

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Integrity

By Elder Terence M. Vinson

First Counselor in the Africa West Area Presidency



Elder Terence M. Vinson

We live in a day when much of the moral fabric of our societies is fading. Everywhere we see those who try to secure some advantage for themselves by taking advantage of others and, by so doing, neglecting the principles of honesty and integrity. Mahatma Gandhi said, “There are seven things that will destroy us: wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; religion without sacrifice; politics without principle; science without humanity; business without ethics.”

Elder Robert C. Gay of the Seventy taught just last November in the Africa-wide stake conference broadcast that “right here in Africa, there are

many manifestations of cultural doctrines that undermine the teachings of Jesus Christ. Traditions which . . . embrace corruption, dashes, lying . . . as well as Gadianton-like quests for money, gold, oil and diamonds.”

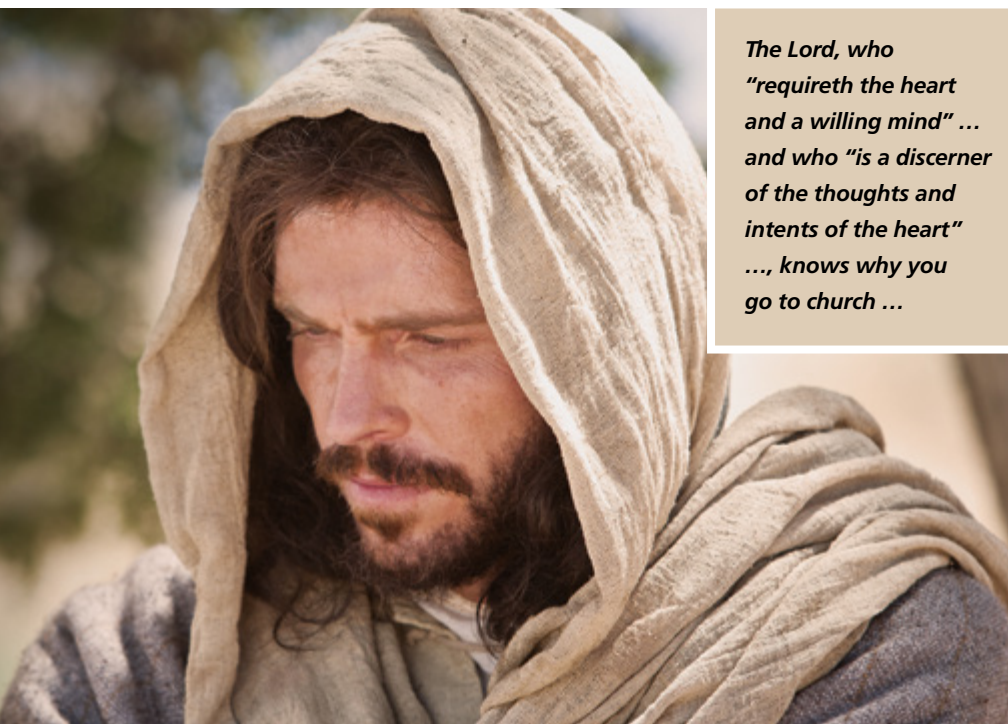
In general conference last October, Elder Jörg Klebingat of the Seventy cautioned that we should “do the right things for the right reasons. The Lord, who ‘requireth the heart and a willing mind’ (D&C 64:34) and who ‘is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart’ (D&C 33:1), knows why you go to church—whether you are present in body only or truly worshipping. You can’t sing on Sunday, ‘O Babylon, O Babylon, [I] bid thee

farewell’ and then seek or tolerate its company again moments later (‘Ye Elders of Israel,’ *Hymns*, no. 319). Remember that casualness in spiritual matters never was happiness. Make the Church and the restored gospel your whole life, not just a part of your outward or social life. Choosing this day whom you will serve is lip service only—until you actually live accordingly (see Joshua 24:15). *Spiritual confidence increases when you are truly striving, for the right reasons, to live a consecrated life in spite of your imperfections!*”¹

Are we guilty of any of these things? How do our actions and behavior reflect our embracing of the principle of integrity? And why is such a principle so important?

