**Motivational Minutes on Character from 2015**

**(Also see Building-up Others, Kindness files.)**

1. **If He Had Only Known**

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**Quote of the day:**

“Any man's life will be filled with constant and unexpected encouragement if he makes up his mind to do his level best each day.” — Booker T. Washington

**Reflection:**

*An elderly carpenter was ready to retire and told his boss of his plans to leave and live a more leisurely life with his wife. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed a break. They could get by. The contractor was sorry to see such a good worker go, and he asked the carpenter to build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter agreed, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end a dedicated career. When the carpenter finished his work, the employer came to inspect the house. He handed the front-door key to the carpenter. “This is your house,” he said. “It is my gift to you.”*

If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done things another way, he would have given his best. So it is with us. We build our lives, a day at a time, often giving less than our best. Then we realize we have to live in the house we have built. If we could do it over, we’d do it much differently. But we cannot go back. You are the carpenter of your life. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Your attitudes and the choices you make today, build your “house” for tomorrow. Build wisely!

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1. **Two Wolves**

 

**Quote of the day:**

“Nobody can bring you peace but yourself.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Reflection:**

In a story from Native American folklore, a grandfather explains to his young grandson the inner struggle between good and evil.

*“A battle goes on inside all of us," the grandfather begins. "It is a battle between two wolves. One wolf is the embodiment of everything evil, like hate, anger, jealousy, resentment, greed, arrogance, lying, and selfishness. The other wolf is the embodiment of everything good, like love, joy, peace, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, compassion, truth, and faith." The grandson thinks about those words and then asks, "Which wolf wins?" The grandfather replies, "The one you feed."*

How can you tell these two wolves apart so you'll know which to feed? Whenever you have a thought that causes you to feel discontent, critical, bitter, or unhappy you can be sure it's the *wrong* wolf stalking his prey. Don't be his next meal! Feed the *other* one instead by filling your mind with positive, encouraging, uplifting, grateful thoughts. This is key to a happier, more upbeat, and more successful you.

You may not be able to stop the evil wolf from coming around, but if you're smart you won't wait till he does to start feeding the good wolf. Remember, the more you feed the good wolf, the stronger he will grow. Feed him on a daily basis, every chance you get, and the evil wolf will be no match for him. When it comes to a showdown, the evil wolf will turn tail and run every time.

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1. **You Are What You Repeatedly Do**

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**Quote of the day:**

“Repetition of the same thought or physical action develops into a habit which, repeated frequently enough, becomes an automatic reflex.” — Norman Vincent Peale

**Reflection**:

In other words, you are what you repeatedly do. Take a look at what you do, and you’ll see what you are becoming. For example, you become a generous person by giving repeatedly. If there are areas you would like to change in here’s how:

* Decide on the desired good habit you would like to acquire, and describe what that behavior looks like.
* Act out your description for a minimum of 30 days, by then that action should be automatic.
* Repeat this process for as many new habits that you would like to establish.

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1. **A Second Chance**

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**33. Quote of the day:**

“The virtue of man ought to be measured, not by his extraordinary exertions, but by his everyday conduct” — Blaise Pascal

**Reflection:**

It's difficult not to react negatively and make others feel bad for their mistakes. It is strength, not weakness, to give people a second chance when they are truly sorry for their mistakes and want to do better. Remember this the next time someone around you makes a mistake. If it's within your power, look for ways to give the person a second chance.

*Dale Carnegie tells a story that illustrates this. Bob Hoover, a famous test pilot and frequent performer, was flying home from an air show. At three hundred feet in the air, both engines suddenly stopped. By deft maneuvering Hoover managed to land the plane. Thankfully, no one was hurt, but the plane was badly damaged.*

*Upon inspecting the aircraft, just as he suspected, the WW2 propeller plane had been fueled with jet fuel rather than gasoline. Upon returning to the airport, he asked to see the mechanic who had serviced his airplane. The young man was sick with the agony of his mistake. He had just caused the loss of a very expensive plane and could have caused the loss of three lives as well.*

*One could anticipate the tongue-lashing that this proud and precise pilot would unleash for such carelessness. But Hoover didn't scold the mechanic; he didn't even criticize him. Instead, he put his big arm around the man's shoulder and said, "To show you I'm sure that you'll never do this again, I want you to service my F-51 tomorrow."*

How would you have reacted? If it's not in a similar way as Hoover reacted, then it's maybe time to rethink.

