

Sermon – October 18 2026 Las Cruces

Title: Personal Integrity

Psalm 26:1-8

Your love is before my eyes

26:1 Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

26:2 Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind.

26:3 For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

26:4 I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites;

26:5 I hate the company of evildoers and will not sit with the wicked.

26:6 I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O LORD,

26:7 singing aloud a song of thanksgiving and telling all your wondrous deeds.

26:8 O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell and the place where your glory abides.

Full Text (Scottish Metrical Psalter 1650)

1. Judge me, O Lord, for I have walk'd in mine integrity:
I trusted also in the Lord; slide therefore shall not I.
2. Examine me, and do me prove; try heart and reins, O God:
For thy love is before mine eyes, thy truth's paths I have trode.
3. With persons vain I have not sat, nor with dissemblers gone:
Th' assembly of ill men I hate; to sit with such I shun.
4. Mine hands in innocence, O Lord, I'll wash and purify;
So to thine holy altar go, and compass it will I:
That I, with voice of thanksgiving, may publish and declare,
And tell of all thy mighty works, that great and wondrous are.
5. The habitation of thy house, Lord, I have loved well;
Yea, in that place I do delight where doth thine honour dwell.

6. With sinners gather not my soul, and such as blood would spill:
Whose hands mischievous plots, right hand corrupting bribes do fill.
7. But as for me, I will walk on in mine integrity:
Do thou redeem me, and, O Lord, be merciful to me.
8. My foot upon an even place doth stand with steadfastness:
Within the congregations th' Eternal I will bless.

Romans 12:9-21

12:9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good;

12:10 Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

12:11 Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord.

12:12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in afflictions, persevere in prayer.

12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.

12:16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

12:18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

12:19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord."

12:20 Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Sermon: Personal Integrity

Today, we will deal with what it means to be someone that people find trustworthy, loyal, reliable, and that the person themselves strives to maintain a high level of personal integrity.

The Letter to the Romans was written by the **Apostle Paul** around AD 57–58, likely while he was staying in Corinth. Unlike many of Paul's other epistles, which were written to correct specific crises or heresies in churches he founded, Paul had not yet visited the Christian community in Rome.

The Roman church was a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers. Historically, Emperor Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49. When they returned several years later following his death, the Roman church dynamic had shifted—Gentiles had taken on leadership, leading to potential social, cultural, and theological tensions between Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ.

Chapters 1 through 11 of Romans form Paul's theological deep-dive into gospel doctrine: salvation by grace through faith, justification, the work of the Holy Spirit, and God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 12 marks a major pivot in the letter—from deep theology to practical Christian living. Starting in Romans 12:1–2, Paul calls believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices transformed by the renewing of their minds. **Romans 12:9–21** acts as the blueprint for what this transformed life looks like within the community and toward the outside world, setting a standard for active, non-counterfeit love.

The Core Lessons of the Romans passage are:

Love Demands Integrity: Genuine love isn't permissive of harm—it hates evil while holding fast to what is good. It shows up through tangible actions like hospitality, humility, and generosity.

Empathy Over Superiority: Living in harmony requires intentionally entering into the joy and sorrow of others, letting go of pride, and refusing to consider yourself wiser than everyone else.

Release the Desire for Revenge: Retaliation escalates conflict and traps you in bitterness. Trusting God's ultimate justice frees you from the burden of taking vengeance into your own hands.

Radical Goodness Prevails: You do not defeat hostility by copying the methods of your enemies. The only way to truly conquer evil is by answering it with transformative goodness and undeserved kindness.

Psalm 26 is traditionally attributed to **King David**. While the exact event is not named, scholars often place its composition during a time of intense personal trial or false accusation—such as his flight from King Saul, the betrayal during Absalom’s rebellion, or malicious slander by political enemies.

In the ancient Near East, a person accused of a crime or disloyalty with no human tribunal to clear their name would appeal directly to God as the supreme judge. Psalm 26:1–8 represents a **prayer for vindication and divine inspection**. Rather than claiming absolute sinless perfection, David asserts his overall **integrity (wholeness of heart)**, his loyalty to God's covenant, and his deliberate separation from deceitful, wicked people.

The core lessons from this Psalm are that

True integrity is not just outward behavior; it is an undivided heart. When the Psalm says *"try my mind and my heart"* it is an invitation to God to test your thoughts and motives, to keep your faith grounded and transparent.

You cannot walk in God's truth while regularly sitting in council with hypocrisy and deceit. Boundaries are necessary to protect your moral character and communion with God.

When facing false accusations or slander, David kept God's loving kindness before his eyes rather than becoming consumed by his detractors.

True devotion naturally moves outward into thanksgiving, public praise, and an active love for being in God's presence alongside other believers.

The relentless mid-afternoon heat of the Chihuahuan Desert radiated off the gravel, shimmering across the lonely stretch of New Mexico highway just a few miles north of the Santa Teresa crossing.

Mateo stood near the fence line of his family’s small pecan grove and cattle ranch, wiping sweat from his brow with a dust-stained bandanna. He adjusted his woven straw hat and looked out across the arid flatlands. For three generations, the land had been in his family, but over the past few years, the borderlands had become a pressure cooker.

Living along the border meant walking a tightrope. Every week brought tension: human traffickers cutting livestock fences, heavily armed border patrols kicking up dust plumes, and local vigilante groups patrolling back roads with night-vision scopes and hostility. Lately, Mateo found himself caught in a crossfire of malicious local rumors. A neighbor up the road, bitter over a long-standing property line dispute, had begun whispering at the local cafe that Mateo was secretly helping smugglers cut through his acreage for cash.

