

Truly Good and without Guile

By Elder Michael T. Ringwood

Of the Seventy



The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that the desires of our hearts can be transformed and our motives can be educated and refined.

Unfortunately, there was a time in my life when I was motivated by titles and authority. It really began innocently. As I was preparing to serve a full-time mission, my older brother was made a zone leader in his mission. I heard so many positive things said about him that I couldn't help but want those things said about me. I hoped for and may have even prayed for a similar position.

Thankfully, as I served my mission, I learned a powerful lesson. Last conference I was reminded of that lesson.

In October, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said: “Over the course of my life, I have had the opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the most competent and intelligent men and women this world has to offer. When I was younger, I was impressed by those who were educated, accomplished, successful, and applauded by the world. But over the years, I have come to the realization that I am far more impressed by those wonderful and blessed souls who are *truly good and without guile*.”¹

My Book of Mormon hero is a perfect example of a wonderful and blessed soul who was truly good and without guile. Shiblon was one of the sons of Alma the Younger. We are more familiar with his brothers Helaman, who would follow his father as the keeper of the records and the prophet of God, and Corianton, who gained some notoriety as a missionary who needed some counsel from his father. To Helaman, Alma wrote 77 verses (see Alma 36–37). To Corianton, Alma dedicated 91 verses (see Alma 39–42). To Shiblon, his middle son, Alma wrote a mere 15 verses (see Alma 38). Yet his words in those 15 verses are powerful and instructive.

“And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end.

“I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering among the people” (Alma 38:2–3).

In addition to speaking *to* Shiblon, Alma also spoke *about* him to Corianton. Alma said: “Have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee?” (Alma 39:1).²

It appears that Shiblon was a son who wanted to please his father and went about doing what was right for right's sake rather than for praise, position, power, accolades, or authority. Helaman must have known and respected this

about his brother, for he gave Shiblon custody of the sacred records he had received from his father. Surely Helaman trusted Shiblon because “he was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God” (Alma 63:2). As seems truly characteristic of Shiblon, there is not much recorded about him from the time he took possession of the sacred records until he gave them to Helaman’s son Helaman (see Alma 63:11).

Shiblon was truly good and without guile. He was a person who sacrificed his time, talents, and effort to help and lift others because of a love for God and his fellowmen (see Alma 48:17–19; 49:30). He is described perfectly by the words of President Spencer W. Kimball: “Great women and men are always more anxious to serve than to have dominion.”³

In a world where praise, position, power, accolades, and authority are sought on every side, I honor those wonderful and blessed souls who are truly good and without guile, those who are motivated by a love of God and their neighbors, those great women and men who are “more anxious to serve than to have dominion.”

Today there are some who would have us believe our search for relevance can be satisfied only by obtaining position and power. Yet, thankfully, there are many who are uninfluenced by this perspective. They find relevance in seeking to be truly good and without guile. I have found them in all walks of life and in many faith traditions. And I find them in large numbers among the truly converted followers of Christ.⁴

I honor those who selflessly serve each week in wards and branches around the world by going above and beyond in fulfilling callings. But callings come and go. Even more impressive to me are the many who without formal callings find ways to consistently serve and lift others. One brother shows up early for church to set up chairs and stays after to straighten up the chapel. One sister purposely selects a seat near a blind sister in her ward not only so she can greet her but also so she can sing the hymns loudly enough that the blind sister can hear the words and sing along. If you look closely in your ward or branch, you will find examples like these. There are always members who seem to know who needs help and when to offer it.

Perhaps my first lesson about truly good Saints without guile was learned when I was a young missionary. I moved into an area with an elder I didn’t know. I had heard other missionaries talk about how he had never received any leadership assignments and how he struggled with the Korean language despite having been in the country a long time. But as I got to know this elder, I found he was one of the most obedient and faithful missionaries I had known. He studied when it was time to study; he worked when it was time to work. He left the apartment on time and returned on time. He was diligent in studying Korean even though the language was especially difficult for him.

When I realized the comments I had heard were untrue, I felt like this missionary was being misjudged as unsuccessful. I wanted to tell the whole mission what I had discovered about this elder. I shared with my mission president my desire to correct this misunderstanding. His response was, “Heavenly Father knows this young man is a successful missionary, and so do I.” He added, “And now you know too, so who else really matters?” This wise mission president taught me what was important in service, and it wasn’t praise, position, power, honor, or authority. This was a great lesson for a young missionary who was too focused on titles.

