

# *Becoming Men and Women of Integrity*

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It is good to be with you today. This is my **I**alma mater—the place where I found my beloved wife and a place that has a treasure trove of happy memories for me. First, I would like to pay tribute to President and Sister Samuelson, who have served with such distinction and devotion. They command my highest respect.

Today I would like to speak about becoming men and women of integrity. It is this attribute that often defines the greatness of a man or a woman. People such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, William Wilberforce, and John and Abigail Adams are revered as icons of integrity. These icons are like spiritual magnets. Every time we read about their lives we are drawn to their higher way.

What then is this integrity that is such a dominating force in determining greatness? Integrity is a purity of mind and heart that knows no deception, no excuses, no rationalization, nor any coloring of the facts. It is an absolute honesty with one's self, with God, and with our fellowman. Even if God blinked or looked the other way for a moment, it would be choosing the right—not merely because God desires it but because our character demands it.

Integrity is the very core of our being. It is who we really are. When all the scaffolding is removed, it is our integrity that both defines us and identifies us. Men of integrity are like the Rock of Gibraltar—steadfast and immovable. Men without it are like the shifting sands on the Sahara Desert—tossed to and fro by every variant wind of life.

Many years ago Elder Sterling W. Sill was driving down a road. He became thirsty, so he pulled into a gas station. He put a dime in the soda pop machine and pulled out a bottle, but his dime was returned. He took the dime, looked at it, put it in his pocket, and said, “They charge too much for this stuff anyway.”

He didn't get very far before the still small voice said, “Sterling, are you really going to be a thief for a dime?”

“Of course not,” he said. “The price is not nearly enough.”

He then returned the dime to the gas station attendant.<sup>1</sup>

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This story only speaks of small sums, but it teaches of great principles. Each of us might appropriately ask: Does our integrity, our honor, have a purchase price—a dime, a thousand dollars, the approval of our peers, some physical pleasure, or temporary recognition? Is there some point at which our integrity can be purchased? Or is it priceless—not for sale at any price?

On one occasion I read Robert Bolt's classic play *A Man for All Seasons*. It is the story of Sir Thomas More. He had distinguished himself as a scholar, a lawyer, an ambassador, and, finally, as Lord Chancellor of England. He was a man of absolute integrity. The play opens with these words of Sir Richard Rich: "Every man has his price! . . . In money too. . . . Or pleasure. Titles, women, bricks-and-mortar, there's always something."<sup>2</sup> That is the theme of the play. It is also the theme of life. Is there a man or woman in this world who cannot be bought, whose integrity is beyond price?

As the play unfolds, King Henry VIII desires to divorce Queen Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn. But there is a catch: divorce is forbidden by the Catholic Church. And so King Henry VIII, not to be thwarted in his desires, demands of his subjects the taking of an oath that will support him in his divorce. But there is a further problem. Sir Thomas More, who is loved and admired by the common people, is a holdout—his conscience will not let him sign the oath. He is unwilling to submit, even at the king's personal request. Then come the tests. His friends apply their personal charm and pressure, but he will not yield. He is stripped of his wealth, his position, and his family, but he will not sign. Finally, he is falsely tried for his life, but still he will not succumb. They have taken from him his money, his political power, his friends, and his family—and will yet take his life—but they cannot take from him his integrity. It is not for sale at any price.

At the climax of the play, Sir Thomas More is being falsely tried for treason. Sir Richard

Rich commits the perjury necessary to convict him. As Sir Richard Rich exits the courtroom, Sir Thomas More asks Rich, "That's a chain of office you are wearing. . . . What [is it]?"

Prosecutor Thomas Cromwell replies, "Sir Richard [Rich] is appointed Attorney-General for Wales."

More then looks into Rich's face with great disdain and retorts, "For Wales? Why, Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world. . . . But for Wales!"<sup>3</sup>

In the life to come, no doubt many will look back amidst uncontrollable sobs and repeat again and again, "Why did I trade my soul for Wales or temporary physical pleasure or fame or a grade or the approval of my friends? Why did I sell my integrity for a price?"

For a few moments I would like to address seven principles of integrity that I hope will inspire us to make this Christlike attribute a fundamental character trait in our personal lives.

