

Integrity of Heart

RUSSELL M. NELSON

Thank you, President Lee and Sister Lee. We appreciate your limitless leadership and are grateful to acknowledge the presence of Sister Lee's parents, Brother and Sister Griffin. I thank Brother Staheli and the singers for their wonderful music—it was beautiful.

Dear fellow students and friends—beloved brothers and sisters—you look mighty good to Sister Nelson and me. We admire and respect you. Many of you attended the Sunday night fireside recently (7 February 1993) when President Howard W. Hunter spoke. We commend you for your conduct during that shocking confrontation by an adversary. Your spontaneous song of faith was inspired and effective. And you witnessed the great courage of that wonderful man whom we sustain as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. How we honor him!

The title of my message today is "Integrity of Heart." I hope you will permit me to draw on my experience as a cardiac surgeon to illustrate this important topic.

Let me begin with this picture of the mitral valve. It is one of four valves within the heart. Isn't it beautiful? This delicate and durable structure is situated between the left atrium and the left ventricle. It is a check valve,

regulating the flow of freshly oxygenated blood from the lungs into the heart's powerful pump. Your own mitral valve opens and closes about 100,000 times a day—36 million times each year. It consists of soft billowing tissue, cords, and attachments below.

In a way it is like a parachute, which also consists of three important components: the flexible sail, cords, and attachments below. When in operation the parachute's sail billows to form a pocket of resistance that slows the descent of the passenger tethered to it by strong cords.

The mitral valve opens widely to let blood enter the pump, and then it snaps securely shut when blood is ejected from the heart. The work of the heart goes on day after day, year after year, with or without your awareness.

But things can go wrong with the mitral valve. If for any reason the mitral valve doesn't close completely, blood is regurgitated backwards. The high pressure exerted by the heart

Russell M. Nelson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 23 February 1993.

is then impelled directly back to the lungs. If that were to go on very long, it would result in failure of both the heart and the lungs. Let me describe one condition that can create just such a problem.

One of the mitral valve's cords may rupture spontaneously. When that occurs, stress on the adjoining cords is immediately increased. Then the neighboring cords are much more prone to rupture. And when they break, the entire mitral valve loses its competence, and the patient's life is in serious jeopardy.

That concept is familiar to anyone who has lined up a row of dominoes. When one falls, the next one goes, and so on. You ladies may have watched a similar scene, much to your dismay. It doesn't take very long for a snag to become a run in your nylons.

Cardiac surgeons speak of the heart in terms of its structural integrity. The word integrity is related to the word *integer*, which means "entire" or "whole." Integrity may be defined as "unimpaired." Integrity also means "incorruptible," a firm adherence to a code of values. Integrity denotes a state of completeness. If any component of the heart loses its integrity, the heart is impaired and a vicious cycle ensues. An anatomical flaw leads to improper function, and improper function leads to further failure. Therefore, the ultimate objective of any cardiac operation is to restore structural integrity to the heart.

Fishermen also understand the danger of sequential stress as it relates to integrity of their nets. To the untrained, a small tear may seem to be relatively insignificant. But the experienced fisherman knows about sequential stress. A broken strand in his net may allow the loss of a fish or two but, more important, it causes undue strain on adjacent strands. Before long a small hole becomes larger and larger. Eventually the entire net is worthless.

Most of you will not be cardiac surgeons or professional fishermen, so you may wonder why I use such teaching models at a devotional

assembly. The reason comes from scripture. The Lord said that "all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal" (D&C 29:34).

He is our Creator. Thus, temporal or physical laws that relate to our divine creation often have a spiritual application. This should come as no surprise because "all [of God's] kingdoms have a law given; . . . And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions" (D&C 88: 36, 38).

The Lord taught that anyone "who hath seen any or the least of these [kingdoms] hath seen God moving in his majesty and power" (D&C 88:47). Because he is the Creator of both the physical and spiritual components of our being, examples of the importance of structural integrity can teach much about the importance of spiritual integrity.

Applying the mitral valve or parachute analogy, let us depict a model of spiritual integrity. Let the sail of integrity be tethered by cords attached to you as an individual. Let us label each cord with a spiritual quality. For example, I have chosen specific attributes of character mentioned in the thirteenth article of faith—being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, doing good, and seeking things of good report. Many other qualities of character could be listed, but these will suffice to illustrate the principle. As you study this illustration, think of someone you admire greatly—someone with spiritual integrity. His or her integrity is characterized by the strength of each of these cords of character. So this model is unimpaired; the sail, cords, and attachments are all secure.

