the president of the United States should never tell a lie. At least that's the conviction of the 91 percent who admit that they regularly lie. But who knows if they're telling the truth?

About 50 percent of us go to church each week, and 45 percent of all Americans say that we are born-again Christians. That's hard to believe when 91 percent admit they are liars.¹

John Gardner, founder of the Common Cause, recently said, "Duplicity and deception, in public

and private life, are substantially greater than they have been in the past.”

Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, former president of the University of Notre Dame, stated, “To the extent family life is disintegrating, kids are not being taught values about lying, cheating, and stealing.”

When a New York City school student turned in a purse she had found, complete with the \$1,000 cash, not a single school official congratulated her on her virtue. Her teacher explained, “If I come from a position of what is right and wrong, then I am no longer their counselor.”

The apparent translation: We no longer believe in black and white, only shades of gray.

Twentieth-century Americans have grown cautious about making value judgments. There is a growing degree of cynicism and sophistication in our society — a sense that all things are relative and nothing is absolutely right or wrong.

Paul Harvey, the noted news commentator, recently observed that Sears, one of America’s great retail institutions, lost \$48 million in one quarter to shrinkage. Most retailers agree that the greatest loss in shrinkage is due to theft.

Who’s doing the stealing? It’s a known fact that retail *employees* steal four times more than the public takes through shoplifting. Why? Because a store or place of business is impersonal; it’s easier to steal from “the store” than to put a gun to a clerk’s head.

Most Americans believe dishonesty is inherent in business practices today. The philosophy seems to be, “Do whatever is necessary to succeed and beat the competition.”

“People feel like suckers if they’re honest,” a recent article in a *Business News* magazine reported.

People Who Could Do No Wrong

What gives me, Richard Dortch, someone who lost his integrity, the right to raise questions about truth and honesty? That’s a valid question.

I have paid an immense price for my loss of integrity and learned how easily it can be forfeited. I don’t want you to make the same mistakes.

The men I met in prison were not the kind I expected. Many were professional people who would be considered the most unlikely to fall victim to their crimes.

Among my fellow inmates were lawyers; executives serving time for bank fraud; administrators involved in savings and loan scandals; medical doctors who had not told the truth about their Medicare and Medicaid funds. I shared a prison dormitory with a former Secret Service agent, a judge, and men who had been government officials and county prosecutors. In fact, I wasn’t the only former churchman serving time either; six other ministers were incarcerated during my prison term.

What caused the downfall of these men who had so much going for them?

It is said that adversity tests our ability to survive, and prosperity tests our integrity. That’s when some of us failed the test — when we were at our peak and had it all. How did that happen? Most fell blindly into the snare, unaware that the primrose path was strewn with subtle booby traps.

Where are these pitfalls hidden? Within the day-to-day decisions that each of us must make —

decisions involving different kinds of integrity. In the chapters that follow, we will consider integrity from four vantage points:

1. The Arrogance of Integrity
2. Selective Integrity
3. Judgmental Integrity
4. Consensual Integrity

Maybe you will find yourself before it's too late.