

INTEGRITY

If we listen to the inner voice of the Holy Ghost, we can develop true integrity.

By Barbara A. Lewis

The cuttlefish is the champion of disguise in the deep sea. It can change its “coat of many colors” almost instantly by combining red, yellow, brown, and black pigments in its skin. The males sometimes employ this skill in ways meant to impress the females. The cuttlefish is also a tricky shape shifter that can adjust its skin to look like kelp or even rock. It uses its camouflage skills to hide from hungry dolphins.¹

People can behave like cuttlefish, changing their clothing, language, behavior, and thoughts, depending on their surroundings. They might do this in order to impress or be accepted by others. However, this behavior does people more harm than good. In their eagerness to blend in, they can sacrifice their integrity.

What Is Integrity?

Integrity is defined as moral soundness, genuineness, wholeness, and incorruptibility. It includes our beliefs, the way we think and speak, and the way we act, especially when no one is watching. It is being honest with ourselves, others, and God. When we have integrity, we “live by our beliefs and standards.”² President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) instructed us that keeping our covenants with honor is a part of integrity. It is thinking and doing what is right, no matter where we are or what the consequences

might be.³ Unlike the cuttlefish, we should not change colors—or standards—to impress or be accepted by others.

Suppose you know someone who believes that it is acceptable to lie, backstab, and cheat to get ahead. She consistently acts according to those beliefs. Does she have integrity? Acting according to one’s views does not necessarily mean that a person has integrity. Our beliefs need to match up with God’s commandments. We are given the ability to discern right from wrong: “The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16).

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught that “integrity (the willingness and ability to live by our beliefs and commitments) is one of the foundation stones of good character, and without good character one cannot hope to enjoy the presence of God here or in the eternities.”⁴

Integrity in Beliefs

Daniel was willing to die for his beliefs. He went from slave to ruler in the king’s court, interpreting the dreams of the king. When he was given the choice to stop praying to God or be cast into a den of lions, he chose the lions (see Daniel 6). Daniel stood firm when his integrity was tested.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were commanded by the king’s decree to kneel down and worship a golden



idol, but they refused. Enraged, the king threatened to throw them into a fiery furnace if they did not comply. The young men expressed their faith that God would deliver them and then added, “But if not, . . . we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:18). They demonstrated integrity because they would not compromise their beliefs and were even willing to sacrifice their lives if the Lord did not deliver them.

Although it is unlikely that we will be thrown into a den of lions or a fiery furnace, our integrity is challenged every day. We can choose to stand up for our beliefs no matter what.

Integrity in Thoughts

Our thoughts are the birthplace of our actions. If we maintain integrity in our thoughts, we will be better able to act with integrity. Consider the experience of a young woman named Jordan.

Jordan was working late at a clothing store for a major sales event that would end at midnight. Dozens of customers clamored around her. She checked her watch and saw that it was ten minutes before midnight. Jordan had promised the Lord two years before to read the Book of Mormon every day, and she hadn’t read it yet that day.

“I haven’t taken my break yet,” Jordan thought. “I could take it now . . . but I’d lose a lot of sales.”

Jordan earned commission for each sale. She could make a lot of money in the next few minutes. But if she took her break, her coworkers would get all the money for the sales she had been working on.

A soothing voice came into her head. “It won’t matter if you skip one day. Think of all the money you could earn.”

Jordan hesitated. But she knew that wasn’t a good way to think. Instead, she redirected her thoughts: “Keeping my promise to God is more important to me than money.”

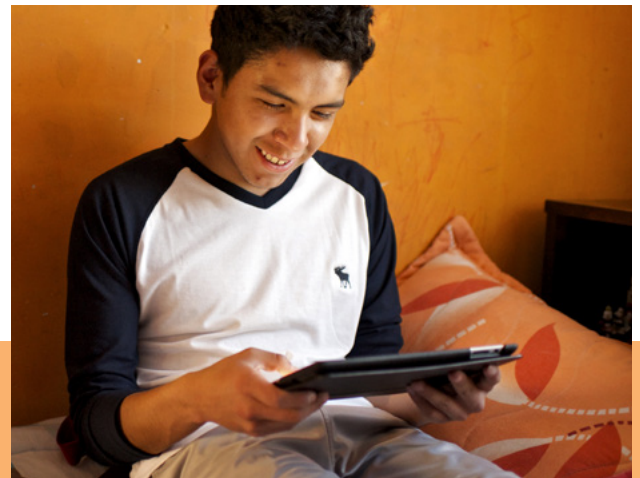
Jordan quickly slipped into the storage room. Sitting on a stool amid boxes and racks of clothing, she read from her small copy of the Book of Mormon. Peace flowed from the words on the pages.

