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Imagine a world devoid of virtue and good intention, a bleak wasteland where no compassion breeds inhuman beings lacking morals. It would be an environment of barren cities filled with dilapidated structures and run-down humanity. Corrupted individuals would roam the deserted landscape that was once civilization. Looting, murder, and destruction would become standards of living for the inhabitants of this world—a land devoid of integrity.

Slim hope exists for the future of human society if integrity is not embraced. Just as the dilapidated buildings—constructed without integrity—receive structural damage and collapse in a storm, people without integrity are blown about by winds of misfortune and destroyed by catastrophes. Without the solidity and strength of character, individuals lacking veracity cannot weather true difficulties in life. In a world of decrepit structures on the brink of destruction, people—deficient in the virtue of integrity—will collapse like the fallen buildings around them.

Beside the crumbling city in this immoral world, grey clouds fill the sky but no rain falls to fill the dried river beds. This depressing sight adds to the disappointment one feels when the howling wind and dark clouds bring no rain. Is the discontent no less when people fail to live true to their promises? According to *Proverbs 25:14*, “People who promise things they never give are like clouds and wind that bring no rain.” This biblical lesson deals with integrity. When what people think, say, promise, and do all coincide, they have integrity—contained within an unshakable character. They have the trust and respect of fellow men, and hold a strong reputation because they are reliable and responsible. These people stir a difference in others.

In my life, I’ve had the privilege to acquaint myself with people who carry an unwavering moral compass. Specifically, I learned integrity when I was a young sapling, growing taller in the forest of life. My mind and morals were being cultivated by a *youth group*—a program dedicated to fertilizing virtues in young men and women. Integrity was exemplified to me by a positive mentor and role model: Bob, my youth minister. Going on a camping trip to develop character traits, we stopped along the way to get firewood. There were numerous people with enough trust in others to leave bundles of wood at the end of their driveways with a small box nearby for payment. My passion for integrity was born at the moment Bob took a stack of wood and counted out the money. Rounding up to the nearest \$5, he deposited the cash in the freestanding box beside the woodpile. Bob could have easily taken the firewood without paying—for nobody was watching—and no problems would have risen. In retrospect, I realize Bob could have taken the box of money as well...and nothing would have stopped him...

Except his integrity.

The *honors system* tested the honesty within Bob, as *he* would forever know he had done wrong. Integrity means that one adheres to a moral compass, or honors system, that prohibits actions that would debase one’s virtues. It is not simply honesty—the ability to tell the truth

despite the consequences—but the restraining moral harness that keeps one from acting on dishonest urges. This is a gift attainable by all, if one wishes to live up to it.

Like water nourishing plants to grow into sturdy trees capable of weathering any storm, integrity is essential for the growth of morally strong individuals and society. Children, the sprouting roots of a growing community, must be nourished in integrity—the essential component for the construction of a reliable moral compass—so they may develop into sturdy trees that honorably contribute to their forest, the society in which they dwell. Although our world has not reached complete moral decadence, we must all strive for the preservation of integrity to give life to the wilting stem of humanity. Just as I was inspired by my youth minister’s positive actions, one act of integrity will inspire another. And like a river seeping over lifeless banks, integrity can spread meaning to the world. Water for a thirsting nation, integrity brings hope to troubled lands and people.

That is the best gift we can receive.

That is integrity.