



ILLUSTRATIONS BY SIMONE SHIN

Defining moments will test your integrity. As you choose honesty and truth, you will realize that important crossroads become fundamental pillars of strength in your spiritual growth.



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THE DIVINE STANDARD OF Honesty

For a disciple of Christ, honesty is at the very heart of spirituality.

God our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are beings of absolute, perfect, and complete honesty and truth. We are sons and daughters of God. Our destiny is to become like Him. We seek to be perfectly honest and true like our Father and His Son. Honesty describes the character of God (see Isaiah 65:16), and therefore honesty is at the very heart of our spiritual growth and spiritual gifts.

Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6; see also John 18:37; D&C 84:45; 93:36).

The Lord asked the brother of Jared, “Believest thou the words which I shall speak?”

The brother of Jared answered, “Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie” (Ether 3:11, 12).

And here are the Savior’s own words: “I am the Spirit of truth” (D&C 93:26; see also verse 24). “I tell you the truth” (John 16:7; see also verse 13).

On the other hand, Satan is described as the father of lies: “And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice” (Moses 4:4).



The world would tell us that truth and honesty are difficult to define. But we can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings.

Jesus said: “The devil . . . abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar” (John 8:44; see also D&C 93:39).

The Savior constantly rebuked those who professed one thing publicly but lived differently in their hearts (see Matthew 23:27). He praised those who lived without deception (see D&C 124:15). Can you see the contrasting difference? On one hand there is lying, deceiving, hypocrisy, and darkness. On the other hand there is truth, light, honesty, and integrity. The Lord draws a sharp distinction.

President Thomas S. Monson has said:

“Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it’s growing ever wider. . . .

“The Savior of mankind described Himself as being in the world but not of the world [see John 17:14; D&C 49:5]. We also can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings and remain true to that which God has commanded.”¹

The world would tell us that truth and honesty are difficult to define. The world finds humor in casual lying and quickly excuses so-called “innocent” deception. The contrast between right and wrong is dulled, and the consequences of dishonesty are minimized.

To constantly receive the Spirit of Truth—the Holy Ghost—we must fill our lives with truth and honesty. As we become completely honest, our spiritual eyes are opened to increased enlightenment.

You can easily understand how this spiritual strength lifts your learning in the classroom. But can you also see how this principle applies to critical decisions of how you spend your time, with whom you spend your time, and how you shape your life?

Commit to Personal Honesty

You cannot separate the spiritual endowment of truth you need and want from your being a person of honesty and truth. The truth you seek is tied to the person you are. Light, spiritual answers, and heavenly direction are unalterably linked to your own honesty and truth. Much of your lasting satisfaction in life will come as you continually elevate your commitment to personal honesty.

Roy D. Atkin shared the following story:

“After a number of students dropped out following [my] freshman year, my dental school classes became even more competitive. Everyone worked hard to be at the top of the class. As the competition increased, some students decided that the way to succeed was by cheating. This troubled me greatly. . . .

“. . . I knew I couldn’t cheat. I wanted to be right with God even more than I wanted to become a dentist.”

[During] my junior year, I was offered a copy of an upcoming test in a crucial class. Obviously that meant some of my classmates would have the test questions ahead of time. I declined the offer. When the corrected test papers were returned, the class average was extremely high, making my score low in comparison. The professor asked to speak to me.

“Roy,” he said, ‘you usually do well on tests. What happened?’

“Sir,” I told my professor, ‘on the next exam, if you give a test that you have never given before, I believe you will find that I do very well.’ There was no reply.

“We had another test in the same class. As the test was handed out, there were audible groans. It was a test the teacher had never given before. When our graded tests were handed back, I had received one of the highest grades in the class. From then on, all the tests were new.”²

Because we are disciples of Christ, the divine standard of honesty grows within us. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin’s admonition to “[put] off the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) is in part a call for a more heightened sense of honesty and truth.

To the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul counseled, “Put off . . . the old man, which is corrupt . . . and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Paul then gave specific counsel on becoming a “new man” or a “new woman”: the very first thing he told them to do was “[put] away lying, speak every man truth” (see Ephesians 4:22–25; see also Colossians 3:9; 3 Nephi 30:2).

I like this definition of honesty: “Honesty is to be completely truthful, upright, and just.” Also, integrity is “[having] the moral courage to make [your] actions consistent with [your] knowledge of right and wrong.”³

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, once told of applying for Officer’s Candidate School in the United States Army. He said:

“I was summoned before the board of inquiry. My qualifications were few, but I had had two years of college and had finished a mission for the Church in South America.

“The questions asked of me at the officers’ board of inquiry took a very surprising turn. Nearly all of them centered upon my beliefs. ‘Do you smoke?’ ‘Do you drink?’ ‘What do you think of others who smoke and drink?’ I had no trouble answering these questions.

“Do you pray?’ ‘Do you believe that an officer should pray?’ The officer asking these questions was a hard-bitten career soldier. He did not look like he prayed very often. . . . I wanted to be an officer very much. . . .

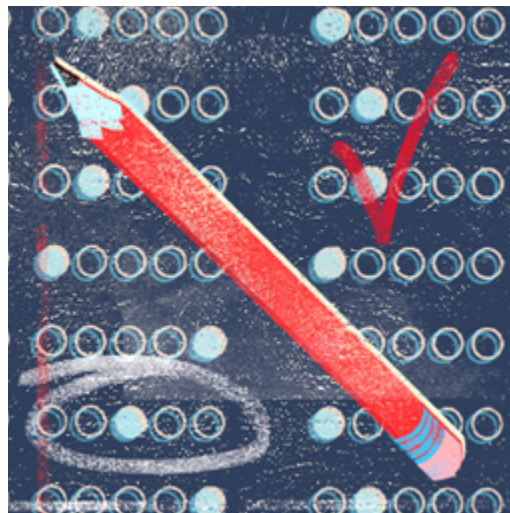
“I decided not to equivocate. I admitted that I did pray and that I felt that officers might seek divine guidance as some truly great generals had done. . . .