After the sale, one of Jordan’s coworkers came into the back room. “What on earth are you doing?” she asked. “You lost some big sales out there.”

Jordan was tempted to quickly hide the book, but she did not change her colors to avoid ridicule. Instead she spoke up boldly. “I made a promise that I would read the Book of Mormon every day. I know it’s true, and I’ve kept that promise for two years.”

Her coworker’s brows squeezed together. “I’ve heard of that book. I might get a copy someday.”

Jordan smiled. “Here, you can have mine.” She gave her friend the book. Warmth filled her heart. By controlling her thoughts, she had kept the integrity of her promise to the Lord and possibly changed the life of her friend.



LOOKING INSIDE TO DEVELOP PERSONAL INTEGRITY

- Attend Church meetings, read scriptures, and seek out good literature.
- Accept responsibility for mistakes instead of trying to justify them.
- Pray to understand how to better live the commandments.
- Remember that concealing or avoiding the truth can be the same as lying.
- Pay an honest tithing, thereby not cheating the Lord.
- Avoid music, movies, games, or websites that do not align with God’s standards.

Integrity in Words and Actions

Abraham Lincoln once rode in a stagecoach with an army colonel. The colonel pulled out a bottle of alcohol and asked Lincoln if he would have a drink with him. Lincoln politely said no. The colonel next pulled out a cigar and offered it. Lincoln again refused the offer.

He explained that when he was nine years old, his mother was gravely ill. She called him to her bedside before she passed away. She asked him to promise that he would never drink or smoke.

Lincoln said to the colonel, “I have kept that promise.



LOOKING OUTSIDE MYSELF TO ENCOURAGE INTEGRITY IN OTHERS

- Help others maintain their integrity by supporting their moral courage and standing with them.
- Recognize and applaud other people’s acts of integrity.
- “Stand as [a witness] of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9).
- Do not try to please others around you by changing good behavior for inappropriate language, clothing, or behaviors.
- Refuse to participate in dishonest actions, such as sneaking into an event without paying, even when others pressure you to do so.
- Teach others about integrity so that they can understand it and live with integrity.

Now would you advise me to break that promise to my dear mother?”⁵

Lincoln demonstrated integrity in both his words and his actions. He remained true to his inner convictions, even under social pressure. Likewise, we can maintain our integrity by keeping our promises and standing up for our beliefs.

The Integrity of Jesus Christ

Jesus exemplified the wholeness of integrity throughout His ministry. After 40 days of fasting, Jesus was weak from hunger. Satan tempted Him to abuse His power and turn stones to bread to instantly satisfy His hunger. When Jesus withstood that temptation, Satan tempted Jesus with instant fame and acceptance, suggesting that angels would catch Jesus if He threw Himself from a pinnacle of the temple. Jesus again refused. Finally, Satan promised Jesus kingdoms of power if Jesus would only bow down to him. Jesus rejected Satan and commanded him to depart. (See Matthew 4:1–11.)

Even in His most vulnerable moments, Jesus kept His integrity before His Father. From the Savior’s example, we learn that the strength of our integrity is often tested when we are at our weakest. But, following His example, we can gain the courage to be strong in difficult times.

Changing colors benefits a cuttlefish. But changing behaviors to please others—for wealth, fame, or any other reason—does not benefit people. Following Christ’s example of integrity will lead us back to our Father in Heaven. If we listen to the inner voice of the Holy Ghost, we can develop true integrity. Our beliefs, thoughts, and actions will be in harmony with our Savior, who will be able to say to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See Dave Hansford, “Cuttlefish Change Color, Shape-Shift to Elude Predators,” *National Geographic News*, Aug. 6, 2008, news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/08/080608-cuttlefish-camouflage-missions.html.
2. *Young Women Personal Progress* (booklet, 2009), 62.
3. See *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 270.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 126.
5. See *Preparing for Exaltation* (Sunday School teacher’s manual, 1998), 249.