*First: Integrity is the foundation of our character and all other virtues.* In 1853 the Saints commenced the construction of the Salt Lake Temple. For the better part of seven long, hard years the Saints dug the excavations and laid the foundation—over eight feet deep, all made of sandstone. One day the foreman came to Brigham Young with this devastating news—there were cracks in the blocks of sandstone. Brigham Young was faced with this dilemma: (i) do the best they could to patch up the cracks and build a temple of much less weight and grandeur than anticipated or (ii) rip out seven years of work and repair it with a granite foundation that could support the magnificent temple God envisioned for them. Fortunately Brigham Young chose the latter course.

Integrity is the foundation upon which character and a Christlike life are built. If there are cracks in that foundation, then it will not support the weight of other Christlike attributes that must be built upon it. How can we be humble if we lack the integrity to

acknowledge our own weaknesses? How can we develop charity for others if we are not totally honest in our dealings with them? How can we repent and be clean if we only partially disclose the truth to our bishop? At the root of every virtue is integrity.

C. S. Lewis noted that once we make a mistake in a mathematical equation, we cannot just keep on going. His exact words are as follows: "When I have started a sum the wrong way, the sooner I admit this and go back and start over again, the faster I shall get on."<sup>4</sup> Likewise, we cannot continue to fully acquire other Christlike virtues until we first make integrity the granite foundation of our lives. In some cases it may require us to go through the painful process of ripping out an existing foundation built upon deceit and replacing it stone by stone with a foundation of integrity, but it can be done. Shakespeare understood the inseparability of our integrity and all other Christlike virtues:

*Mine honor is my life; both grow in one;  
Take honor from me, and my life is done.*<sup>5</sup>

*Second: Integrity is not doing just that which is legal but that which is moral or Christlike.* It may be legal to have premarital relationships, it may be legal to commit adultery, it may be legal to gossip, but none of those actions is moral or Christlike. Integrity is not just adherence to the legal code; it is adherence to the higher moral code. It is as Abraham Lincoln suggested—living in accord with "the better angels of our nature."<sup>6</sup>

Every young man on this campus has the moral duty to protect and preserve the virtue of his date, and every young woman has the reciprocal moral duty for her date. It is a test of his or her integrity. The man or woman who is striving for integrity will develop a resolve and a discipline that transcend even the powerful passions of physical emotions. It is that integrity to God and to self and to others

that sustains them and empowers them even when Satan unleashes his arsenal of moral temptations upon them. To this generation the Lord said: "I will raise up unto myself a pure people."<sup>7</sup> God is counting on you to be that generation.

Some years ago my business partner and I needed to terminate an employee. After some discussions we reached a settlement to compensate him for his past services. I felt the settlement was more than fair, but, nonetheless, there were some strained relationships as a result of the negotiations. That night I felt a gloom come over me. I tried to dispel it by reasoning within myself that I had been fair, but the feeling would not leave. Then this impression came: "It's not enough to be fair; you must also strive to be Christlike." Adherence to the highest moral code is a hallmark of a man or a woman of integrity.

*Third: Integrity makes decisions based on eternal implications.* One of the young women in our ward was taking a test at the local high school. As she looked up, she saw one of her friends cheating. Their eyes made contact. Embarrassed, the friend shrugged her shoulders and mouthed the words "I need the grade." Somehow this young lady had lost her eternal vision—it is not grades but godhood that is our destination. What good does it do to be accepted to the most prestigious university but forfeit our exaltation in the process? Every time someone cheats, he trades his spiritual birthright for a mess of pottage. In his shortsightedness he has opted for a dollar today rather than infinite wealth in the life to come. In loving-kindness the Lord gave us this warning:

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,  
where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where  
thieves break through and steal:*

*But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,  
where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and  
where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*<sup>8</sup>

The man of the world has his heart focused upon his temporal net worth. The man of integrity has his heart focused upon his spiritual net worth. No doubt there will be a lot of millionaires, even billionaires, who in the life to come will find themselves spiritually bankrupt and a lot of goodly Saints who with meager net worths will become spiritual billionaires—discovering that integrity has been the wisest investment of all. Those with integrity have that eternal foresight.

A disappointed father once told me that his teenage daughter wanted to “live it up” and then three months before her intended marriage clean up her act so she could receive a temple recommend. I do not know of any stake president who would give a recommend under such circumstances. But even if it were given, it would be a curse, not a blessing. Integrity is not shortsighted—it is not just a temporary change of behavior; it is a permanent change of nature.

When I first entered the field as a mission president, I met several times with a missionary who was struggling with obedience.

One day in frustration he blurted out: “What then do you want me to do?”

I replied: “You have missed the point. It is not what do I want you to do but what do *you* want to do?”

