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Integrity Today: Light in a Dark World

Rowdy laughter erupts into the thick, lively air, obnoxiousness only found at a local tavern. Busy bartenders rush drinks to their impatient customers, which only serves to spread the odors of sweat and alcohol. One table of particularly inebriated men, in the midst of a heated poker match, soon bursts into a fit of yelling and violence. The scene changes to a crowded hallway lined with lockers. Teenagers of all kinds and cliques fill the corridor with chatter. Awkward nerds discuss pre-calculus problems, eccentric preps boisterously gossip about Alicia's new boyfriend, and burly jocks reference some new perverted concept. In a world that is constantly changing, it's easy to get lost in the turmoil, and question our very reason for being. What compels us to be who we are? Integrity: the differentiation between what is morally right and morally wrong and the decision to pursue what we believe is morally right. The answer sounds simple, but underneath the definition is a concept that goes beyond each of us as an individual. The true definition of integrity is different for everyone, for we all have unique experiences, personalities, and opinions that lead us to think and act like we do. What results is a moral paradox. However, I firmly believe that there are aspects of integrity that are definite. Those with integrity battle the relentless uncertainties of the world with honesty, justice, and consistency.

Of these, honesty is the most easily described: telling the truth. It is most commonly known for its application in spoken language. Honest people tell the truth to the best of their ability, and refrain from telling lies. Of course truth can be somewhat relative to a person's perspective or background. Despite this relativity, there is absolute truth, a truth that is ingrained within each of us. Truth that makes us feel guilty when we copy essays off the internet or fake sickness to get out of work or school. Though a major part of honesty is in what we say, we cannot ignore the honesty of our actions. We can talk of righteousness and truth all we like, but it is meaningless if we cannot be true to ourselves. The only way to be sincerely honest is to know and act like ourselves. Only hypocrites bash others' behavior while erecting personality facades of their own. Honesty alone pierces the confusion caused by lies and deception, and those who practice it are as noble and beloved as the stars lighting the night sky.

Those with integrity must also be just. Justice ensures the fair treatment of everyone, but what is considered fair to one person might be unreasonable to another. The only way to truly treat others equally is by treating them how you would prefer to be treated. The Golden Rule is often underappreciated, but in a poker game, you'd feel much better knowing that everyone is playing with the same deck. But justice isn't always about being equal; various people have different needs. People of justice are shields for the defenseless, beacons for the lost, legs for those who can't stand up for themselves. From some kid who gets picked on at school to a friend who smokes, opportunities to help others and fight injustice in the world present themselves in variety of ways throughout life. One only needs to know where to look and have the right moral means to deal with them.

Though honesty and justice are key components of integrity, both are rendered useless unless you are consistent with your beliefs. To be consistent, you must first know what your principles are, and firmly support them. To be an illustrious archer, one must first know how to hold the bow. Being unfailing in your convictions is important, but even more so is steadfastly acting on them. Gossip, the media, even peer pressure can easily sweep away the fickle folk. Only those strong of mind, heart, and principle stand out in this chaotic world as shining examples of integrity.

Those with integrity use honesty, justice, and consistency to battle the darkness and disorder of the world. Honesty, in speech and action, destroys deception; justice ensures equality; and consistency supports and defends these precious values. That is all integrity is. Relativity may help us understand it from everyone's perspective, but integrity, in its very nature, isn't about everyone. It's about your values and how you choose to act on them.