

Latter-day Saints: Men and Women of Integrity

Douglas E. Brinley

Douglas E. Brinley is a professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University. He received his PhD from Brigham Young University in family studies.

One of the foundational scriptures of Latter-day Saints is the question and response Joseph Smith received in the grove: “I asked the Personages . . . which of all the sects was right . . . and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them” (Joseph Smith—History 1:18–19). A second passage comes from the Doctrine and Covenants wherein the Lord said that the April 6, 1830, Church established by the Prophet and five others was “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased” (D&C 1:30). A third fundamental scripture was given April 26, 1838, wherein the Lord named His Church: “For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (D&C 115:4).

From these scriptures we learn (1) in 1820, at the time of the Prophet’s inquiry, the true Church was not on the earth; (2) the Church

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established ten years after the First Vision was “the only true and living church . . . with which I, the Lord, am well pleased” (D&C 1:30); and (3) members of the Church bearing His name are to be called *Saints*.

The dictionary describes a *saint* as “one officially recognized . . . as preeminent for holiness,” and “one of God’s chosen . . . people.”¹ By calling disciples in this last dispensation *Saints*, the Lord expects members of His Church to be impeccable in areas of honesty, integrity, decency, and charity. “When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant,” the Savior said of those who belong to His Church, “they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men” (D&C 101:39). “They were,” He said on another occasion, “set to be a light unto the world, and to be the saviors of men” (D&C 103:9; see also D&C 105:5). Being a “Saint” or “salt” or a “light” or a “godly person” obligates Church members to rigorous standards of deportment. For the Saints in our day to attract others to the Church and gospel principles, they must live exemplary lives.

What missionary, for example, has not heard potential investigators repeat the frustrating mantra, “It doesn’t matter which church you belong to as long as you are sincere,” or one of its variants? Though exasperating to youthful ears, there is a point to this statement. Surely every Christian denomination or non-Christian religion counts honorable and decent people among its membership. Thus, an impartial observer of the religious scene could logically conclude that it is not the specific church that is important but the way a member of a particular denomination lives life consistent with group beliefs.

How Latter-day Saints translate gospel principles into human relationships will be even more relevant in the days ahead as the Church expands worldwide. If we are going to attract others to the Church, it will be because of our example in adhering to the principles of the Restoration. The purpose of this symposium is to emphasize how important it is for graduates of Brigham Young University to live the highest standards of morality and integrity as they leave this campus and assume residency and employment in the world community.

1. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “saint.”

Consider the impact Latter-day Saints *could* have on those not of our faith if it could be said, “My dealings with a Mormon individual [or firm] have been outstanding.” Or, “My experience of doing business with Mormons has been excellent. They keep their word and fulfill every agreement.” Or, more specifically, “We hired an engineer from Brigham Young University, and he is one of our most reliable employees. We trust him to represent our firm, handle company finances, and maintain confidentiality. His honesty and integrity are first rate.”

In contrast, how embarrassing when a Latter-day Saint is involved in criminal acts, exploits a fiduciary relationship for personal gain, is prosecuted for child pornography, or is involved in any shoddy engineering, business, public, or private practices. Such negative behavior on the part of any “Saint” reflects poorly on the Lord’s Church and its latter-day mission.

Latter-day Saints are now located in most corners of the world. For the most part, we are a respectable people, no longer driven from homes because of religious persecution. There is no need to scurry in the night across county or state boundaries to escape extermination orders. Latter-day Saint women are no longer forced to give birth in the back of wagons or lose children to ravaging childhood diseases or inclement weather that took the lives of so many crossing deserts and plains. Our standard of living allows us a comfortable lifestyle with modern technology and transportation that stand in stark contrast to that of oxen and horses. Living in a global community and having members in most civilized countries provide us with opportunities to influence the citizens of the world for good. We no longer have to do the hard physical pioneering. Our task now is to extend the gospel principles and blessings to the honest in heart, those who yearn and search for the principles and priesthood authority restored almost 180 years ago.