To seek an answer to the first two questions we must look inside our own hearts. To find an answer to the last, we look to the example of the Savior, whom we are obliged to try to emulate. He asked and answered: “What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

To become as He is, we must develop the character He has: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye



The Lord, who “requireth the heart and a willing mind” . . . and who “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” . . ., knows why you go to church . . .

must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do” (3 Nephi 27:21).

His first statement upon appearing to the Nephites testified of this very aspect of His integrity, an essential component of His divine character:

“And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11).

He demonstrated the essence of integrity. He had asked that the cup might pass from Him, but His request could not be granted. Despite that, He continued His incredibly painful journey and did exactly what He had told the Father He would do, and what He told us He would do. He has shown such integrity “from the beginning.” This is why we can have complete faith in Him and undaunted hope that if we do His will, it will be enough. He will always do exactly what He says He will do. We know that; we trust that! And we should exemplify the same quality, in the small things of everyday life as well as in the big things.

Albert Einstein once said: “Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.” Another famous individual, in a different sphere of expertise, has

added further wisdom: “Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not” (Oprah Winfrey).

So what does this mean for us? If we are true disciples, we will be honest in all things. We will have absolute integrity, even when we know it will cost us dearly. We will be true to our word. We will deal with the funds, trust, and belongings of others with absolute trustworthiness, whether in our daily dealings or in our position in the Church. We will be true to the promise we make when we raise our hand to show that we will sustain someone called to serve, whether that be our bishop or the teacher of our child in Primary. We ourselves will serve as we have promised to do. And we will be utterly and completely faithful to the sacred covenants we have made with our Father. When we consider those covenants as we partake of the sacrament and serve in the temple, there will come a determination to live them to the letter; there will be a stiffness in our spine and an inner strength that we feel in our commitment and which we can call upon to do as we have said we will.

Karl G. Maeser, regarded as one of the founders of Brigham Young University, once said: “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 the 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!”²

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles recounted a story his mother told him—an emperor who called all the young people in his kingdom together one day. The emperor said, “It has come time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. It will be one of you. In making that selection, I am going to give each one of you a seed today. Come back here one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed.

“A young boy named Ling was in the crowd of children. He went



THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER, BY JAMES TISSOT

CONVERSION

The Conversion of Mariama Kallon

By Mariama Kallon

Teaser: Mariama finds hope and comfort in the gospel of Jesus Christ during the civil war in Sierra Leone.



Mariama Kallon

Sierra Leone was a sad place during my teenage years, but it was my home. For much of my life, my small West African country was torn by a civil war (1991–2002). About seven years after the war began, the rebels came to our city. My whole family was running to escape, but my parents, who were just a few steps behind me, were shot and killed. I was so sad to lose them, but I had to keep moving. After my parents were shot and killed, my brother was abducted and slain, and I saw my sister get her legs brutally cut off. I was next in line to lose my legs, but I prayed fervently for help, and when some government soldiers arrived, the rebels ran off, saving my life.

home and excitedly told his mother the whole story. She helped him get a pot and some planting soil. He planted the seed given him. Every day he would water it and watch to see if it had grown.

“After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept checking his pot, but nothing ever grew in it.

“Eventually all the others were talking about their plants. Ling was apparently the only failure. Everyone else spoke of small trees and tall plants, but he had nothing.

“Finally a year went by, and all the youths brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn’t going to take an empty pot. But she encouraged him to go, report how hard he had tried, and be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his mother was right. He took his empty pot to the palace.

“Ling put his empty pot on the floor amidst beautiful plants and flowers of all shapes and sizes. When the emperor arrived, Ling tried to hide in the back of the room. But the emperor spotted Ling—empty pot and all. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front, where the leader said, ‘Behold your new emperor!’

“To a now *very* quiet audience, the older man said, ‘One year ago today I

gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds, which would not grow. Yet all of you, except one, have brought me magnificent trees and plants and flowers. Obviously, when you found that the seed I gave you would not grow, you substituted another. Apparently only one young man among you had the integrity to abide by the rules I gave you. I can trust him to take my place and lead my people.’”

