

# *Honesty—The Heart of Spirituality*

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I bring you the love and blessing of President Thomas S. Monson and the First Presidency of the Church. President Monson asked me specifically to share his love and greeting with you. Just over an hour ago I left a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve. They also asked that I extend to you their love and blessing.

I want to mention the great respect and appreciation the leaders of the Church feel for President and Sister Samuelson. President Samuelson was called from a very prominent and financially rewarding medical and health-care profession to become a General Authority seventeen years ago. The service of this wonderful couple reflects the unselfishness and devotion of disciples of Christ. We love you, President and Sister Samuelson.

BYU is a very special place. The Lord's influence is upon this school. For a young man or woman desiring a university education, it is an oasis of righteousness. For a young disciple of Christ, BYU offers an extraordinary environment for learning, for meeting others, for making important decisions, and for growing spiritually. BYU's prophetic direction, its history, its faculty and administration, and its students make it what it is. You help make BYU what it is. We love you for who you are.

BYU holds a special importance for our family. Kathy and I met here, and we both graduated from BYU. Our four children also graduated from BYU, and three of our four met their eternal companions here.

When I fell in love with Kathy, I wondered how an insecure Idaho farm boy could attract a beautiful, intelligent woman from Florida. I then remembered one talent I possessed: I had served my mission in France, and I spoke French. I had been told that young women loved to hear French spoken to them. But, to my dismay, I realized I did not know the French words of romance. I only knew missionary words. I won Kathy's heart with *ma chérie* at the front, *je t'aime* at the end, and the plan of salvation in between.

As a sidenote, let me encourage you young women to have the courage to let an insecure but interesting young man know that you would like to know him better. Take a risk! I remember coming home to my roommates and incredulously saying, "I think she actually

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likes me. Can you believe it? She likes me!" It does a lot for the initiative of an insecure man.

While attending BYU, I remember hearing frequent references to BYU's first president, Karl G. Maeser. President Brigham Young instructed Dr. Maeser that he "ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God."<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge BYU's most impressive faculty. To attract the intelligence, preparation, and spiritual maturity of those who teach here is a miracle itself. How fortunate we are to have this faculty.

I come to you today under assignment by the First Presidency. I have thought and prayed much about what the Lord would have me say. I hope to elevate your mind and spirit with a principle that, if followed, will enhance your time at Brigham Young University. It is a principle you all believe in, but I promise you that if you will think about it more intently, pray about it more specifically, and embrace it more fully, it will bring an abundance of blessings to you now and throughout your life. My subject is honesty.

Why would I speak to *you* about honesty? Were we to compare you to others, you would undoubtedly rank very high. However, the standard for honesty is not determined through comparison with others. Ours is a divine standard. I speak to you as fellow disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, committed to His restored gospel and striving to keep His commandments.

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, and therefore honesty is at the very heart of our spiritual growth and spiritual gifts.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup>

And here are the Savior's own words: "I am the Spirit of truth."<sup>5</sup> "I tell you the truth."<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Satan is described as "the father of all 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.*<sup>7</sup>

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."<sup>8</sup>

The Savior constantly rebuked those who professed one thing publicly but lived differently in their hearts.<sup>9</sup> He praised those who lived without deception.<sup>10</sup> Can you see the contrasting difference? On the one hand there is truth and light and honesty and integrity. On the other hand there is lying, deceiving, hypocrisy, and darkness. The Lord draws a sharp distinction.

In general conference in April 2011, President Thomas S. Monson 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.*<sup>11</sup>

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.

Brigham Young University was established by the hand of the Lord and is watched over by His prophets. At Brigham Young University, truth received through the Spirit of the Lord is readily available to those who are worthy and desire this influence.

To constantly receive the Spirit of Truth, our lives must be filled 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 our learning in the classroom. But can you also see how this principle applies to your critical decisions of how you spend your time, with whom you spend your time, and how you shape the life that will follow BYU?

You cannot separate the spiritual endowment of truth you need and want to receive here at BYU 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. Many of your lasting satisfactions here at BYU will come as you continually elevate your commitment to personal honesty.

As a student you will appreciate the story told by Roy D. Atkin:

*After a number of students dropped out following [my first] year [in dental school, the] 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. . . .*

*During summer break, I [visited] a dentist who had graduated from my school. I talked to him about cheating. He said he had encountered the same problem.*

*“What did you do?” I asked.*

*“What could I do?” he replied. “I had no choice but to cheat occasionally.” . . .*

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

*[During] my [third] 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.<sup>12</sup>*

As 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”<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup>

Thank you for your noble efforts in your young years to “put off . . . the old man.”

I like this definition of honesty: “Honesty is to be completely truthful, upright, and just.”<sup>15</sup>

Also, integrity is “[having] the moral courage to make [your] actions consistent with [your] knowledge of right and wrong.”<sup>16</sup>

President James E. Faust 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.*<sup>17</sup>

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.

Honesty envelops every part of your daily life, but let me refer to a few specifics here at BYU.