Prophecies concerning Latter-day Saint Influence

In fact, several prophecies exist concerning the impact Latter-day Saints can have on the world community if they live their religion. President Harold B. Lee said on one occasion, “I say to you Latter-day Saint mothers and fathers, if you will rise to the responsibility of teaching

your children in the home—priesthood quorums preparing the fathers, the Relief Society the mothers—the day will soon be dawning when the whole world will come to our doors and will say, ‘Show us your way that we may walk in your path’ (see Micah 4:2).”²

Perhaps a major area of influence Latter-day Saints will have on the world community will come from our position on marriage and family relationships as outlined in the Church’s “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”³ As attested by conference addresses and Church commercials, it is clear that a primary message for which we want to be known concerns marriage and family life. The home serves as the crucible from which children emerge to take their place in society, where values and standards are inculcated in the hearts of the rising generation. The first principle of effective parenting is that parents have a strong, stable relationship, for a stable marriage can produce stable children who will grow up to create stable families of their own. This is the process by which the social fabric is strengthened.

A later prophecy came from President Spencer W. Kimball: “Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us.”⁴

It is not difficult to list social restraints that have dissolved or are disappearing before our eyes in recent decades. Ten come readily to mind:

1. Men and women live together without the commitment of marriage.
2. Premarital and extramarital sexual relations no longer carry the social or legal stigma or social penalty they once had.

2. Clyde J. Williams, ed., *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 277.

3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.

4. Spencer W. Kimball, “Families Can Be Eternal,” *Ensign*, November 1980, 4.

3. Same-sex partners bristle at the refusal of governmental agencies to grant them legal rights of “marriage.” Legislatures debate the definition of the family.
4. Divorce has become more acceptable and accessible.
5. Abortion is used as a form of contraception.
6. “Morning after” pills and abortion pills are available to sexually active couples to avoid pregnancy.
7. Music, television, Internet, and movie themes undermine chastity, marriage, and family values.
8. Radical feminism has made an effort to restructure divine roles of women.
9. Religion and moral values are attacked from political sides, leading to an ever-widening separation of Church and state.
10. Pornography in print and electronic form has become a worldwide scourge.

President Boyd K. Packer said: “The distance between the Church and a world set on a course which we cannot follow will steadily increase. . . . Across the world, those who now come by the tens of thousands will inevitably come as a flood to where the family is safe.”⁵ It is clear from such prophecies that if Latter-day Saints are men and women of integrity, if their fidelity and moral behavior is consistent with divine standards, the growth of the kingdom of God on the earth is assured, because people will be drawn to it through the example set by members throughout the world.

Integrity

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin defined integrity as “always doing what is right and good, regardless of the immediate consequences. It means being righteous from the very depth of our soul, not only in our actions but, more importantly, in our thoughts and in our hearts. Personal integrity implies trustworthiness and incorruptibility that we are incapable of being false to a trust or covenant.” Then, comparing the integrity of the biblical Job with current trends, Elder Wirthlin continued:

5. Boyd K. Packer, “The Father and the Family,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 21.

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In sharp contrast, many today trade away their integrity for a very small price tag. A person who shoplifts for a candy bar, or makeup, or jewelry trades priceless integrity for a meager gain. A person who falsifies a tax return by not reporting income or claiming invalid deductions compromises valued integrity for a pittance of unpaid income tax. One who avoids paying bills promptly for goods or services received exchanges cherished integrity for a perceived temporary advantage. Husbands or wives who are unfaithful to their spouses trade their prized integrity for a fleeting moment of mirth. Integrity is so precious that it is beyond price; it is invaluable.⁶

Even a cursory review of newspapers or television news evidences a plethora of mortal sins: cheating, bribery, identity theft, burglary, stock or securities manipulations, malpractice, tax evasion, shoplifting, along with the more serious crimes of passion. Surely His Saints refrain from such behavior. Both by covenant and by doctrinal understanding, Latter-day Saints must be above reproach.

Personal Experiences

Years ago I saw how a Saint changed what could have been a disastrous situation. My son was playing in a flag football league. As often happens in sporting events, the game was close, emotions ran high, and the opposing coaches began shouting at each other across the field. At the end of the game, the other team's coach came across the field to our side. Because tempers were flaring, I was not sure what would happen, but the coach approached my son's coach and said, "I see that you hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. I don't think it's right that two adult endowed men should be behaving like this. I want to apologize for my poor behavior. I didn't set a very good example for my boys, and I surely offended you. I am sorry." He extended his hand to my son's coach, who was visibly stunned by this apology. The two men hugged each other and apologized profusely for their actions. What could have been an

6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Personal Integrity," *Ensign*, May 1990, 30–31.

ugly scene was averted by men recalling their commitments to live the standards to which they both ascribed.

Examples of integrity are easy to discuss in the classroom or Church meetings. But there are critical times when our mettle is tested, when the emotions of the situation require us all to stand by our beliefs and standards. There is a fable of ancient date that points out the difficulty of maintaining integrity in the face of humiliation and embarrassment.