There was a moment of silence, and then he made this insightful observation: “You are not just asking me to change my behavior; you are asking me to change my nature.”

He was so right. If someone only changes his behavior while a missionary, then, when he goes home, he will be the very same person he was when he left, subject to the same problems that plagued him before. But if someone changes his nature, he will go home a new man, with the power and discipline to conquer his old Goliaths. If someone is only moral

because his date insists on it, then he has only changed his behavior and will be equally susceptible when each new temptation confronts him. But if he is moral whether or not his date so insists, he has changed his nature. Then he will have an increased resistance when similar temptations come. If someone speaks good words but entertains bad thoughts, he has only changed his behavior. If he also changes his thoughts, then he will also change his nature. Our natures have changed when our inner motives and thoughts are consistent with our outward behavior. With the Lord’s help we can transform our natures. King Benjamin told us how we might change our natures from a natural man to a spiritual man:

*For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, **unless** he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.*<sup>9</sup>

Changing our natures, not just our behaviors, is facilitated by an eternal perspective that we are the children of God, that we do have His spark of divinity within us, and that through the Atonement we can become like Him—the perfect model of integrity.

My grandfather used to say to my grandmother: “What do you think we will be doing 30 million years from now?” Men and women of integrity make their decisions based on eternal implications and consequences—not on what is expedient but on what is right in the eternities.

*Fourth: Integrity is disclosing the whole truth and nothing but the truth.* I believe the Lord can live with our weaknesses and mistakes, provided there is a desire and effort to repent. That is what the Atonement is all about. But

I do not believe that he can easily tolerate a deceitful heart or lying tongue.

A few years ago I conducted a mission tour. Some of the missionaries were struggling with obedience. That evening the mission president and I conducted interviews with some of the missionaries. The next morning the mission president commenced our zone conference by giving a masterful talk on integrity. I felt impressed to further speak on that subject. We observed that in a few moments we would be conducting additional interviews. We requested that the missionaries not play the game in which someone only discloses the truth if he is asked the perfect, pointed question. If they were men of integrity, they might say, “President, I don’t need any questions—I’ve made some mistakes, and I want to voluntarily disclose them. I want to be 100 percent honest.”

Well, you know what happened. The Spirit was there, and four missionaries from the night before privately stepped forward and said, “We have something else to disclose.”

One of them said, “I want to be an honest man.” That day he changed his foundation of sand for a granite foundation of integrity.

The question is often asked: When should we confess our sins? When the sin is of such a serious nature that it might warrant a disciplinary action or it continues to linger in our mind so we cannot find peace. If we then fail to confess, our spiritual horizons become limited. It is like being surrounded by a circular, impenetrable wall. In such a circumstance we have some limited room in which to move, but we are trapped. We will look in vain for a slit through which we can squeeze, an opening through which we can escape, an end around which we can travel. There are no end runs, no secret openings, no hidden passages. Years of service do not obviate confession; years of abstinence do not erase its need; one-on-one pleading with the Lord is not a substitute. Somewhere, sometime, somehow we must face

the wall, square up, and climb it. That is confession. That is total integrity—disclosing the whole truth and nothing but the truth. When we do this, our spiritual horizons become unlimited.

*Fifth: Integrity knows no alibis or excuses.*

There is something ennobling about the man or woman who admits his or her weaknesses or takes the blame “square-on” without excuse or alibi. On multiple occasions Joseph Smith recorded his weaknesses in the Doctrine and Covenants for all to read. What does this tell us? It tells us he was not perfect, but it also tells us he had nothing to hide—he was a man of integrity. What does this do for his credibility when he tells the story of the First Vision or the account of Moroni’s visitation? It tells us that we can trust him; that we can believe his every word because he is, indeed, a man of integrity. The Lord said to George Miller, “He may be trusted because of the integrity of his heart.”<sup>10</sup> And so it is with Joseph Smith. And so it can be with us.

*Sixth: Integrity is keeping our covenants and our commitments, even in times of inconvenience.* Integrity is the courage to do right regardless of the consequences and regardless of the inconvenience. President N. Eldon Tanner told of the following experience:

*A young man came to me not long ago and said, “I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears, and I can’t make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?”*

*I looked at him and said, “Keep your agreement.” “Even if it costs me my home?”*

*I said, “I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word, meet his obligations, keep his pledges or his covenants, and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges.”<sup>11</sup>*

He had a difficult choice—his home or his integrity. A man of integrity does not yield or succumb merely because it is hard or expensive or inconvenient. In this respect the Lord has a perfect sense of integrity. He has said, “Who am I . . . that have promised and have not fulfilled?”<sup>12</sup>

For a number of years I represented a retired attorney named Larry Beilenson. He was one of the most brilliant men I had ever met—a Harvard graduate in the true tradition. He also was a man of exacting integrity—a refreshing combination of traits. For years he served as the personal attorney for Ronald Reagan when he was in the entertainment field. Later he served as one of his political advisors.

