

## **Second Place**

### **The Directions to Love**

by  
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My mind went wild as I pondered deeply. My new English teacher had challenged us to find the most important value to live life by. My brain went crazy searching for an answer, yet I still couldn't find the best value. I decided to go to church and pray for help on my project. I was new to the mammoth-size city and didn't know where the church was located. I went up to a middle-aged woman and asked for directions. "Hello, would you know where the church is? I need to seek guidance on what my most important value is."

"It's about twenty miles south of here." She pointed to an old bench and a sign that read: Bus Stop. "The bus will be here in a good half hour. And, girl, let me tell you a good value. I'm a single mom with five kids. I've learned in life ya gotta be a givin' person or you aren't gonna get anywhere. I don't always get my way living with five people, but you have to put others' needs in front of yours to get somewhere in life. Just give, and give, and, girl, keep on giving. You'll find out if you give, others usually give a lil' back to you. Here's a few bucks go get yourself a warm drink at the coffee shop. Try the hot cocoa; it's the best in town." She handed me a few crumpled bills and without waiting for a reply walked off.

"Thanks!" I shouted, but she kept on walking. The aroma overwhelmed me as I stepped foot into the coffee shop. An old man stood behind the counter with a grin expanding across his face. "Could I have a hot cocoa, please?"

"You sure can," he said as his smile broadened. He handed me a large, warm cup of cocoa. "Not to brag, but I make the best cocoa around." I took a sip and let it tickle my tongue with delight. "Does it to every new customer. You aren't a regular of my shop. What caught your interest?"

"I'm waiting for the bus. I need to go to the church and find out what a good value to live life by is."

"Kindness," he stated without hesitating. "I've owned this shop for thirty-seven years. I'm smaller than the big companies, but people love this place. When you come in here, you get more than a cup of cocoa or coffee, you get a smile. I have made so many friends by kindness." A young woman walked in and he turned and told me, "Put a drop of kindness in each day and you'll see the change it makes. That one is on the house and don't forget to have a good day."

"Charlie is right. Kindness is a good thing to have," said a paraplegic, teenage boy who had overheard our conversation. "I know another good one. Forgiveness. Two months ago I was shot in a school shooting. They tell me I'll never walk again, but who knows. I forgave the shooters." I looked at him, puzzled. "At first it was really hard and all, but after holding a grudge for a while I realized it wasn't working. I've talked to the other kids and the shooters too. They are all getting help and that is good. I was an innocent victim, but you got to forgive to get places in life."

"You must be a pretty strong person to forgive them," I replied. He nodded solemnly. I glanced at my watch and realized I had to go. "Thanks for sharing such an empowering story and I have a feeling you'll walk again." I smiled hopefully and he gave one back in return. "I have to catch a bus. See you around." I walked to

the bus stop thinking about giving, kindness, and forgiveness. I sat next to an older, white-haired man and decided to see if he had any good values. "Sir, what is a good value to live life by?" As he turned towards me I noticed he didn't have a right arm.

His wrinkled face lit up in joy. "There are many, my dear, but mine is integrity. I fought in honor for my country in World War II. There is nothing I am more proud of than the time I served for my country. I lost my arm doing so, but I never regret my time spent serving." A bus rumbled and I had to leave this American hero. "Thank you for talking to an old gent like myself. Not many young people know the integrity us veterans have." His face lit up in another joyous smile.

"You're welcome, but thank you for helping me see the insight of your honor." We exchanged smiles as I walked onto the bus. I handed my money to a vibrant lady and looked for a seat on the tightly packed bus.

"Young lady," the bus driver called out to me "You gave me a dollar too much. Now you may think this is ridiculous to fuss over a dollar, but no one who rides my bus gets cheated. One thing I've learned throughout my life is you got to be honest. Don't ever lie, 'cause that is a sin and we don't want any of those. Trust is something that is hard to gain, but once you lose it, well, you never get it back." She reached the crumpled bill towards me.

"Keep it as a tip for teaching me about honesty," I replied. She let out a high pitched laugh and started up the bus. I sat next to a petite, frail, little girl who wore a big sun hat. She lifted up the hat and I could see she had lost her hair.

"I have cancer in case you're wondering", she said, shockingly smiling. "And my mommy says I have more courage than anyone she knows. Guess what, I just got done with my chemo, and they put me in remission. I'm going to go to church and thank God for helping me." I was about ready to speak, but the vigorous little girl continued. "At first I was really scared. I was more scared than when you get really bad dreams. I was so scared I would, you know, die. But I gained some courage and kept telling myself I would be okay, and look at me now! Look! Here is the church. Bye!"

"You really are a brave little girl -." Before I could finish, the bus doors had opened and she had skipped in the doors of the church. The child had amazed me with her courage to get through tough times. She was so little, yet she had more courage than most people I've ever met. I walked into the huge, beautiful church. I kneeled down in a pew and began to pray, "Dear God, I came here today to find out what a good value is to live life by, but on my way I found many. Giving, kindness, forgiveness, integrity, honesty, and courage are all great values, but I'm confused on which one is the best."

"There is no best value, but there is something you can do. Love everyone and through love you'll be a more giving person, you'll be kinder to everyone, you'll learn to forgive easier, you'll have more integrity for your country, you'll be more honest to people, and through love you'll find courage. So I tell you love your neighbor as I have loved you."