Elder Holland stated: “I stand with Thomas Jefferson who once said, ‘I am sure that in estimating every man’s [or woman’s] value either in private or public life, pure integrity is the quality we take first into calculation, and that learning and talents are only the second.’”³

Our Father has given us a “seed” in the form of His divine principle of integrity, modeled by His Son. We too will present our pots before Him one day. Will our honesty be of the emperor variety? And will our integrity, while we are here on the earth, both enhance our home nations and magnify the Lord’s Church? ■

NOTES

1. Jörg Klebingat, “Approaching the Throne of God with Confidence,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 36.
2. Karl G. Maeser, in Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (1953), 71.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Integrity” (address delivered at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, USA, on May 7, 2010).

I was constantly on the run, trying to escape the rebel soldiers. It was terrifying every time the rebels came through a city. Someone would see their torches approaching in the night, warn the others, and we would run for the bush, grabbing whatever we could along the way.

One day I arrived in another village to live with a friend. A neighbor said, “Mariama, we don’t have anything to offer you except an invitation to church tomorrow. That’s where we find safety. That’s where we find hope.” I decided to attend.

My first Sunday in that Latter-day Saint branch was a day I’ll never forget. I learned of hope. You could just see that there was hope in those LDS people, and I was drawn to them. I was given a copy of the Book of Mormon and started reading right away. I remember hearing in church about how families could be together again after death and then reading in Alma 11 where Alma teaches about how our bodies will be made perfect again in the Resurrection. I felt the Spirit so strongly as I thought of my family members killed in the war. I knew that the Church was true and that we could be together forever—each of us well and whole. There were no missionaries in Sierra Leone at that time (1997), so I took the lessons from my branch president and was baptized soon after.

As the war continued, the Church sent food and humanitarian kits.



I received a blanket and a hygiene kit that included a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, a comb, and a washcloth.

Everyone was so grateful even to get a small bag of rice or beans. I received a blanket and a hygiene kit that included a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, a comb, and a washcloth.

Soon the rebels hit again and set fire to the house I was living in. As I was running to escape the flame, I took time to save only two things—my scriptures and my hygiene kit. We had to live on the run for a while, and I used my hygiene kit to help those around me. Our group of 25 women stayed in the bush for three weeks. I would squeeze out one pinch of toothpaste for each person, or we would go to the river and carefully pass my bar of soap from person to person. I tried not to share my toothbrush! The kit was so precious to us. The blanket too was invaluable. It sheltered us for many days

until I used it to wrap an old woman who had died.

When I received my humanitarian kit, my stepsister received a school kit. She was the only child in her school who had paper. Carefully, she tore out one piece for each of her friends and broke her three pencils in half, giving one half to each friend. Every day, the children would carefully write down their lessons and then gently erase everything each night so that they could use the sheet of paper again the next day. They were so grateful for the tools to learn.

Eventually, I went back to my town and my branch. It was then that I decided I wanted to serve a mission. One thing that made me have the desire was that I felt that by serving my God and my brothers and sisters, I would return my gratitude to Him for saving my life. I know there is not much I can do to thank Him, but that is one way, by serving. And so I had the desire to serve. But it was still a difficult decision for me, because I had nothing and would be leaving behind people I loved. As I was trying to decide, I read Doctrine and Covenants 84:81 and 88, which says, “Therefore, take ye no thought for the morrow, for what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or where-withal ye shall be clothed . . . for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and

mine angels round about you, to bear you up.”

When I filled out my mission application, I was scared but I knew the Lord would care for me, so I turned in my mission papers and was called to the Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square Mission. I believe that I was the first African missionary from Sierra Leone called to serve in the Temple Square Mission. I was the caregiver for my two living relatives, my ten-year-old sister and my two-year-old nephew, but my branch president relieved my concerns for them by telling me that he would care for the children in my absence.

I arrived in Utah with practically nothing, and it was in the middle of winter. I had only two changes of clothes in a plastic bag with my hygiene kit and my scriptures. It was the coldest temperature I had ever felt. I had only sandals and no coat. The missionary training center president's wife took me to a store for underprivileged missionaries to get some shoes and a coat.

One day we were taking a tour of the humanitarian center, and I recognized a blanket with an embroidered Relief Society logo—just like the one I'd had in Sierra Leone. I then saw hygiene kits like mine and familiar bags of beans and rice, and I began to cry. Although I knew the Church had sent them, I didn't realize they originated here in this center in my mission.