With this lesson in mind, I began to look back on my life and see how often I had been influenced by men and women who at the time held no great title or position. One of those Shiblon-like souls was my seminary teacher during my junior year in high school. This good man taught seminary for only two or three years, but he opened my heart in a way that helped me gain a testimony. He may not have been the most popular teacher at the school, but he was always prepared and his influence on me was powerful and lasting. One of the few times I saw this man in the 40

years since he taught me was when he came to see me at my father's funeral. Truly, that was an act not motivated by title or power.

I honor that dedicated teacher and many like him who are truly good and without guile. I honor the Sunday School teacher who doesn't teach his students just during class on Sunday but also teaches and influences these same students by inviting them to join his family for breakfast. I honor youth leaders who attend the sporting and cultural activities of the young men and young women in their wards. I honor the man who writes notes of encouragement to neighbors and the woman who doesn't just mail Christmas cards but hand delivers them to family members and friends who need a visit. I honor the brother who routinely took a neighbor for a ride during that neighbor's dark days of Alzheimer's—giving both him and his wife a much-needed change of pace.

These things are not done for praise or accolades. These men and women are not motivated by the possibility of receiving titles or authority. They are disciples of Christ, going about doing good continually, and like Shiblón, they are trying to please their Father in Heaven.

It saddens me when I hear of some who stop serving or even attending church because they are released from a calling or feel overlooked for a position or title. I hope they will one day learn the same lesson I learned as a young missionary—that the service that counts most is usually recognized by God alone. In our pursuit of me and mine, have we forgotten Thee and Thine?

Some may say, "But I have so far to go to become like those you describe." The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that the desires of our hearts can be transformed and our motives can be educated and refined. When we are baptized into the true fold of God, we begin the process of becoming new creatures (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Mosiah 27:26). Each time we renew the covenant of baptism by partaking of the sacrament, we are one step closer to that ultimate goal.⁵ As we endure in that covenant, we access the strength to mourn with those who mourn and to comfort those who need comfort (see Mosiah 18:9). In that covenant, we find the grace that enables us to serve God and keep His commandments, including loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves.⁶ In that covenant, God and Christ succor us so we can succor those who stand in need of our succor (see Mosiah 4:16; see also verses 11–15).

All I really want in life is to please my fathers—both earthly and heavenly—and to be more like Shiblón.⁷

I thank my Heavenly Father for Shiblón-like souls whose examples offer me—and all of us—hope. In their lives, we see a witness of a loving Father in Heaven and a caring and compassionate Savior. I add my testimony to theirs with a pledge to strive to be more like them, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Lord, Is It I?" *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 58; emphasis added.

2. Helaman did not go teach the Zoramites, so we know that Alma is talking about Shiblón when he says "thy brother" (see Alma 31:7; 39:2).

3. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 104.

4. “The Lord taught us that when we are truly converted to His gospel, our hearts will be turned from selfish concerns and turned toward service to lift others as they move upward to eternal life. To obtain that conversion, we can pray and work in faith to become the new creature made possible by the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We can start by praying for the faith to repent of selfishness and for the gift of caring for others more than ourselves. We can pray for the power to lay aside pride and envy” (Henry B. Eyring, “Testimony and Conversion,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Feb. 2015, 4–5).

5. “[God] is immortal and perfect. We are mortal and imperfect. Nevertheless we seek ways even in mortality whereby we can unite with Him spiritually. In so doing we gain some access to both the grace and the majesty of His power. Those special moments include ... baptizing and confirming ... [and] partaking of the emblems of the Lord’s Supper” (Jeffrey R. Holland, *To My Friends* [2014], 80).

6. “The Latter-day Saints who see themselves in all they do as children of God take naturally to making and keeping commitments. The plan of salvation is marked by covenants. We promise to obey commandments. In return, God promises blessings in this life and for eternity. He is exact in what he requires, and he is perfect in keeping his word. Because he loves us and because the purpose of the plan is to become like him, he requires exactness of us. And the promises he makes to us always include the power to grow in our capacity to keep covenants. He makes it possible for us to know his rules. When we try with all our hearts to meet his standards, he gives us the companionship of the Holy Ghost. That in turn both increases our power to keep commitments and to discern what is good and true. And that is the power to learn, both in our temporal studies and in the learning we need for eternity” (Henry B. Eyring, “A Child of God” [Brigham Young University devotional, Oct. 21, 1997], 4–5; speeches.byu.edu). See also David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 87–90.

7. From my earliest recollection, I wanted to please my father. As I grew and gained a testimony, I also gained the desire to please Heavenly Father. Later in my life, I learned about Shiblōn and added to my life’s goals to be more like him.