The accusation stung deeply. Mateo was a quiet man who lived by a strict, old-country code of honor. He spent his evenings praying over his family and reading the Scriptures by the yellow glow of a kitchen lamp. To be branded a criminal by his own community tore at him.

That morning, before stepping out into the heat, Mateo had opened his Bible to the Book of Psalms. David's words in Psalm 26 had echoed in his chest all day: *"Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity... I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites."*

Standing by the wire fence, Mateo lifted his eyes toward the jagged skyline of Mount Cristo Rey. *"You know my heart, Lord,"* he prayed silently. *"You see the lines I refuse to cross. Examine my motives, prove my heart, and protect my integrity when everyone else assumes the worst."*

As if in answer to his prayer, the silence of the desert was shattered by the harsh, metallic screech of tearing iron and the roar of a high-powered engine.

Mateo turned toward his north pasture. A dusty white pickup—one he recognized immediately as belonging to Jim, the neighbor who had been spreading the rumors—was spun out in the ditch beside Mateo's access road. Smoke billowed from under its crumpled hood, and the front axle was snapped clean after smashing into a heavy steel irrigation pipe.

Mateo instinctively started running toward the wreck. As he got closer, he saw Jim struggling to push open the bent driver's side door. The man was trapped, cursing loudly, his face flushed red with panic.

Then, Mateo saw why Jim was in such a rush.

Scattered around the bed of the truck were stolen irrigation pumps and copper wire—stolen from Mateo's own barn just an hour earlier. Jim hadn't just slandered Mateo; he had raided his property while Mateo was out inspecting the south fence, driving off so fast in his greed that he had wrecked his own vehicle.

A hot wave of fury surged through Mateo's chest. The bitterness that had been simmering for weeks suddenly threatened to boil over. Here was the proof. Here was his chance for vengeance. He could leave Jim sitting in that sweltering truck in 105-degree heat, call the sheriff, and watch his enemy get dragged away in handcuffs, publicly exposed as the true thief and liar.

Mateo slowed his pace, his fists clenched tight. *Give him what he deserves*, a voice inside urged. *Let him suffer a little.*

But as he reached the smoking wreck, another passage of Scripture—one his grandmother had made him memorize in Spanish as a boy—flashed through his mind with arresting clarity. Romans 12 was a passage he had read just days before: *"Repay no one evil for evil... Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Mateo stopped two feet from the driver's window. Jim looked up, his eyes widening in terror as he realized who was standing over him, surrounded by the evidence of his own crime. Jim braced himself, expecting a blow or a volley of curses.

Instead, Mateo took a deep breath, grabbed a heavy steel crowbar from the back of the truck, and wedged it into the crushed door frame. With a grunt of exertion, he heaved against the metal until the latch popped open with a loud groan.

He reached in, grabbed Jim by his belt and shirt collar, and hauled the stunned, bruised man out of the smoking cab onto the dry dirt.

Jim sat on the ground, gasping for air, clutching a bleeding scrape on his forearm. He looked down at the stolen copper wire, then up at Mateo, unable to make eye contact.

"Why didn't you just leave me?" Jim rasped, his voice trembling. "I tried to ruin you, Mateo. I took your gear. I lied about you to the whole town."

Mateo leaned the crowbar against the truck. He walked over to his own utility vehicle parked nearby, grabbed a cold jug of water and a clean towel, and walked back. He handed the water to Jim and knelt down to help clean the cut on the man's arm.

"Because my life isn't governed by what you do to me, Jim," Mateo said quietly, his voice calm and firm like the desert floor. "It's governed by who I answer to. God knows my integrity, and He demands that I treat you with mercy, even when you bring me malice."

Jim held the cold jug against his forehead, tears cutting muddy tracks through the dust on his cheeks. The weight of undeserved kindness crushed his hostility far more effectively than any fist or lawsuit ever could.

"I'll bring the sheriff out here myself," Jim whispered, his shoulders slumping in defeat. "I'll tell him everything—about the gear, and about the lies I told at the cafe. I'll make it right."

Mateo offered a hand and pulled his neighbor to his feet.

As the wail of a siren distant down the highway signaled the approach of the authorities, Mateo looked out across the sun-drenched valley toward the border. He realized that the hardest border to guard wasn't the wire fence separating two nations; it was the boundary line of his own heart.

By refusing to sit with deceit and choosing to answer betrayal with radical grace, he hadn't just saved his neighbor's life—he had preserved his own soul, proving that the light of genuine love can overpower even the darkest dust storm of evil.

pastoral prayer

Heavenly Father, Almighty God,

We come before You today standing at the crossroad of our own hearts, where the dust of this world meets the purity of Your holiness. You are the God who searches our minds and tests our hearts, who sees the silent trials, the false accusations, and the wounds we carry in secret. Like the psalmist, we ask that You vindicate us—not through our own pride or self-righteousness, but by washing us in Your truth and anchoring us in Your steadfast love.

Lord, guard our hearts when anger kindles within us. In a world quick to retaliate, slander, and divide, keep our hands clean and our motives pure. Grant us the wisdom to set boundaries against deceit, yet give us the courage to tear down the walls of bitterness. When betrayal cuts deep and our enemies stand before us, tame our desire for vengeance. Remind us that judgment belongs to You alone, and that You have called us to a higher, radical path—to overcome evil with active, living good.

Pour out Your Holy Spirit to transform our instincts. Give us eyes to see the brokenness beneath the hostility of those who oppose us. May our love be without pretense: hating what is evil, clinging to what is good, and offering the cold cup of water to the very ones who sought our harm. Let Your grace run so deeply through our lives that even our enemies are met with undeserved mercy, and in that mercy, find their way to Your light.

Establish our feet on solid ground, Lord. Protect our integrity in the quiet places where no one else is watching, and let the house of Your glory be our dwelling place forever.

AMEN