I have learned that God loves all His children, no matter where they may be and no matter what their circumstances are.

“This is where they come from!” I thought to myself. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I remembered what these things meant to me and my friends in Sierra Leone. I was so grateful to the Lord for preserving me, for bringing the gospel into my life, and for allowing me to serve a mission. I knew that His angels truly had been round about me, to bear me up.

When I first arrived on my mission in Temple Square, I had no family to write me and I never received any packages, but the loving sister missionaries around me soon wrote to their mothers about my situation. It was not long before I received packages from all their mothers! I was so grateful! Within a few weeks I was receiving more packages than anyone else!

About halfway into my mission, I was called into my mission president's

office where I was introduced to an American couple from Lehi, Utah. In the course of the conversation, I discovered that the couple, who had eight children, wanted to adopt an orphan from Africa. My heart jumped for joy as I told them about my two-year-old nephew. The couple looked uneasy and finally admitted they had hoped for a girl. I then told them about my ten-year-old sister and showed them a photo of my nephew and sister. The couple smiled. They knew they were about to meet their new son and daughter.

The couple later flew to Sierra Leone to adopt the children. That was twelve years ago. My living family, consisting of my sister and nephew, are now a part of a loving family, whom I also consider my new American family. I know the Lord inspired this couple to come visit with me.

One day on Temple Square, I developed a strong desire to teach someone from Africa. I went into a coat closet and poured out my soul to the Lord, asking Him to please send someone from West Africa (who we rarely saw on Temple Square) for me to teach. I felt a strong impression to immediately get up and run to the south gate. As I was running across Temple Square, I saw my mission president. He asked me where I was running. I told him that I was going to meet a black man and teach him the gospel! I knew in

my heart that someone would be there to meet me. Shortly after arriving at the south gate, I met a man from Ghana, a country not far from my own country of Sierra Leone. I was able to teach him the gospel, all in answer to my sincere prayer.

Sometimes we have to get up and run. We have to act on our spiritual impressions. We can't just wait for the blessings to come to us. Sometimes we have to work for them. This was certainly true in my case of meeting the

man from Ghana at the south gate, and so it is true in all of our own lives.

I have learned that God loves all His children, no matter where they may be and no matter what their circumstances are. I have also learned not to take what we have been given for granted. I am so grateful for the hope and comfort the gospel has brought into my life. ■

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- “Will I be true to the covenants I have made with the Lord in the waters of baptism and in the holy temple?”
- “Will I be totally honest with the Lord?” (“The Eternal Importance of Honesty,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2010, 38.)

President Bassey's Story

Several years ago I attended a workshop in Abuja with several men, the head of our team being a professor. At the end of the workshop money was put in envelopes and given to each of us.

When I opened my envelope, I counted my money and realized that it was more than what my colleagues had received. I asked them to confirm that fact. Then I asked the professor, and his amount was the same as mine. I told them that this envelope was not meant for me. The professor didn't say anything. He was watching what was going on, but my colleagues said, “Is it not God who has blessed you? All you need do is to give us ₦10,000 and then keep your money.”

TESTIMONY

A Single Act of Honesty

By Edem Umoh Edem, Calabar Nigeria Stake

President Victor Bassey, the stake president in Calabar, Nigeria, said he was given one of his appointments in the University of Calabar based on a *single act of honesty*.

Richard J. Maynes of the Seventy said, “In today's culture the principle of honesty at times seems to be seldom talked about and often abused. Although there are many honest people in the world, dishonesty and corruption exist in many facets of society, like, government, politics, business, and athletics. Honesty often takes a back seat to the worldly aspiration of getting ahead at any cost.

“We may wonder whether it is possible to succeed in such an environment and at the same time be true to our covenants. The big questions for each Latter-day Saint are these:



When I opened my envelope, I counted my money and realized that it was more than what my colleagues had received.

The professor didn't say anything, but I knew within me that that money was not meant for me, so I had to go back to the facilitators and report my experience to them. They were surprised, so they followed me to our table and asked who the leader was. They were told that the professor was the leader. They told the professor, "You are blessed with honest people. This man was given three times the amount he should have received, and he brought it back."

