

Stories from General Conference

HONESTY

NARRATOR: Honesty is the topic for this series of “Stories from General Conference” here on the Mormon Channel.

A compact basic reference book on gospel topics is entitled *True to the Faith*. From its pages, a concise summary introduces our topic: “When we are honest in every way, we are able to enjoy peace of mind and maintain self-respect. We build strength of character, which allows us to be of service to God and others. We are trustworthy in the eyes of God and those around us.

On the other hand, if we are dishonest in our words or actions, we hurt ourselves and often hurt others as well. If we lie, steal, cheat, or neglect to give the full amount of work for our pay, we lose our self-respect. We lose the guidance of the Holy Ghost. We may find that we have damaged relationships with family members and friends and that people no longer trust us.

Being honest often requires courage and sacrifice, especially when others try to persuade us to justify dishonest behavior. If we find ourselves in such a situation, we can remember that the lasting peace that comes from being honest is more valuable than the momentary relief of following the crowd.”

The stories in the collection illustrate these principles of honesty. In the first story, from the April 1998 General Conference President Thomas S. Monson shared an example from his experience in the Navy that taught a lesson on the importance of honesty.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 1998)

“The Indianapolis”

On July 16, 1945, the USS *Indianapolis* departed the Mare Island Naval Shipyard in California on a secret cargo mission to Tinian Island in the Marianas. The cargo included highly sophisticated equipment which could well bring an end to the Second World War, with all its suffering, remorse, and death. The ship delivered its cargo on July 26 and was heading, unescorted, toward Leyte in the Philippines.

Because they were traveling through hostile waters in the Philippine Sea, the captain had discretionary orders to follow a zigzag course of travel to prevent detection by and attack from the enemy. He failed to do so. Just before midnight on Sunday, July 29, 1945, as the *Indianapolis* continued toward Leyte Gulf, the heavy cruiser was discovered by an enemy submarine. Easily avoiding detection while submerging to periscope depth, the submarine fired a fanwise salvo of six torpedoes from 1,500 yards. As the torpedoes struck the target, explosions of ammunition and aviation fuel ripped away the cruiser's bow and destroyed its power center. Without power, the radio officer was unable to send a distress signal. The order to abandon ship, when it came, had to be passed by word of mouth because all communications were down. Just 12 minutes after being hit, the stern rose up a hundred feet straight into the air, and the ship plunged into the depths of the sea.

Of the nearly 1,200-man crew, approximately 400 were killed instantly or went down with the ship. About 800 survived the sinking and went into the water.

Four days later, on August 2, 1945, the pilot of a Lockheed Ventura, flying on patrol, noticed an unusual oil slick on the water's surface and followed it for 15 miles. Then the plane's occupants spotted those men who had managed to survive since the *Indianapolis* had gone down.

A major rescue effort began. Ships hurried to the area, and planes were dispatched to drop food, water, and survival gear to the men. Of the approximately 800 who had gone into the water, only 316 remained alive. The rest had been claimed by the perilous, shark-infested sea.

Two weeks later World War II was over. The sinking of the *Indianapolis*, called "the final great naval tragedy of World War II," is now legend.

Are there lessons for our lives in the horrific experience of those men aboard the *Indianapolis*? They were in harm's way. Danger lurked; the enemy stalked. The vessel sailed on, disregarding the command to zigzag, and thus it became an easy target. Catastrophe was the result.

On the day the *Indianapolis* sailed toward Leyte, I enlisted in the United States Navy. At the Naval Training Station near San Diego, California, I endured the extreme discipline of boot camp and the intense training for combat.

At last our first liberty came, and we were advised that all those who could swim could now take the navy bus to San Diego, while those sailors who could not were to remain for swimming training. How pleased I was that I could swim and had done so for many years. Then came an unexpected order. We who answered that we could swim were marched away--not to the waiting bus, but rather to the base swimming pool. We assembled at the pool's deep end, were told to undress, and then were commanded to jump in one at a time and swim the length of the pool. Most accomplished the feat with little effort and anticipated eagerly the bus ride to San Diego. But there were men who had been untruthful, who answered they could swim when in reality they could not. For them, the petty officers waited until they were about to go under the water for the second or third time before proffering a bamboo pole to tow them to safety. The lesson learned? *Tell the truth*. It could ultimately save your life if you were in harm's way.

NARRATOR: No matter how hard it is to tell the truth, it's always the best decision. It could save your life, keep you out of trouble or avoid feelings of guilt. In the October 2006 General Conference, Bishop Richard C. Edgley related an experience from his youth about a lesson on honesty learned in a hard way.