The Emperor's Seeds

An emperor in the Far East was growing old and knew it was time to choose his successor. Instead of choosing one of his assistants or his children, he decided to do something different. He called the young people in the kingdom together one day and said, "It is time for me to step down and choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you."

The children were shocked! But the emperor continued: "I am going to give each one of you a seed today, one very special seed. I want you to plant the seed, water it, and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge the plants that you bring, and the one I choose will be the next emperor!"

A boy named Ling received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his mother the story. She helped him get a pot and planting soil, and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he watered it and watched 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 seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, then five weeks went by—still nothing.

By now, others were talking about their plants, but Ling did not have a plant, and he felt like a failure. Six months went by—still nothing in Ling's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed. Everyone else had trees and tall plants, but he had nothing. Ling didn't say anything to his friends; he just kept waiting for his seed to grow.

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A year finally went by, and all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But his mother asked him to 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.

When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the other youths. They were beautiful—in all shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor, and many of the other kids laughed at him. A few felt sorry for him and just said, "Hey, nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted the young people. Ling tried to hide in the back.

"My, what great plants, trees, and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!"

Then the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front. Ling was terrified.

"The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me killed!"

When Ling got to the front, the emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied.

All the kids were laughing and making fun of him. The emperor asked everyone to quiet down. He looked at Ling and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!"

Ling couldn't believe it. He couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor? Then the emperor 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. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new emperor!"⁷

7. Author unknown, "The Emperor's Seeds"; see www.52best.com/seeds/asp; see also Demi, *The Empty Pot* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).

Integrity in Africa

An unusual example of integrity was displayed by two African Saints, as shared with me by a former colleague, Dr. Dale LeBaron.⁸

In just over a decade after the establishment of the Church in Ghana, the extraordinary faith of the Saints there was severely tested. On June 14, 1989, without any warning, the Ghanaian government publicly announced that it was imposing an immediate freeze on all LDS Church activities and banned Church operations in Ghana. A vile, anti-Latter-day Saint film was shown over national television the day after the announcement. The Church mission president, all foreign missionaries, and other Church representatives were given forty-eight hours to leave the country. Native missionaries from Ghana were immediately released and sent home; however, some chose to continue to wear their missionary name badge. All chapels and other Church buildings were locked down and military police were placed to guard them.

Church members were warned by government officials that the slightest violation of official orders would be met with immediate and severe consequences. Church operations, except for those considered essential—temporal affairs, finances, and record keeping—were closed. Church members were not allowed to meet in any gathering except in their own homes and only with their own family members. Even then they were not allowed to sing or preach loudly for fear of arrest. The slightest violation of government orders, they were warned, would be met with immediate consequences.

Priesthood leaders did their best to continue their roles as “shepherds,” unobtrusively visiting individuals and families, urging them to hold family prayer, scripture reading, and family home evening in addition to fasting and holding sacrament meetings in their homes each week until the freeze ended. The members were urged to reach out to serve one another. Fathers were counseled to be effective priesthood leaders in the home.

8. Dr. LeBaron served in Africa as mission president and Church Education System Supervisor. He spent years interviewing new converts to the Church in a magnificent oral history project.

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These heavy restrictions lasted for nearly eighteen months, during which time Church matters were placed under the direction of Dr. Emmanuel Kissi, who had been serving in the Ghana Accra Mission presidency.

Why were such severe actions taken by the national government? Apparently the rapid growth of the Church caused concern and frustration for leaders of other churches who united together and carried complaints and grievances to government officials who made decisions without discussing them with any Latter-day Saint Church leaders.

One government official reported over national television that “the Mormons will never return to Ghana,” to which a recently returned Ghanaian missionary replied, “There was once a governor of Missouri who made a similar foolish statement about the Mormons, and he was also wrong!”

Many members of other faiths who were friends of the Church stepped forward to defend the Church, expressing shock that such actions would be taken against one of the most respected religious organizations in the world. Even former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, known for assisting African nations to confront a variety of health challenges fostered by famine and disease, expressed to Ghanaian government leaders his shock at the action taken against his “Mormon friends.” Government leaders were reminded of the considerable humanitarian aid the Church had given the people of Ghana and other African nations. Finally, the freeze was lifted on November 29, 1990, and Church meetings resumed on Sunday, December 2, 1990.