President Bassey was being observed.

Little did I know that at that time, the vice chancellor of my institution had approached the professor and informed him that he was going to be a director. As a consequence, he himself was searching for somebody to select to be his assistant. That evening he called me to his room to say, "What you have done today shows how honest you can be. Please, would you like to be my assistant?" For four years and four months, I have been his assistant.

Honesty can be a missionary tool.

The story did not end there. As the professor's daughter was graduating from the school, he expressed his desire that she could find an honest man like President Bassey to marry. This professor later came to a Church meeting and introduced his children to the Church. Although he was not baptized

before his death, the seeds had been planted with his family because of this one act of honesty on President Bassey's part.

As it states in Alma 27:27, "And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their

zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end."

President Bassey exemplified this scripture and learned for himself what a single act of honesty can bring to us, in our public places and private life. ■

YOUNG WOMEN

What does integrity mean to me?

By Ewuradjoa A., Teshie Second Ward, Christiansborg Stake, Ghana

Integrity is a value that means being wholesome and unimpaired. This also means being totally honest in all our dealings with our fellowmen.

When one has integrity, it simply means that one will strictly adhere to principles or rules set by oneself or by an organization. Integrity also goes with honor. As a child of our Heavenly Father, I honor the promises and covenants I make with Him, such as by partaking of the sacrament to renew my baptismal covenant. This shows I have integrity in my heart.

During my days in high school, my friend and I, who shared the same standards, established our own rule that no matter how difficult an exam was, cheating would be entirely out of the question. Cheating during exams was commonplace and widely practiced by most students our age, but we stood firm and upheld this principle until our final external examination. This was not

easy; even though we strived to stay top of class in academic work, our peers who cheated would sometimes beat us in tests. This did not deter us.

We learned to follow the example of Job who was perfect, upright, feared God and eschewed evil (see Job 2:3). During our final examination, under strict supervision of external supervisors, Bureau of National Investigators (BNI) officers, and the police, I was able to focus on what I had studied and wrote my exams with ease.

In Doctrine and Covenants 124:15, Heavenly Father said He loved Hyrum Smith because of the integrity of his heart.

I know my Savior loves me too; I must continue to be very honest in all my dealings and have integrity in my heart as Hyrum and Job did. ■



PRIMARY

My Favorite Quote on Integrity

Nondy Y., age 10, Agoueto Ward, Abobo West Stake, Ivory Coast



Nondy

My favorite quote on integrity is by President Thomas S. Monson from the April 2014 General Conference. He said: “We will all face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us—all of us—have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God’s approval” (“Be Strong and of a Good Courage,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 69).

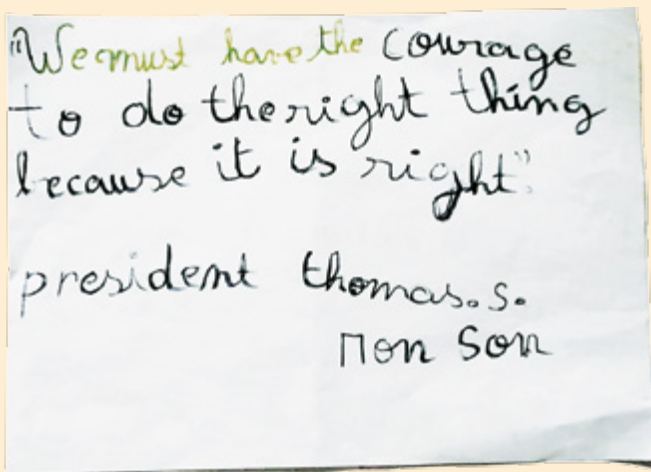
I like this quote because the prophet wants us to stand for our principles and do what is good. I am having a test this week. If my classmates ask me to cheat, I will not do that. I will have integrity like Joseph of Egypt in front of the wife of Potiphar. Joseph did not compromise his standards for Potiphar’s wife. He ran away to stand for his principles. He had integrity. (See Genesis 39.) I will have

integrity and always stand for my principles.

Soura Y., age 5, Agoueto Ward, Abobo West Stake, Ivory Coast



Soura



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