Imagine now that one of those supporting cords is broken—the cord of honesty, for example. If that cord breaks, the law of sequential stress immediately imposes additional strain on the neighboring cords of chastity, virtue, benevolence, and so on.

In familiar scripture, we have been warned of such risk:

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; . . . yea, lie a little, take the advantage of . . . thy neighbor; . . .

Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines. [2 Nephi 28:8–9]

Those teachings are dangerous because they are hazardous to your precious integrity. Yet some people are so easily tempted to lie a little, to cheat a little, to steal a little, or to bear false witness—just a little. You cannot commit a little sin without being subject to the consequences. If you tolerate a little sin today, you tolerate a little more tomorrow, and before long, a cord of integrity is broken. Sequential stress will follow, putting at risk adjacent cords of chastity, virtue, being true, and so on.

Brigham Young had strong feelings about such matters. On one occasion, he said:

Many want to shade a little, rather than to work hard for an honest living. Such practices must be put away, and this people must become sanctified in their affections to God, and learn to deal honestly, truly, and uprightly with one another in every respect, with all the integrity that fills the heart of an angel. They must learn to feel that they can trust all they possess with their brethren and sisters, saying, “All I have I entrust to you: keep it until I call for it.” . . . That principle must prevail in the midst of this people: you must preserve your integrity to each other. [JD 6:47]

His statement strikes a sympathetic response in me when I reflect upon days our nine daughters enjoyed as college coeds dating their boyfriends. As a young suitor would call at our door, I might silently ask myself: “Would he one day call me ‘Dad’? Would he help to care for me in my old age?” And sometimes I wondered—knowing so well the

history of Jacob, son of Isaac—if any of these boyfriends would follow the biblical precedent of Jacob, who kissed Rachel on their first date. Not only that, Jacob kissed Rachel’s father (see Genesis 29:11–13). I can report to you that the boys successfully resisted any such temptation—at least as far as a kiss for me was concerned.

I trusted each young man to be a man of integrity. So I echo those thoughts expressed by Brigham Young: “All I have I entrust to you: keep it until I call for it.” Now, some years later, I am pleased to state that our nine sons-in-law have earned and have honored that trust we placed in them. Each one possesses integrity of heart, as do our daughters and our son, currently serving as a missionary in Russia. Integrity safeguards family love, and love makes family life rich and zestful—now and forever.

But none of us is immune to temptation, and the adversary knows it. He would deceive, connive, or contrive any means to deprive us of potential joy and exaltation. He knows that if one little cord of control can be snapped, others are likely to give later under increased strain. Then there would be no integrity. Then there would be no eternal life. Then Satan’s triumph would be assured.

Isaiah warned of this. He cautioned that “a little one shall become a thousand” (Isaiah 60:22). If this domino-like deterioration causes a “run in your spiritual stocking,” qualities of character are lost and your cherished integrity is gone.

The Savior warned us of the lethal wages of sin (see Romans 6:23). But he didn’t limit his caution to major transgression alone. He specifically warned against breaking “one of these least commandments” (Matthew 5:19). His admonitions were meant to protect and preserve your precious integrity.

A surgeon can repair or replace a mitral valve that has lost its integrity. But no surgical procedure can be performed for loss of

spiritual integrity of heart. Such break down is under individual control. Isaiah observed that “thou . . . didst debase thyself” (Isaiah 57:9).

The wise fisherman inspects his nets regularly. Should any flaw be detected, he repairs the defect, without delay.

An old saying teaches that “a stitch in time saves nine.” Recorded revelation gives similar instruction. The Lord said, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5).

So the wise assess personal cords of integrity on a daily basis. You are the one to identify any weakness. You are the one to repair it.

Indeed, you have an obligation to do so. Words of Isaiah, though referencing service to others, apply equally to ourselves. He said: “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong” (Isaiah 35:3–4; see also D&C 81:5).

A good time for introspection is during private personal prayer. In the morning it might include a prayer for honesty, chastity, virtue, or simply being of service to others. In the evening there may be another quick checkup on all of those attributes. First, you pray for the preservation of your spiritual integrity, and then you work for it. Should any flaw be found, you will want to begin the process of prompt repair that will protect further disintegration of that threatened cord.

