



The Virtues and Character Development Project

The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

I Thessalonians 5:24

BOOK REVIEW

Integrity: The Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality

Henry Cloud

Integrity: The Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality by Henry Cloud is an outstanding examination of how the virtue of *integrity* weaves all other virtues together. He explains why gifts, talents, and ability are insufficient to meet the demands of reality. The combination of basic competencies, alliances, and character leads to outcomes that exceed expectations. The pattern that Cloud uses in presenting the concepts arises from scenarios where character is lacking. (The reference to character is always a reference to *good* character). These illustrations are followed by explaining what was missing. Finally, steps to develop character in one's life are delineated. His examples from business, marriage, and personal relationships illustrate why an integrated character leads to transcendence and meaning in life. The *Fake it until you make it* approach lacks the integration necessary for successful living. He points out how a problem with character prevents someone from achieving this level of life.

Cloud defines character as who a person is, as it is more than merely ethics and morals, truth and honesty; rather, character enables people to gain the complete trust of others and to see all of the realities before them, resulting in transcending their own interests and giving themselves to larger purposes. Yet, even though character may be the most important aspect of a person, we focus little attention and work on it. This book addresses ways to build an integrated character.

Cloud asks the reader to picture a boat moving through a body of water, which results in the formation of a wake behind it, with two sides spreading away from each other. He draws a parallel to a person going through life. The two sides of the wake formed address two aspects: the task (what did the person accomplish?) and the relationships (how did the person deal with people?). He emphasizes that the results (the wake) matter in an organization, a marriage, and in relationships. *When we look at results, the wake, we are really looking at ourselves and learning something about our character...the wake doesn't lie and it doesn't care about excuses...It is what we leave behind and it is our record.*

Because character enables one to meet the demands of reality, it is important to understand the breadth of situations that arise in life that must be faced. Cloud uses an analogy of building a plane to withstand the forces it will face – temperature, acceleration, altitude, cargo, and flight patterns. Similarly, character must be broad enough to withstand the demands encountered in the real world. *In the end, character always rules.* So, it is essential for character to change and grow as a result of life experiences. The goal is to have character with *integrity*.

The word *integrity* comes from Latin and French origins that refer to meanings such as intact, integrate, integral, and entirely. *Integrity* is defined as *a whole that is working well, undivided, integrated, intact, and uncorrupted*. It is an integration of all the parts of character. There is an internal consistency. It is clear that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. *While you don't need all the gifts that exist in the world, you do need all the aspects of character while you are putting your gifts to work...If we do not have integrity of character, then our ability to capitalize on our strengths will be severely affected.*

Compartmentalization results when there is a lack of integration. A person with *integrity* has balanced the aspects of his character. While everyone has some gaps, i.e., underdeveloped areas, these are places of room for improvement, opportunities for growth. If one fails to develop here, the result may be dysfunction, i.e., *the action exertion of effort in that area causes more problems, or a greater gap, than it solves*. We need character integration (*integrity*). To see this arise, we must commit to personal growth that results in full integration of character and wholeness as a person.

The first aspect is the development of trust with people. We need to hear them, understand them, and be able to empathize with them. This aspect is to gain people's heart, which includes their desire and passion. Trust is more than simply gaining their will to do something. We are connecting at the heart level, which *is always stronger than mere willpower*. This is connection, which is the opposite of detachment. *Connection happens when one person has a true emotional investment in the other, and the other person experiences that and it is returned*. This type of character enables you to focus on a problem and not the other person, allowing increased trust since you are for the person, not against them. There is connection, orientation toward the truth, and embracing and resolving negatives. In essence, grace is being extended. *Integrity, the kind that meets the demands of reality, is character that can handle another person's not being all someone needs that person to me*. When integrity has been internalized, the person has the strength to be vulnerable with others. This vulnerability presents itself as a real, authentic person.

Cloud points out that *reality is always your friend*. Admiral Jim Stockdale, a prisoner of war in Vietnam, stated, *You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be*. The order in the universe always overrides our wishful thinking. It is imperative that people who are growing in character are seeking reality, what is true in themselves and in the world around them. Integrated character reduces extreme polarized emotions, allowing reason and judgment to counterbalance these emotions. These people see the whole of who they are and the world around them. They see the real world.

Cloud reminds the reader that integrated character enables a person to be able to move forward in three phases: *ready, aim, fire*, in this order. Being **ready** refers to being prepared and equipped. **Aim** is a focus on purposeful, goal-oriented action. **Fire** is being able to actually *pull the trigger*, take the risk of doing something. Even failure is viewed as *another reality to deal with and overcome*. Integrated character deals with loss well since losing is part of life. One needs to learn from the experience and move on. *Success and fruitfulness depend as much upon focusing on the who you are as much as the what of the work you do... You can't do the latter without the former... Invest in your character*. Some people cannot separate themselves from a negative outcome. On the other hand, differentiation enables one to be secure in who he is. *There is a difference between a human **being** and a human **doing***.

Integration will not allow one part of our character to do something that another part does not accept. It will enable a person to say *No* when it is necessary. It also will invest the effort needed in difficult situations. This is what is meant by growing in character. The view is that there always is *more* as a person. *The more we get into this thing called character, the more we see that integration and wholeness is paramount. It all goes together, and when we are stuck in one, it will certainly affect the other*. New capacities and new skills will be integrated into the person. *An integrated aspect serves all of the person whereas disintegrated keeps a person further away from becoming whole*. Growth requires a growth mindset that leads to taking risks. If someone does not reach outside themselves, they cannot grow. One recommendation is mentoring by someone who is able to speak into the life of a person desiring to grow. Integrated character asks *Why are you doing what you are doing?* and *How can you do it better?*

Finally, Cloud points out that *To live and flourish, we must bow to things larger than us*. Failure to do this arises from self-centeredness. The opposite is transcendence, recognizing that there is a reality beyond us for which we exist such as character and values. *There is only true regulator, and that is a person's character integrity when it is oriented towards transcendence*. Awareness leads to a response to a call to becoming deeper in one's character and life meaning. *A person with integrated character is a person who possesses the awareness that it is not all about him or her, and the ability and willingness to make the necessary adjustments to the things that transcend him or her at any given juncture*. He calls us to get out of the *ought to's* and into reality. Each of us has our own temperament, past experiences, and life choices (the cards you have been dealt). The question is, *how have you played them and what are you going to do about it?*

This book is a practical look at how *integrity* enables character to be whole. It is highly recommended for anyone seeking to grow.