The most obvious is the BYU Honor Code. It is not new to BYU. The Honor Code was here when I was a student—in what seems like a hundred years ago. Its value and contribution to this special environment you enjoy is time-tested and proven. In signing the Honor Code, you promise "to demonstrate in daily living on and off campus those moral virtues encompassed in the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup>

The first of nine virtues mentioned in the Honor Code is "Be honest." The Honor Code is signed not only by students but by the faculty, administration, and staff. It adds greatly to the unique environment in which you are learning.

The BYU Honor Code includes eternal principles such as honesty, chastity, and service. It also includes specific rules that apply to BYU here and now. These generally have to do with housing visitations and dress and grooming standards. To some, these rules will appear childish, but they are time-tested and proven. For those with an honest question, let me explain how they can be of help to you in your life.

In my student days, I remember then BYU President Dallin H. Oaks sharing this quotation from President 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!*<sup>19</sup>

There are times we honor commitments simply because we have agreed to honor them. You will have situations in your life after your university years 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.

I promise you that you will have increased spiritual power as you are absolutely obedient to the specific rules set forth in the BYU Honor Code. Obey them because you signed your name, agreeing that you would obey them, and there will be added light and truth in your experience here.

How grateful we are that you “believe in being honest,”<sup>20</sup> that you tell the truth, that you would not cheat on an exam, plagiarize a paper, or deceive one another. Listen to this scripture:

*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.*<sup>21</sup>

Our challenges often come in the “more or less”—the small temptations on the edge of being completely honest. As a freshman at BYU, I kept a statement above my desk often quoted by then President David O. McKay. It read: “The greatest battle of life is fought out within the silent chambers of the soul.”<sup>22</sup>

I have appreciated a vignette on television that depicts the courage of being honest. Please watch. [A video from values.com was shown.<sup>23</sup>]

This video is about more than sportsmanship. It is about honesty. How do you think the Lord feels when we make difficult decisions of honesty? My young brothers and sisters, 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.

Brigham Young once said, “We must learn to be righteous in the dark.”<sup>24</sup> 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.*<sup>25</sup>

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.*<sup>26</sup>

There are pressures facing you at BYU. Pressure to achieve. Pressure to keep a high GPA, pressure to find employment, pressure to find friends, pressure to please those around you, pressure to graduate. Pressures

continue after BYU. 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 Thomas S. Monson admonished us at the conclusion of this past April general conference, “May we be examples of honesty and integrity wherever we go and in whatever we do.”<sup>27</sup> You might consider putting this counsel by the Lord’s prophet where you can see it often.

In Sunday’s CES broadcast, Elder Dallin H. Oaks counseled, “We should not be tolerant with ourselves. We should be ruled by the demands of truth.”<sup>28</sup> 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.”<sup>29</sup>

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.

As you humbly ponder and pray about your own desire to be honest and quietly make decisions that lift your personal integrity, I promise that you will have greater clarity come into your life. You will feel the grace of the Savior as He leads you along to ever greater honesty, assuring you of His love and approval. As you are honest, you will know that He is aware of you. He will bless you as you seek to be like Him. I testify that He lives. I testify that this is His holy work and that He is involved in the comings and goings of Brigham Young University. You will know of His influence in the details of your life. I so testify as one of His

servants, even one of His apostles, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. Brigham Young, quoted in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928), 79.
2. See Isaiah 65:16.
3. John 14:6; see also John 18:37; D&C 93:36, 84:45.
4. Ether 3:11–12.
5. D&C 93:26; see also verse 24.
6. John 16:7; see also John 16:13.
7. Moses 4:4.
8. John 8:44; see also D&C 93:39.
9. See Matthew 23:27.
10. See D&C 124:15.
11. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 66–67.
12. Roy D. Atkin, “I Wouldn’t Cheat,” *New Era*, October 2006, 22–23.
13. Mosiah 3:19.
14. Ephesians 4:20–25; see also Colossians 3:9; 3 Nephi 30:2.
15. From values.com/honesty.
16. Young Women Personal Progress online interactive version, “Integrity”; lds.org/young-women/personal-progress/integrity?lang=eng.
17. James E. Faust, “Honesty—A Moral Compass,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 42–43.
18. BYU Honor Code; saas.byu.edu/catalog/2011-2012ucat/GeneralInfo/HonorCode.php#HCOofficeInvolvement.
19. In Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), 71; quoted in Dallin H. Oaks, “Be Honest in All Behavior,” BYU devotional address, 30 January 1973.
20. Articles of Faith 1:13.
21. D&C 93:24–25.
22. Reverend James L. Gordon, “Self-Control,” *The Young Man and His Problems* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1911), 130.

23. See basketball video at [values.com/inspirational-stories-tv-spots/106-Basketball](http://values.com/inspirational-stories-tv-spots/106-Basketball).

24. Brigham Young's Office Journal, 28 January 1857.

25. Edgar A. Guest, "Myself."

26. Joseph Smith—History 1:25.

27. Thomas S. Monson, "At Parting," *Ensign*, May 2011, 114.

28. "Truth and Tolerance," CES devotional for young adults, Brigham Young University, Provo, 11 September 2011.

29. Matthew 16:24.