(Bishop Richard C. Edgley, Sunday Morning Session, October 2006)

In 1955, after my freshman year of college, I spent the summer working at the newly opened Jackson Lake Lodge, located in Moran, Wyoming. My mode of transportation was a 14-year-old 1941 Hudson automobile that should have received its burial 10 years earlier. Among the car's other identifying traits, the floorboards had rusted so badly that, if not for a piece of plywood, I could have literally dragged my feet on the highway. The positive is that unlike most 14-year-old cars in this time period, it used no oil—lots of water in the radiator, but no oil. I could never figure out where the water went and why the oil continually got thinner and thinner and clearer and clearer.

In preparation for the 185-mile (298-km) drive home at the end of the summer, I took the car to the only mechanic in Moran. After a quick analysis, the mechanic explained that the engine block was cracked and was leaking water into the oil. That explained the water and oil mystery. I wondered if I could get the water to leak into the gas tank; I would get better gasoline mileage.

Now the confession: after the miracle of arriving home, my father came out and happily greeted me. After a hug and a few pleasantries, he looked into the backseat of the car and saw three Jackson Lake Lodge towels—the kind you cannot buy. With a disappointed look he merely said, “I expected more of you.” I hadn't thought that what I had done was all that wrong. To me these towels were but a symbol of a full summer's work at a luxury hotel, a rite of passage. Nevertheless, by taking them I felt I had lost the trust and confidence of my father, and I was devastated.

The following weekend I adjusted the plywood floorboard in my car, filled the radiator with water, and began the 370-mile (595-km) round trip back to Jackson Lake Lodge to return three towels. My father never asked why I was returning to the lodge, and I never explained. It just didn't need to be said. This was an expensive and painful lesson on honesty that has stayed with me throughout my life.

NARRATOR: Bishop Edgley told how the lesson of the towels was long-remembered as he related a follow-up incident in the same address from the October 2006 General Conference.

(Bishop Richard C. Edgley, Sunday Morning Session, October 2006)

Some 30 years ago, while working in the corporate world, some business associates and I were passing through O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois. One of these men had just sold his company for tens of millions of dollars—in other words, he was not poor.

As we were passing a newspaper vending machine, this individual put a quarter in the machine, opened the door to the stack of papers inside the machine, and began dispensing unpaid-for newspapers to each of us. When he handed me a newspaper, I put a quarter in the machine and, trying not to offend but to make a point, jokingly said, "Jim, for 25 cents I can maintain my integrity. A dollar, questionable, but 25 cents—no, not for 25 cents." You see, I remembered well the experience of three towels and a broken-down 1941 Hudson. A few minutes later we passed the same newspaper vending machine. I noticed that Jim had broken away from our group and was stuffing quarters in the vending machine. I tell you this incident not to portray myself as an unusual example of honesty, but only to emphasize the lessons of three towels and a 25-cent newspaper.

There will never be honesty in the business world, in the schools, in the home, or anyplace else until there is honesty in the heart.

NARRATOR: Making the right choices when others do not may be very hard to do. What price are we willing to pay for our integrity? In the October 1998 General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson recalled an incident and a long-remembered simple statement about honesty.

(36. President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, October, 1998)

"Never Lie"

During the fervor of the early years of World War II, one of our teachers quorum members, Fritz, wanted to defend our country but didn't want to wait until he reached the minimum age required to serve. He falsified his age and enlisted in the United States Navy. Soon he found himself far away in the Pacific sea battles. The vessel on which he served was sent to the bottom, with many hands lost. Fritz survived and later appeared in our quorum meeting in full uniform, with battle ribbons affixed. I remember asking Fritz, "Fritz, do you have any advice for us?" We were all on the very doorstep of mandatory military service.

Fritz thought for a moment and then said, "Never lie about your age or about anything else!" That one-sentence declaration is remembered yet.

NARRATOR: This remains good advice for all. A reputation of honesty and integrity is invaluable and attracts respect and honor from others. In the April 1997 General Conference, Elder Sheldon F. Child shared a story from his youth about his father, who had such a reputation.

(Elder Sheldon F. Child, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 1997)

“Your Father’s Word”

“I was raised on a small farm in northern Utah. We were blessed to have enough land, not enough to make a living, but enough to make work for a young boy. My parents were good, hardworking, industrious people. In order to make ends meet, my father took outside employment. Each morning before he left for work, he would make a list of chores he wanted me to accomplish before he came home that evening. I remember on one occasion one of the items on the list was to take a small broken part from our hay rake to the blacksmith shop to have it repaired. I was uncomfortable about going. My father hadn't left any money, and I wondered what I should do. I put off going as long as I could. When all my other chores were finished, I knew I couldn't avoid it any longer. Father expected the broken part to be repaired when he came home, and it was my responsibility to see that it was done. I can still remember walking the mile or so to the blacksmith shop. I even remember how uncomfortable I was as I watched him weld the part. As he finished, I nervously told him that I had no money, but that my father would pay him later. I'm sure he sensed my anxiety. He patted me on the shoulder and said, "Son, don't worry, *your father's word is as good as his bond.*" I remember running all the way home, relieved that the part had been repaired and grateful that my father was known as a man whose word was as good as his bond.”