It was about three days before the end of the year. Mr. Beilenson was negotiating the purchase of a large supply of equipment. It would give him a tax write-off and a good return on his investment, but he needed to conclude the transaction before December 31. The other party called back to say that there was simply not enough time to draft and prepare the necessary documents before year-end. I will never forget the instructions that Mr. Beilenson then gave me: “Tell them that they have my word. It is better than a written contract.” And then he added, almost parenthetically, “If I were bound only to a written contract, I might find a loophole, but there are no loopholes in my word.”

One of the acid tests of our integrity is whether or not we keep the commitments and promises we have made or whether there are loopholes in our word.

We might appropriately ask: Do we live the honor code with exactness, or are there loopholes in our word—cracks in our foundation of integrity? Do we honor our commitments as home teachers and visiting teachers, or are there loopholes in our performance? In other words—is our word our bond?

*Seventh: Integrity is not governed by the presence of others. It is internally, not externally, driven.* Elder Marion D. Hanks told of the man

and his small son who stopped at an isolated cornfield on a remote country road and eyed the delicious corn beyond the fence. The father, after looking in front of him, behind him, to the left of him, and to the right of him, started to climb the fence to take some ears of corn. His son looked at him and said reproachfully, “Dad, you forgot to look up.”<sup>13</sup>

In Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, Polonius says to his son Laertes:

*To thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*<sup>14</sup>

What wonderful counsel! We have a choice. We can either seize the moment and take control of our lives or become mere puppets to our environment and our peers.

Would you watch pornography in front of your mother, your date, your spouse, or your bishop? If it is wrong in the presence of others, it is just as wrong in their absence. The man of integrity who is true to self and to God will choose the right whether or not anyone is looking because he is self-driven, not externally controlled.

A lack of integrity is a major problem in the world. That deficiency undermines every business transaction and every spousal, family, and social relationship it touches. It is a concern of every profession. There are attorneys who bill for hours of service that they never rendered; physicians who recommend surgeries and procedures that were never needed; teachers who fail to prepare lessons but deposit their paychecks just the same; and, unfortunately, politicians whose integrity is governed by popular polls rather than by eternal principles. It is a day and age in which men and women of integrity are in desperate demand but in short supply.

May the integrity of our souls have a sign that reads in bold, black letters “NOT FOR SALE AT ANY PRICE” so that it might be said

of us, as it was of Hyrum Smith, “Blessed is my servant Hyrum Smith; for I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart.”<sup>15</sup> We love you for the integrity of your hearts and the purity of your lives.

May we all become men and women of integrity—not because we have to but because we want to. The Lord announced the reward for those who do so: “Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest . . . and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice . . . *they are accepted of me.*”<sup>16</sup> May we all be accepted of God because we are striving to become men and women of integrity. I so pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. See Hartman Rector, Jr., “Get Up and Glow,” BYU devotional address, 5 January 1971, 6; see also Sterling W. Sill, “Stories from the General Authorities: The Convert,” *New Era*, February 1973, 44.

2. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play of Sir Thomas More* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1960; reprint, 1969), 2; act 1.

3. Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons*, 95; act 2.

4. C. S. Lewis, “We Have Cause to Be Uneasy,” *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 36; book 1, chapter 5, paragraph 2.

5. William Shakespeare, *King Richard the Second*, act 1, scene 1, lines 182–83.

6. Abraham Lincoln, first inaugural address, 4 March 1861.

7. D&C 100:16.

8. Matthew 6:19–21.

9. Mosiah 3:19; emphasis added.

10. D&C 124:20.

11. N. Eldon Tanner, *CR*, October 1966, 99; or “Keep Your Covenants,” *Improvement Era*, December 1966, 1137.

12. D&C 58:31.

13. Marion D. Hanks, *CR*, October 1968, 116; or “The Tradition of Their Fathers,” *Improvement Era*, December 1968, 96.

14. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, lines 78–80.

15. D&C 124:15.

16. D&C 97:8; emphasis added.