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### Though the Heavens Fall

Decisions are often defining moments for character. No one needed to impress upon the young American army commander the importance of the decision which lay before him. The British army was determined to gain the area under his command; he was facing an impending siege. However, this was not all that disturbed this young, brilliant and courageous officer. He had been passed over for promotion again due to personal enemies in the army high command. While he believed in the cause of liberty, he had begun to gradually lose heart in the face of the seemingly insurmountable British attacks and the lack of recognition from his superiors. Now, in a letter before him, he was being made an offer of defection by the British secret intelligence and a promotion to Brigadier General in their army. What about the principles of liberty and justice which he fought for? But of what worth was this idealism in the light of an unending war and impending loss?

It is easy to sit back in the comfortable realm of self-righteousness and affirm to oneself how your integrity would stand the test in various hypothetical situations. It is much more difficult when, in the real world, life endeavors to strip you of your values, and to disentangle you from those inconvenient realities of character and conscience. Remaining true to values, having the courage to stand for them in the face of great adversity, and having the sense of honesty and duty necessary to make yourself accountable to them, this is the meaning of integrity today.

The 1930's-1940's saw a very dark time for Europe. The human atrocities coming from Germany were spreading as the holocaust ravaged those under Nazi control. The Netherlands were no exception, but in the small town of Haarlam a woman was making a stand against the oppression. Miss Corrie Ten Boom valued human life and was repulsed by the wanton destruction, and saddened by the plight of the Jews. The integrity of her character and prodding of her conscience would not allow her to idly stand by and watch the devastation. She started a very successful underground system based in her house to smuggle the Jews out from the clutches of the Nazi's. It was not merely courage that Ms. Ten Boom possessed, but a courage fueled by an integrity based on her convictions. Courage is integrity in action, because such a courage is derived from adhering to ones values and sticking to them even in adverse circumstances. Ten Boom's integrity was rewarded by the hatred of the Nazis and she and her family were taken to concentration camps. When her aged father was offered release on the condition that he promised never to help another Jew, he notably replied: "If you release me today, I will be helping Jews tomorrow." Holding fast and adhering to principles, this is the meaning of integrity today, or for any other time.

A central element to integrity is honesty, primarily to oneself. Often doing what you know to be right is quite difficult; the higher road is often a lonely one. To recognize the need for integrity in all one does is essential in becoming a person of character. William Shakespeare once said: "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou

canst not then be false to any man.”

The aforementioned young officer, Mr. Benedict Arnold, was confronted by a choice between what he knew to be right and his personal safety and prosperity. Arnold chose a path of denial, failing to be honest with himself, and betraying his character and country in favor of ill-gotten gain. In contrast to Arnold, Corrie Ten Boom faced imprisonment and death but could not be dissuaded from standing for her convictions, living a life of value and preserving an example of integrity which is a challenge and inspiration for each of us.

*“The greatest want of the world is the want of men, [and women]--men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.” ~Ellen Gould White*