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A Life of Integrity

Many different character traits define who we are, with the most important of these traits being integrity. The internet is full of quizzes that range from finding your I.Q. to determining which television or movie character you are most like. There seems to be a quiz for almost any topic. These quizzes consist of a list of questions, and based upon an individual's answers, determine which category a person most likely matches. This leads me to ponder what questions would really determine whether a person possesses a certain character trait such as integrity.

Not everyone will possess or demonstrate integrity. Integrity is often used to describe when a person does what is good or right. Doing right or good, however, that does not necessarily mean that a person has integrity. Integrity is much more than simply doing what is right. Asking the question of whether someone is making the right choice does not mean he has integrity. Most people know right from wrong and many only choose to do what is right to avoid being punished or ridiculed. Often we might only do good deeds in order to gain recognition for our actions.

My grandpa has always said that people pay more attention to what we do than to what we say. He owned a tire business and I help him during the summer. His business has the reputation of being honest and fair to customers. This past summer an elderly lady came into his office and said she needed to buy a tire. She explained that one of her tires continued to lose air and another tire dealer told her she would need a complete new set. She was shopping around for the best price. The lady then told us that she was very upset because a complete set of new tires could be expensive. My grandpa told her he would inspect her tires and quote new ones. When he returned to his office he told the customer that the cost would be ten dollars to repair two of her tires. He had discovered that the problem was a roofing nail in the tires. They only needed a tire plug.

I later asked my grandpa why he had not sold the lady the new tires. He could have made more money if he had sold her a complete set. He explained to me that good, honest reputation is what builds a good business and makes a good person. He believes we should try our best to set a good example for others. Selling the tires to the customer would have been cheating her. If he had cheated the lady, not only would she have eventually found out and never done business with him again, but he would have known that he had been dishonest. He would not have been happy with himself if he knowingly cheated another person. He does not just advertise that he is a trustworthy business. He actually puts it into practice. Now the customer will probably return because she was treated fairly. My grandpa has built a reputation by demonstrating that his business is one of integrity.

Having real integrity also means doing the right thing whether someone is watching or not. A person of integrity is one that can be trusted to do what he says he is going to do. For instance, my Little League Baseball coach had to leave our team on the field while he met with another coach. He asked us to continue bunting practice just as if he were still there. We all agreed that we would continue practicing until he returned. He left the field and five of my teammates went into the dugout and sat down because they thought the coach couldn't see them. They ran back onto the field when they saw him returning. Even though the coach probably would never know if we practiced bunting or not, I stayed on the field and did as he asked me. I did not do it because I was afraid of being caught.

As it turned out, the coach had seen that only a few of us continued to practice. He sat the entire team down and talked about having integrity and being responsible for our own actions. He said that part of having integrity was being honest and trustworthy. He thanked those of us that had stayed on the field and not followed the other players. I felt good inside about my decision because I had done what was right for the right reason. I continued practicing because that is what I had promised. Running to the dugout would have been cheating me and my team. I did not want to be known as a player that did not keep his word or a person that could not be trusted.

In the Bible, Daniel was also a man of integrity. He always tried to please God no matter what his situation. Daniel had been given a gift for interpreting dreams. He was truthful in his interpretations. It did not matter whose dream he was interpreting. When the king decreed that the people could not pray to any god but him, Daniel still prayed to God three times a day. He was constantly watched by his enemies and the only fault his enemies could find was his unchanging relationship with God. Daniel was committed to God even though he could be thrown into the lion's den. Daniel was the same on the inside as he was on the outside. He told the king and his enemies that he was a follower of God and never once denied it. He did not let the fear of ridicule or the fear of being killed make him deny what was right. He did the right thing and God protected him. God was proud of Daniel for being the kind of person he said he was.

A major question that could be asked to determine if a person is one of integrity is whether that person is actually who he says he is. Integrity is not something that we can actually touch or hold, but it can be measured and demonstrated through our right actions. These right actions must be consistent. True integrity is who we really are when no one else is watching. A person with integrity is one whose thoughts and actions are always one in the same. That person has the trust and respect of others. We should live out our lives so others will trust our word. When you have integrity, your character is unshakable.