Self-assessment is not done as a formal “final exam,” or as a major “mid term.” It is done best in many little steps. For example, ask yourselves questions such as these:

What do you do when you make a mistake? (If you don’t make mistakes, you must have died long ago.) Do you admit your error and apologize? Or do you deny it? Or do you blame others?

When in a group, if ideas or activities are promoted that you know to be wrong, what do

you do? Do you endorse error by your silence? Or do you take a stand?

If employed to do a job, are you totally true to your employer? Or do you let yourself be less than loyal?

How do you keep the Sabbath day, obey the Word of Wisdom, honor your mother and your father?

If you have made sacred covenants in the temple, how do you react when you hear evil-speaking of the Lord’s anointed? Do you honor *all* covenants made there? Or do you allow exceptions and rationalize your behavior to suit your preconceived preferences?

How do you honor your word? Can your promises be trusted? President Karl G. Maeser once said to students,

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! [Alma P. Burton, Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1953), p. 71]

I agree with Brother Maeser. A promise is binding either until fulfilled or until one is released from it. Now please don’t be discouraged or depressed by your shortcomings. No one is without weakness. That’s part of the divine plan—to determine if you will master that weakness or let that weakness master you. Proper diagnosis is essential to proper treatment. The Lord gave us this remarkable assurance: “Because thou hast seen thy weakness, thou shalt be made strong” (D&C 135:5). But wishing for strength won’t make it so. It takes faith and work to shore up a weakened cord of integrity.

That process of repair you know as repentance, and, mercifully, you don't have to begin it alone. Help can be received through counsel with trusted parents and Church leaders. But their aid is more likely to be helpful if you will seek it not merely to satisfy a formality, but with "real intent" to reform yourself and to come closer to Christ. He is the Ultimate Physician. Real faith in him will provide real relief—and glorious rewards. He said, "Because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father" (Ether 12:37; see also 12:27, 2 Corinthians 12:9). Mistakes may mar our worthiest intentions. And serious sin can stain with scarlet the slate of pristine white that was once ours. As none of us may escape sin, none of us may escape suffering. Repentance may not be easy, but it is worth it. Repentance not only bleaches, it heals!

Now for some more good news: Not only can your integrity of heart be maintained, it can actually become strengthened. A testimony of the gospel is one of the most important fortifiers we know. So taught Elder Orson Pratt, who faced the burden of leadership imposed upon him. He knew that "it required a witness independent of the testimony of others" (JD 12:85). So Brother Pratt once confided:

I sought for this witness. I did not receive it immediately, but when the Lord saw the integrity of my heart and the anxiety of my mind—when He saw that I was willing to travel hundreds of miles for the sake of learning the principles of the truth, He gave me a testimony for myself, which conferred upon me the most perfect knowledge that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and that this book, called the Book of Mormon, was in reality a Divine revelation, and that God had once more, in reality, spoken to the human family. What joy this knowledge gave me! No language that I am acquainted with could describe the sensations I experienced when I

received a knowledge from Heaven of the truth of this work. [JD 12:85]

Just as Orson Pratt's unshakable testimony fortified him for great trials ahead, your personal testimony will strengthen you for challenges that are yet to come.

Challenges face a heart surgeon every day. From many years of experience I learned that the integrity of my team's performance was absolutely essential to the success of an operative procedure. Any serious misstep, even though unintentional, could nullify the fervent prayers of a patient even when fortified by great faith of family and friends. I learned that desired blessings come only when all necessary laws are obeyed. Hence, the demands of obedience can be painful. Sanctification is neither simple nor quick. Speaking of his Saints in the latter days, the Lord said that "they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son. For all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified" (D&C 101:4–5).

Repentance, strengthening, and sanctification are part of that cherished prize—integrity of heart. If President Brigham Young were here speaking to you now, he might counsel you as he did those of his day. These are his words:

In all your business transactions, words, and communications, if you commit [a wrong] act, repent of that immediately, and call upon God to deliver you from evil and give you the light of His spirit. Never do a thing that your conscience, and the light within you, tell you is wrong. Never do a wrong, but do all the good you possibly can. Never do a thing to mar the peaceable influence of the Holy Spirit in you; then whatever you are engaged in—whether in business, in the dance, or in the pulpit—you are ready to officiate at any time in any of the ordinances of the House of God. If I commit an overt act, the Lord knows the integrity of my heart, and, through sincere repentance, He forgives me. [JD 12:103]

Please note that President Young linked the integrity of his heart to forgiveness from the Lord. And that can be earned only through full repentance. Truly, the miracle of forgiveness finalizes the healing of ruptured cords of spiritual integrity.