“More interesting questions came.

‘In times of war, should not the moral code be relaxed? Does not the stress of battle justify men in doing things that they would not do when at home under normal situations?’

“. . . I suspected that the men who were asking me this question did not live by the standards that I had been taught. The thought flashed through my mind that perhaps I could say that I had my own beliefs, but I did not wish to impose them on others. But there seemed to flash before my mind the faces of the many people to whom I had taught the law of chastity as a missionary. In the end I simply said, ‘I do not believe there is a double standard of morality.’

“I left the hearing resigned to the fact that these hard-bitten officers would . . . surely score me very low. A few



days later when the scores were posted, to my astonishment I had passed. I was in the first group taken for Officer's Candidate School!"

And then President Faust, realizing how small decisions can have large consequences, said, "This was one of the critical crossroads of my life."⁴

Honesty, integrity, and truth are eternal principles that significantly shape our experience in mortality and help determine our eternal destiny. For a disciple of Christ, honesty is at the very heart of spirituality.

Honor Your Word

Honesty envelops every part of your daily life, but let me refer to a few specific examples. In my student days, I remember then-Brigham Young University president Dallin H. Oaks, now a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, sharing this quotation from Karl G. Maeser: "My young friends, I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape. But stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first!"⁵

There are times we honor commitments simply because we have agreed to honor them. You will have situations in your life when you will be tempted to disregard an agreement you have made. You will initially make the agreement because of something you wish to receive in return. Later, because of a change in circumstances, you will no longer want to honor the terms of the agreement. Learn now that when you give your word, when you make a promise,

when you sign your name, your personal honesty and integrity bind you to your word, your commitment, your agreement.

How grateful we are that you "believe in being honest" (Articles of Faith 1:13), that you tell the truth, that you would not cheat on an exam, plagiarize a paper, or deceive one another. The Lord tells us:

"And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;

"And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning" (D&C 93:24–25).

Our challenges often come in the "more or less"—the small temptations on the edge of being completely honest. As a college freshman, I kept a statement above my desk often quoted by then-President David O. McKay (1873–1970). It read: "The greatest battle of life is fought out within the silent chambers of the soul."⁶

How do you think the Lord feels when we make difficult decisions

of honesty? There is enormous spiritual power in remaining true and honest when the consequences of your honesty could appear to be a disadvantage. Each of you will face such decisions. These defining moments will test your integrity. As you choose honesty and truth—whether or not the situation works out the way you hope—you will realize that these important crossroads become fundamental pillars of strength in your spiritual growth.

"Be Righteous in the Dark"

President Brigham Young (1801–77) once said, "We must learn to be righteous in the dark."⁷ One definition of this phrase is that we must learn to be honest when no one would know if we were dishonest. I challenge you to be



“righteous in the dark.” Choose the course that the Savior Himself would choose.

The poet Edgar A. Guest wrote:

*I don't want to keep on a closet shelf
A lot of secrets about myself,
And fool myself, as I come and go,
Into thinking that nobody else will know.*⁸

Remember the beautiful words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: “I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation” (Joseph Smith—History 1:25).

There is pressure to achieve, pressure to keep high grades, pressure to find employment, pressure to find friends, pressure to please those around you, pressure to graduate. Do not allow these pressures to crack your character of honesty. Be honest when the consequences appear to move against you. Pray for greater honesty, think about the areas in which the Lord would want you to be more honest, and have the courage to take the needed steps to lift your spirit to a higher level of resolve in being completely honest.

President Monson has admonished us, “May we be examples of honesty and integrity wherever we go and in whatever we do.”⁹ You might consider putting this counsel by the Lord’s prophet where you can see it often.

Elder Oaks has counseled: “We should not be tolerant with ourselves. We should be ruled by the demands of truth.”¹⁰ Be uncompromising with yourself. The Savior said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).



I end where I began. Our Heavenly Father and His Son are beings of absolute, perfect, and complete honesty. I testify that our Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son live. They know you personally. They love you. Your destiny as a son or a daughter of God is to become like Them. We are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us have the courage to follow Him. ■

From a devotional address, “Honesty—The Heart of Spirituality,” delivered at Brigham Young University on September 13, 2011. For the full address, go to speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 66, 67.
2. Roy D. Atkin, “I Wouldn’t Cheat,” *New Era*, Oct. 2006, 22–23.
3. *Young Women Personal Progress* (booklet, 2009), 61.
4. James E. Faust, “Honesty—A Moral Compass,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 42–43.
5. In Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (1953), 71; see also Dallin H. Oaks, “Be Honest in All Behavior” (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 30, 1973), 4, speeches.byu.edu.
6. See James L. Gordon, *The Young Man and His Problems* (1911), 130.
7. Brigham Young’s Office Journal, Jan. 28, 1857.
8. Edgar A. Guest, “Myself,” in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People* (1936), 91.
9. Thomas S. Monson, “At Parting,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 114.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, “Balancing Truth and Tolerance,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2013, 28.

Do not allow the pressures of life to crack your character of honesty. Be honest even when the consequences appear to move against you.