

Impact Through Unification

In this modern-day era, our country is unarguably more divided than ever before. Our nation is in constant disagreement over how the United States is being governed, what America should stand for, and who is the best candidate to lead our country. The lack of empathy between individuals in our nation has led the people of our country to look upon one another with disrespect and impatience. We no longer listen to one another with intentionality or open ears, considering what each other has to say. This disconnect with those around us has only caused the chasm over issues to widen. If we truly look and acknowledge one another's opinions and values instead of ignoring them out of stubbornness, we could be much more unified as a community and nation. The thoughtfulness it takes to treat others respectfully, especially when they do not treat you with that same consideration, calls for integrity.

While speaking boldly about one's own beliefs in the face of peer pressure requires integrity, integrity is also evident when we genuinely consider opposing viewpoints and do not succumb to the urge to argue. Upholding such integrity can be difficult when we want to express our own personal beliefs and values, yet the person we are talking to refuses to listen. However, it is vital that we treat one another how we wish to be treated and listen respectfully to what others have to say even if they do not reciprocate that same consideration. By building conversational bridges, we can draw our community together, and by doing so, improve it. If a community is truly unified, much more can be accomplished than when the same people groups are separated. As individuals, we can strive to bring about such unity in our communities by believing each other's beliefs, opinions, and ideas have value - because they do. Coretta Scott King, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s wife, once expressed the importance of caring and loving for one another: "The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." By truly listening to others without allowing our own ideas to dilute their words, we are showing compassion and integrity not only to those with whom we are speaking, but to ourselves

as well. Maintaining our integrity is imperative for healing, not only in our own personal communities, but also in all of society.

At the National Prayer Breakfast on February 6, 2020, Harvard professor, Arthur Brooks, spoke about the importance of having the integrity to care for one another despite our differing political beliefs. In his speech, he referred to the severity of division in our country. Brooks openly spoke about his faith in Jesus - which alone takes integrity, considering his national audience. Brooks continued this statement by saying that he followed "[the same Jesus] who taught us to love God and taught us to love each other." Brooks also said, "Today I am here to talk to you about the biggest crisis facing our nation and many other nations today: It's the crisis of contempt and polarization that's tearing our societies apart. In this crisis resides the greatest opportunity we have ever had as people of faith to lift our nation up and bring our people together". Whether individuals are Believers or not, Arthur Brooks's speech should set the example and be the goal of all Americans. To "bring our people together" is essential, and the principle we should keep in mind when speaking with those with whom we disagree. In order to keep this philosophy in the forefront of our thinking, integrity requires selflessness and perseverance.

Throughout high school, I have had the chance to show my integrity in similar situations at school, since many of my peers, classmates, and friends have different political views than I. My generation is very atuned to the hot topics in our society, varying from abortion to illegal immigration. These topics are some of the most frequent points that my peers and I discuss. During the past four years, I have had the opportunity to participate in multiple conversations regarding politics and current events with my peers, and though the discussions have not always gone as smoothly as planned, I have been able to remain calm, even discussing the most controversial topics. Though I slip up from time to time, my goal has always been to help bring my classmates and friends together despite our differences. Billy Graham has a quote that I have come to admire and work toward. He said, "The world is watching how we walk and how we talk. We must have the highest standards of morality, ethics, and integrity if we are

to continue to have influence.” If we hold onto our integrity, we can have greater influence to unite our community, and by connecting individuals, make our community stronger.

The integrity that it takes to treat others with respect and consideration is the integrity that will bring our community together as one - unifying the people - and improving our community as a whole. The improvements that can occur in a community are able to happen ten-fold when everyone works together as a team, showing each other intentional respect, intentional love, and intentional understanding, pushing aside one’s preferences in order to accomplish a common purpose. Helen Keller conveyed the significance of working as one when she said, “Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.” This intentionality of working toward becoming one requires integrity when those around us do not treat us with respect or simple consideration. We must remember to prioritize integrity in our life. By having the integrity to demonstrate genuine care and understanding toward those with whom we disagree, we have the chance to begin building the bridges that will connect, and ultimately change, our communities. I want to be someone who advocates for that kind of positive change in my community and in our world.

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