

## Truth and mercy

### Michael Smith from Facebook

#### Failure

A friend of mine failed a student today. The rising senior was set to graduate in a few days but he missed more than half the class assignments and his grade average hovers near 30.

I happen to be strolling by my colleague's office when the student left, lumbering down a long hallway, his sweatshirt gathered around his neck like a monk's hood. He uttered a series of curses and ripped up my friend's business card.

Inside my colleague's office sat a weary professor. His eyes had a rheumy look and his voice dropped an octave into a register that didn't suit him.

"I asked the student if he realized that he was in trouble when he saw the F at mid-term," my friend said, dipping his head as if the weight of it wore more than his fair share of gravity and other unseen forces.

"The student said he never looks at mid-terms."

Over my shoulder, the last loping step of the student disappeared into another long hallway.

It's that time of year when professors across the nation are assigning grades. The academics who I have known in the last two decades take this bittersweet responsibility seriously.

A few of us live by the motto: Don't forget mercy. Don't forget truth. It's a proverb. In the cursing student's case, he received truth. He failed to achieve the minimum standards in the course.

But, my friend told the student that he would work with him next year in the new semester to help the young man finish this one last course. That's mercy.

As I left my friend's office, he nodded once and said, "The student won't be able to graduate but I'll told him that I'd help him," and then he added, "I gave him my business card."