President Mensah, the Church’s Kumasi district president, offered the invocation at one meeting and surprisingly thanked the Lord for the freeze. He noted, “For one and one-half years we have witnessed fathers taking the role as branch presidents in the family, and sons as priesthood bearers blessing and passing the sacrament, mothers playing the role of Relief Society presidents, along with the daughters and everyone together for the eternal goal. There was the family, the first basic unit of the Church in action.”

After the ban was lifted, the new mission president, Grant Gunnell, invited all missionaries from Ghana who had been released due to

the freeze to an interview in which the possibility of continued missionary service was considered. It was anticipated that after a year and a half, very few missionaries would be able to return to service, owing to various commitments that had arisen such as marriage, work, education, and other complications. Church leaders were amazed when sixty of the seventy-six missionaries released earlier came to the interview and fifty-seven returned to full-time missionary service. Some had married in the meantime, and others were encouraged to remain at their employment. Those who did not return were extended honorable releases.

The return of such a large percentage of missionaries after nearly two years of no direct missionary activity is powerful evidence of the faith of these young men and women. When asked their reason for continuing their missionary service, the answer, in one form or another, was typically, "I must complete my commitment to the Lord as a missionary." One elder traveled a great distance from northern Ghana to complete his final month of service. Some missionaries had chosen to live by missionary rules during the freeze and spent time in gospel study and teaching the gospel to family members to retain the missionary spirit so they would be ready when the Lord needed them to return.

The faith and example of the members, the dedication and great service of the missionaries, and the desire of the Ghanaian Saints to share the gospel with others, led to a near explosion of Church membership in the country. Less than a month after the ban was lifted, there were more than 9,000 members in Ghana and within five months, on April 21, 1991, the first two stakes were organized by Elders Boyd K. Packer and James E. Faust—one in Cape Coast and the other in Accra. Within nine months, five new branches and three new districts were organized.

To illustrate the integrity of these Saints, Dr. LeBaron related a personal experience that took place eight years after the organization of these stakes by Elders Faust and Packer. In 1999, Dr. LeBaron and his wife were asked by the Church to serve as hosts for a prominent dignitary visiting Utah from Ghana. This dignitary had been invited to visit Church headquarters, meet Brigham Young University officials, and present a lecture to the campus community. This man, a former

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secretary of finance for the Ghanaian government, had achieved a rare and remarkable feat of lifting an African nation out of terrible financial debt and economic chaos and was now recognized worldwide for this achievement. He had served on international committees, including United Nations leadership efforts to help other poverty-stricken countries overcome massive financial burdens.

On the final day of his Utah visit, Dr. LeBaron asked the man a personal question: What program or economic theory had he implemented to turn an African nation's economy around so dramatically within eight years? Such a change in that part of the world was virtually unheard of due to extensive corruption in political circles.

This former Ghanaian minister of finance smiled and said, "It was really quite simple!" He had grown up and received his education in Ghana, and he went to an American university for graduate work in economics. After gaining some notoriety in economics, he was called back home to serve as the minister of finance. In assuming this position, he knew that the most serious problem he would face was corruption at the national level among government officials. He knew that the only way to solve the financial problems would be to place trusted people in key positions, individuals who would not be bribed or be dishonest in any way. To locate such individuals, he observed and devised tests to determine those who were trustworthy. After considerable effort, he found only two men in whom he had complete confidence. He appointed these two men to key positions in the Federal Department of Finance, and thanks to their integrity, hard work, and courage, the economy of the nation was reversed.

In responding to Dr. LeBaron's question, he smiled and said: "Coming to Utah, I made an interesting discovery. I did not know before I came here that both of those men are members of your church!" He then shared the names of the two men, and they had been the ones sustained as members of the two stake presidencies recently organized by Presidents Packer and Faust. One of the men was called to be the stake president, and the other was asked to serve as a counselor in an adjoining stake presidency.

Summary

As the Church moves forward in its destiny to fill the whole earth, it is essential that the Saints, those claiming membership in the “only true and living church upon the whole earth,” must be outstanding examples of honesty and integrity. To be called a Saint, to hold membership in the true Church, is an honor that cannot be taken lightly. We are commanded to be the salt of the earth, and there is much pertaining to the kingdom of God in the days ahead that depends on the integrity and honesty of Latter-day Saints who will live their religion, who will be above bribery, dishonesty, cheating, plagiarizing, and any other behavior that brings dishonor or discredit to the work of God. Our membership in the kingdom of God compels us to be honorable, trustworthy men and women of integrity if we are to draw others unto Christ in the turbulent days that lie ahead.