NARRATOR: When we choose to do what’s right, it can have an influence through generations. An honest person always demonstrates his actions match his words. In the April 1998 General Conference, Elder Robert D. Hales shared a story about a runner who provided such an example of honesty and integrity.

(Elder Robert D. Hales, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 1998)

“They sent me to finish the race”

Often we do not know what we can endure until after a trial of our faith. We are also taught by the Lord that we will never be tested beyond that which we can endure (see 1 Cor. 10:13).

In 1968 a marathon runner by the name of John Stephen Akhwari represented Tanzania in an international competition. "A little over an hour after [the winner] had crossed the finish line, John Stephen Akhwari . . . approached the stadium, the last man to complete the journey. [Though suffering from fatigue, leg cramps, dehydration, and disorientation,] a voice called from within to go on, and so he went on. Afterwards, it was written, "Today we have seen a young African runner who symbolizes the finest in human spirit, a performance that gives meaning to the word *courage.*" For some, the only reward is a personal one. [There are no medals, only] the knowledge that they finished what they set out to do" (*The Last African Runner*, Olympiad Series, written, directed, and produced by Bud Greenspan, Cappy Productions, 1976, videocassette). When asked why he would complete a race he could never win, Akhwari replied, "My country did not send me 5,000 miles to *start* the race; my country sent me to *finish* the race."

He knew who he was--an athlete representing the country of Tanzania. He knew his purpose--to finish the race. He knew that he had to endure to the finish, so that he could honorably return home to Tanzania. Our mission in life is much the same. We were not sent by Father in Heaven just to be born. We were sent to endure and return to Him with honor.

NARRATOR: The Boy Scout pledge begins, “On my honor, I will do my best...” Another example of developing honor was related in the April 1998 Priesthood Session of General Conference by President James E. Faust. This personal story from his boyhood taught him a powerful lesson about honesty and honor.

(President James E. Faust, Priesthood Session, April 1998)

“On My Honor”

Honesty begins when we are young. When I was 11 years old, I looked forward eagerly to my magical 12th birthday when I could become a deacon and a Scout. My mother helped me learn the Articles of Faith, the Scout Law and Motto, and other requirements so that I would have a good start when that special birthday arrived.

Since I had no sisters, my brothers and I were given some of the inside chores as well as outside ones, such as milking and taking care of the animals. One day Mother left me to wash the dishes and clean the kitchen while she attended to a sick neighbor. I agreed to do these duties but put off doing the dishes. Time ran out and they didn't get done. In fact, they didn't even get started. When Mother came home and saw the kitchen, she put on her apron and went to the sink. She spoke only three words, which stung worse than the sting of a dozen hornets. They were the first three words of the Scout Law: "On my honor." That day I resolved that I would never give my mother cause to repeat those words to me again.

NARRATOR: Those words “On my honor” should always remind us to make sure our actions match the promises we make. In the April 2007 General Conference Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin explained the value of avoiding the temptation to trade a moment of glory for a higher honor: integrity.

(Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Priesthood Session, April 2007)

“Two Inches Away”

Another lesson I learned on the football field was at the bottom of a pile of 10 other players. It was the Rocky Mountain Conference championship game, and the play called for me to run the ball up the middle to score the go-ahead touchdown. I took the handoff and plunged into the line. I knew I was close to the goal line, but I didn't know how close. Although I was pinned at the

bottom of the pile, I reached my fingers forward a couple of inches and I could feel it. The goal line was two inches away.

At that moment I was tempted to push the ball forward. I could have done it. And when the refs finally pulled the players off the pile, I would have been a hero. No one would have ever known.

I had dreamed of this moment from the time I was a boy. And it was right there within my reach. But then I remembered the words of my mother. "Joseph," she had often said to me, "do what is right, no matter the consequence. Do what is right and things will turn out OK."

I wanted so desperately to score that touchdown. But more than being a hero in the eyes of my friends, I wanted to be a hero in the eyes of my mother. And so I left the ball where it was—two inches from the goal line.

I didn't know it at the time, but this was a defining experience. Had I moved the ball, I could have been a champion for a moment, but the reward of temporary glory would have carried with it too steep and too lasting a price. It would have engraved upon my conscience a scar that would have stayed with me the remainder of my life. I knew I must do what is right.

NARRATOR: What a great example of maintaining personal integrity! What a different world it would be if everyone maintained such a standard. May we all make the right choice when the things of the world tempt us to do otherwise. As we focus on making honesty an important value in our lives, we will be filled with integrity and more fit for service to God.

This has been Stories from General Conference on the topic of honesty. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel. For more information on the Mormon Channel, go to radio.lds.org