

Happy Trails is a Motivational and Inspirational book about life's journey that provides numerous short chapters about character values and life insights. Designed to stimulate thought and subsequent action, the text is upbeat, giving the reader clear, concise encouragement.

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# **Happy Trails**

**Frank Hulse**

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## **Chapter 11 - Honesty**

Honesty is the best policy. Now there's a simple truth isn't it? In its simplest form, honesty is what is rather than what isn't. We must be true to the truth. The bible says in John 8:32, "The truth shall make you free." And William Shakespeare said, "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night of the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." Our entire lives are propped up on shifting sand if we do not live our lives based upon the truth. Imagine for a moment that you are convinced that the earth is flat and that if you walk to the edge you will fall off. You don't just believe this to be true. You know it to be true. It is part of your fundamental beliefs. Will you then ever venture out to the edge? No, you will remain where you are, never venturing forth to seek new experience. That is a terrible thought isn't it?

My hope for each of us is a life that is filled to the brim with joy. In that hope is found a dilemma. A joyful life is impossible without the truth. We need to be honest with ourselves and each other if we ever hope to truly experience joy. Joy is found in honesty. Honesty gives us healthy truth with which to make our lives complete. Dishonesty is a broken leg that never heals; it makes life's journey painful and slow

Have you ever heard the expression "living a lie"? It is a terrible fact that some people go through life living a lie. The man or woman who has a past that is so terrible that he or she feels compelled to hide from it sometimes seeks out a place where they are unknown and begin life with a new identity. Twenty years ago, my brother told me of a man with whom he worked who had deserted the Army. He had been in hiding for a dozen years, living under an assumed name. He couldn't go home to see his family for fear of being recognized and arrested. So, he lived a life that can only be described as one of terror - the terror of being discovered. And his life that was a lie also contained the truth. He knew what he'd done and lived every day guilt-ridden and haunted. I felt pity for him. It must have been the saddest of lives, not living but rather just existing, because he was living a lie. He had created his own, personal prison from which only one thing would allow escape - the truth. "The truth shall make you free."

If honesty is the best policy, then should we just let the chips fall where they may and always tell people the truth? If you have a friend who is suffering from a terminal illness and they ask you how they look, should you

*Frank Hulse*

tell them they look like they're going to die? If your daughter brings you a weed bouquet should you tell her that it's just an ugly weed? After all, you're just telling the truth. Have you ever known anyone who is brutally honest? Listen to what Robert J. Needham said about them. "People who are brutally honest get more satisfaction out of the brutality than out of the honesty." In fact, the truth of that person is they are more cruel than honest. The truth can be cruel so it is important that the person wielding the truth uses it as a beacon and not a weapon.

This world in which we live has developed a reputation for dishonesty. I cannot say for certain whether the reputation is deserved. But I do know that many of us do not believe what we are told by our elected officials, on the evening news or what we read in the newspaper. Why is that? I think that we have seen a surge of dishonest conduct. I believe people say what they think people want to hear and twist the truth into a pretzel. Why is this? Well, I believe that we've strayed from a conservative and fundamental approach to truth and honesty. In the recent past, a President of these, our United States, was impeached. His conduct in the White House was shameful. He may or may not have been a good President in other respects. I won't debate that issue. But I believe that his legacy is forever tainted because of his dishonesty and the way he attempted to skirt the truth. The truth is always the truth. There are shades and nuances but the truth is a valuable article.

Why do we lie? I think there are several reasons. We lie because we don't want to face the consequences of our actions. In childhood we began the series of lessons to help us with honesty. Mother asks, "Did you do that?" "No." And then we received a spanking if our parents knew we did. We confused the reason for the punishment - we believed we were punished for getting caught, not for telling a lie. That confusion remained with us. I'm not making excuses for that conduct. But each of us experienced that situation. It would have been better if we were told, "I know you did that." and then were punished. But, instead, we figured we didn't lie well enough so we became better liars to avoid punishment. I know I'm exaggerating and not everyone engaged in this conduct. Some people are so adept at deceiving themselves that they will never admit to telling a lie. Self-deception is a terrible form of dishonesty, because we are being dishonest with ourselves.

What is another reason we lie? We lie to improve our position. We lie to make ourselves seem bigger and brighter and stronger and faster than we really are. "I caught a 35-pound fish yesterday!" "I lifted 400 pounds at the gym this morning!" "I made 100 on the test." You get the picture. And then we step into a new arena and begin telling lies that involve other people. The

## *Happy Trails*

problem with most lies is they do more than damage the liar. They can damage an innocent person. And, ultimately, those lies that might appear to enhance our positions end up destroying our reputations. We become a new person in other people's eyes. We become a "liar". People cannot trust a liar. I feel sorry for the person who is branded a liar. It's very difficult to overcome that image. Even if you want to start over and tell the truth, people will doubt you. But it's still worthwhile and never too late.

What is it about the truth that is so essential and valuable? Well, the truth is a constant when many other things in our lives are inconstant and unreliable. In life, we are always traveling on an unmarked trail. Our journey is very arduous and challenging. We will encounter unknown hazards and dead ends. The advent of GPS devices has allowed us to determine our position on the planet but not the place in which we are located in our journey through life. But the truth can do just that. The truth is a beacon on a lighthouse or a star that is unwavering and constant. From that point we can always determine our position. With truth and wisdom, we can use our minds to determine what next. A newspaper article tells us "who, what, when, where and why". That's handy information if it's accurate - if it's honest. But you, the reader, are the key to the next big unanswered question. "What now?" What am I going to do about what I've read, what I've learned? What now is the next choice? When confronted with a truth that is unpleasant, don't be dismayed. At least you have the truth at your disposal. Without the truth you are stuck with a steering wheel that isn't connected to the wheels. That's the truth of the matter. Don't lie to yourself or anyone else.

I can remember telling a lie. I can remember the sadness I felt afterward. I knew what I'd done was wrong. My soul was bruised by my own action. And that bruise wouldn't seem to heal. Guilt haunted me. It was my constant companion. When I could finally stand it no longer, I confessed my lie. I am not certain that the person I lied to ever forgave me. But my confession and repentance allowed me to forgive myself. It is true that confession is good for the soul and that honesty is the best policy. I pledge myself to a daily attempt to seek and speak the truth.

With the truth as my traveling companion, with honesty in my backpack, I can chart a course that will be straight and true. I can make choices that are well-considered and wise. Each of us can do this and live a life that is rich in values that aren't measured in dollars and cents. I suspect that you already believe this to be fitting and proper and do your best to live a life of honesty. And for that, I applaud you. Keep up the good work. There is a reward for honesty that nobody can take from you. Your freedom from the

*Frank Hulse*

swamp of dishonesty and its consequences is contained in your choice to be honest. Take heart and comfort that your consistent search for the truth is its own reward. "The truth shall make you free."

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