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1. **Reflecting the Light**

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**Quote of the day:**

“There are two ways of spreading light... to be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it.” — Edith Wharton

**Reflection:**

I picked up a fragment of a broken mirror and began to idly fiddle with it reflecting the light that was coming in through the window into the dark corners of the room.

When the thought came to me that what I was doing was a metaphor for life. Our lives are like that mirror. I am not the light or the source of light but the mirror that reflects the light into dark places. The light being truth, understanding, knowledge, love and goodness. Although I am not the light, the light could only get into some dark places when the light reflected off the mirror.

We can reflect light into the dark places of this world-into the black places in the hearts of men and women and change some things in some people. Even if you are only a broken fragment of a mirror it still works.

Are you reflecting the light?

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1. **Moral Courage**

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**Quote of the day:**

“It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.” — Mark Twain

**Reflection:**

I was impressed by the following story of a young man doing the right thing even to his own hurt.

*The Chicago Tribune reported about a big high school soccer game between Wheaton Christian and Waubonsie Valley. Waubonsie was the bigger school, and its team had the better record. But it wasn't until late in the game that Waubonsie Valley took a 3-2 lead. As the clock ticked toward the end of the game, Waubonsie Valley took another shot on the Wheaton goal. The goalie stopped the ball, and then threw it to his team's star player, Rob, a senior, who was the school's all-time top scorer. Rob moved the ball past the defenders until the goal was within his range. He faked the goalkeeper and kicked the ball into the goal tying the game. The Wheaton fans erupted in cheers. Rob's goal had saved his team from defeat. But Rob noticed something-the clock on the scoreboard behind the goal had ticked down to zero before he kicked the ball. After consulting with the referee, who had not noticed that time had expired and who had already left the field, Rob told his coach that Waubonsie Valley should get the victory. They agreed and told the opposing coach that his team actually won the game. When interviewed later, Rob said he considered the situation not as a tough decision, but as an opportunity. Rob told a reporter, "Every time you have an opportunity to do right, you should be thankful." He continued, ‘For a person to know what is right, and then not to do it, that would be a sin." Rob explained, "To have won the game-I mean, really who cares? Doing the right thing is more important. It lets you have peace. Every time you are lucky enough to be given the opportunity to do right, you shouldn't pass it up."*

Building character isn’t always easy. I guess that is why it’s not always so common in the world, as Mark Twain says. Let’s do our part to change that.

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1. **Do Your Best No Matter What**

 

Quote of the day:

“Do the common thing in an uncommon way.” — Booker T. Washington

Reflection:

There are many stories about doing your best even if the circumstances seem as if nothing good will come of it. Here is one such story.

*George Matheson grew discouraged over his small crowd one winter's evening in Innellan, Scotland. He had worked hard on his sermon, but the sparse numbers and empty chairs nearly defeated him. But his motto was, “M*ake every occasion a great occasion, you can never tell when somebody may be taking your measure for a larger place."  *So nevertheless he did his best, not knowing that in the congregation was a visitor from St. Bernard's Church in Edinburgh. This rather large church was in need of a pastor. Matheson had no idea that “somebody was taking his measure for a larger place”, but because he did his best “making this occasion a great occasion”, in spite of the small turn out, he was chosen for the new and better position at St. Bernard's Church.*

Although this story is about a pastor, the principle still holds true. It is important to always do your best no matter what, as this shows your best character, and you never know when you will be rewarded for that.

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1. **The Age Old Question**

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**Quote of the day:**

“If we are to go forward, we must go back and rediscover those precious values–that all reality hinges on moral foundations, and that all reality has spiritual control.” — Martin Luther King Jr.

**Reflection:**

What is truth? That age-old question is being asked less and less these days. Some people don’t ask because they’re so wrapped up in satisfying their material needs and desires that they never stop to consider their spiritual needs. Others don’t ask because they’re afraid they won’t like the answer. And some don’t ask because they don’t believe that there is an answer; their inborn hunger for truth has been dulled by skepticism and the notion of “relative morality” that pervades modern thought.

But does the truth cease to exist because people don’t seek it or don’t want to acknowledge it? Do God and the spiritual realm cease to exist because so many choose not to believe? Of course not! The truth is the truth, and it’s not contingent on anyone believing it. Even if no one believed, it would remain more real and enduring than the world you experience with your five senses.