Your personal integrity will be protected by prior commitments. Job secured his commitment to integrity *before* facing a challenge. He wrote, “All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. . . . till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me” (Job 27:3–5). Job knew he would face his Maker one day in judgment. He recorded this hope: “Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity” (Job 31:6). Shakespeare gives reason for a strong prior commitment to integrity in lines he penned for his character Tarquinius in the poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. As Tarquinius contemplates the conquest of a woman in lust, he argues against himself:

*What win I if I gain the thing I seek?
A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.
Who buys a minute’s mirth to wail a week?
Or sells eternity to get a toy?
For one sweet grape who will the vine destroy?
[The Rape of Lucrece (1594), lines 211–15]*

Commitments to integrity are learned from parents. The Lord said to Solomon, “Walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and. . . keep my statutes and my judgments” (1 Kings 9:4).

A proverb teaches that “the just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him” (Proverbs 20:7). Speaking of parents, permit me to share a personal experience. On President Spencer W. Kimball’s eighty-fifth birthday, a large dinner party was given for him. Sister Nelson and I were

privileged to attend with my parents. When President Kimball walked toward the head table, he saw us. After greeting Sister Nelson and me, he put his arms around my mother and gave her a big kiss. He said, “Thank you for being the mother of the surgeon who saved my life.” Then he embraced my father and gave him a kiss. President Kimball said, “Thank you for teaching your son to be a man of integrity.”

The Prophet Joseph Smith appreciated the integrity of his faithful brother Hyrum. So did the Lord, who said: “Blessed is my servant Hyrum Smith; for I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart, and because he loveth that which is right before me” (D&C 124:15). The Prophet Joseph then added:

Blessed of the Lord is my brother Hyrum for the integrity of his heart; he shall be girt about with strength, truth and faithfulness shall be the strength of his loins. From generation to generation he shall be a shaft in the hand of his God. [Teachings, p. 40]

That prophecy has been fulfilled. Direct descendants of Hyrum Smith stand as strong leaders of the Church today. Likewise, integrity you develop now will be a model for your own children. Generations yet unborn will be influenced by your integrity of heart.

The board of trustees of BYU subsidizes this school with sacred tithing funds of the Church. So each of us must be concerned with institutional integrity—our commitment to academic and spiritual excellence. That integrity can only be safeguarded as each teacher and each student remains individually strong. The integrity of this institution can never be stronger than that of its representatives.

Dear brothers and sisters, if I could have the fondest wish of my heart granted, it would be that you could know who you really are—that you were from premortal realms,

also among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God.

Even before [you] were born, [you], with many others, received [your] first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men. [D&C 138:55–56; see also Abraham 3:22]

Your precious identity deserves your precious integrity! Guard it as the priceless prize that it is. To you I would give such counsel as the Prophet Joseph Smith gave his friends:

Seek to know God in your closets, call upon him in the fields. Follow the directions of the Book of Mormon, and pray over, and for your families, . . .

and all things that you possess; ask the blessing of God upon all your labors, and everything that you engage in. Be virtuous and pure; be men [and women] of integrity and truth; keep the commandments of God; and then you will be able more perfectly to understand the difference between right and wrong—between the things of God and the things of men; and your path will be like that of the just, which shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. [Teachings, p. 247]

God bless you that you may achieve the full measure of your creation—to maintain, to strengthen, and to cherish your integrity of heart—I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

John Calvin - Integrity of heart is indispensable. Dwight D. Eisenhower - The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office. A clear conscience is a prime benefit of integrity, and it enables one to stand firm when the storms of life come upon us. If your heart does not condemn you, but affirms you, you have an integrity-filled heart. When talking about the qualities that are necessary for a Christian heart, integrity is one quality that cannot be ignored. The reason is because that is the type of heart God desires and uses. Of King David it says, ...read more. Scripture: Job 1:8. Integrity of Heart. By Elder Russell M. Nelson. Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Adapted from an address given at a Brigham Young University devotional on 23 February 1993. Just as a person's physical integrity is essential to a person's physical well-being, spiritual integrity of heart is essential to a person's spiritual well-being. The mitral valve, one of four valves within the heart, is a delicate and durable structure situated between the left atrium and the left ventricle.