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1. **Prepared for Opportunity**

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**Quote of the day:**

“To be prepared is half the victory.” — Miguel de Cervantes

**Reflection:**

*In the days before modern harbors, a ship had to wait for the flood tide before it could make it to port. The term for this situation in Latin was ob portu, that is, a ship standing over against port, waiting for the moment when it could ride the turn of the tide to harbor. The English word opportunity is derived from this original meaning. The captain and the crew were ready and waiting for that one moment, for they knew that if they missed it, they would have to wait for another tide to come in.*

*Shakespeare turned this background of the exact meaning of opportunity into one of his most famous passages:*

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,*

*Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;*

*Omitted, all the voyage of their life,*

*Is bound in shallows and in miseries.*

*On such a full sea are we now afloat;*

*And we must take the current when it serves, Or lose our ventures.*

Are you prepared for the next opportunity that comes your way?

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1. **What Do You Want Your Obituary To Say**

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**Quote of the day:**

“It is never too late to be who you might have been.” — George Eliot

**Reflection:**

I thought this story was interesting, not only to see how one man changed his legacy, but the idea of writing your own obituary and then living your life to reflect it.

*About eighty years ago a man picked up the morning paper and, to his horror, read his own obituary! The newspaper had reported the death of the wrong man. Like most of us, he relished the idea of finding out what people would say about him after he died. He read past the bold caption that stated, "Dynamite King Dies," to the text itself. He read along until he was taken aback by the description of him as a "merchant of death." He was the inventor of dynamite, and he had amassed a great fortune from the manufacture of weapons of destruction. But he was moved by this description. Did he really want to be known as a "merchant of death"? It was at that moment that a healing power greater than the destructive force of dynamite came over him. It was his hour of conversion. From that point on, he devoted his energy and money to works of peace and human betterment. Today, of course, he is best remembered not as a "merchant of death," but as the founder of the Nobel Peace Prize-Alfred Nobel.*

What do you want your obituary to say? Start working on it today.

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**11. Patience**



**Quote of the day**:

"People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone.” — Audrey Hepburn

**Consider:**

*I once heard a story about a woman's husband who had returned from the war with post-traumatic stress syndrome. She was unable to deal with him or get him to care for himself and was ready to leave him. But first she sought the help of a healer.*

*The healer told her she could make a potion to heal her husband, but it required the chest hair of a bear. The woman spent months befriending a bear at its cave. She brought it food and was able to get closer and closer until one day she was close enough to pull the hair and run for safety. She then brought the hair to the healer.*

*The healer threw the hair into the fire. The woman screamed, "I risked my life for that hair. You were to make a potion to heal my husband." The healer smiled and said, "Now go home and be as patient with your husband as you were with the bear."*

The ability to wait patiently for something is a valuable character trait. It allows the other person time to know themselves and to heal. The only excep­tion is when the other person's behavior threatens your well-being.

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1. **Don’t Judge a Book By Its Cover**



**Quote of the day:**

“You can easily judge the character of others by how they treat those who they think can do nothing for them.” -- Malcolm Forbes

**Reflection:**

Someone sent me this true story by Malcolm Forbes illustrating his quote.

*A lady in a faded gingham dress and her husband, dressed in a homespun threadbare suit, walked timidly without an appointment into the Harvard University President's Outer office.*

*“We'd like to see the president,” the man said softly.*

*“He'll be busy all day,” the secretary snapped.*

*'We'll wait,' the lady replied. For hours the secretary ignored them, hoping that the couple would finally become discouraged and go away. They didn't, and the secretary grew frustrated and finally decided to disturb the president, even though it was a chore she always regretted.*

*“Maybe if you see them for a few minutes, they'll leave,” she said to him! He sighed in exasperation and nodded. Someone of his importance obviously didn't have the time to spend with them. The president, stern faced and with dignity, strutted toward the couple.*

*The lady told him, “We had a son who attended Harvard for one year. He loved Harvard. He was happy here but about a year ago, he was accidentally killed. My husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him, somewhere on campus.”*

*“Madam,” he said gruffly, “We can't put up a statue for every person who attended Harvard and died. If we did, this place would look like a cemetery.”*

*“Oh, no,” the lady explained quickly. “We don't want to erect a statue. We thought we would like to give a building to Harvard.”*

*The president rolled his eyes and exclaimed, “A building! Do you have any earthly idea how much a building costs? We have over seven and a half million dollars in the physical buildings here at Harvard.”*

*The lady turned to her husband and said quietly, “Is that all it cost to start a university? Why don't we just start our own?” Her husband nodded.*

Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford got up and walked away, travelling to Palo Alto, California where they established the university that bears their name, Stanford University.The saying, “you can’t judge a book by its cover” is certainly true. Not only in this story, but in life in general, you cannot know what someone is like by looking only on their outward appearance. How do you treat people who you think can do nothing for you?

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