

either to our blessing or our condemnation.

“Every Latter-day Saint should make the study of this book a lifetime pursuit. Otherwise he is placing his soul in jeopardy and neglecting that which could give spiritual and intellectual unity to his whole life. There is a difference between a convert who is built on the rock of Christ through the Book of Mormon and stays hold of that iron rod, and one who is not” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1975, p. 97; or *Ensign*, May 1975, p. 65).

I reaffirm those words to you this day. Let us not remain under condemnation, with its scourge and judgment, by treating lightly this great and marvelous gift the Lord has given to us. Rather, let us win the promises associated with treasuring it up in our hearts.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 84, verses 54 to 58, we read:

“And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received —

“Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation.

“And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.

“And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written —

“That they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father’s kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a scourge and

judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion.”

Testimonies of Saints who accepted the challenge

Since last general conference, I have received many letters from Saints, both young and old, from all over the world who accepted the challenge to read and study the Book of Mormon.

I have been thrilled by their accounts of how their lives have been changed and how they have drawn closer to the Lord as a result of their commitment. These glorious testimonies have reaffirmed to my soul the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Book of Mormon is truly “the keystone of our religion” and that a man and woman will “get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

This is my prayer, that the Book of Mormon may become the keystone of our lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang “The Spirit of God” without announcement.

President Hinckley

President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Church, has just addressed us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing “The Spirit of God.”

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder James E. Faust

Follow the prophet’s counsel

I humbly and prayerfully hope that what I have to say will be received in the spirit that I would like to convey. We have just heard the prophet of God. He is a watchman on the tower. He has raised a warning voice. I would urge all

to listen and follow his counsel. It is tremendously important always to be in harmony with those who, according to Paul, have “watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief” (Hebrews 13:17).

Isaiah spoke of a people who did not care to listen to their prophets and seers, who were urged, "Say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isaiah 30:10). Nephi explained, "The guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center" (1 Nephi 16:2).

President Spencer W. Kimball spoke of the duty of prophets. He said:

"I am sure that Peter and James and Paul found it unpleasant business to constantly be calling people to repentance and warning them of dangers, but they continued unflinchingly. So we, your leaders, must be everlastingly at it; if young people do not understand, then the fault may be partly ours. But, if we make the true way clear to you, then we are blameless" (*Love Versus Lust*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, [Provo, 5 Jan. 1965], p. 6).

I wish to speak today of unwanted messages. My purpose in doing so is to attempt to give strength against mistakes, suffering, heartache, and anguish.

Blessing of heeding an unwelcome message

May I begin by sharing with you a personal experience from a time many years ago when I received an unwelcome but valuable message from my devoted father. After World War II was over, I was married and wanted to get on with my life. My memorable mission was finished before my military service. I was not anxious to become a student again and go back to the university where I had started some eight years before. My intended course would require another three years of intensive study, discipline, and poverty. With all of this in mind I said to my father, "I don't think I will go back to school. I'll just get a job or start a business and go forward in my life." Now, my father had completed law school after World War I as an older student with a wife and three children.

His response was typically direct. He said bluntly, "What can you do?" His answer was so brutally honest that it hurt, but I could not ignore it. I went back to the university and completed the course. This frank but well-intentioned message changed my life.

Rich man disregards an unwanted message from Jesus

In the time of Jesus, a certain ruler asked the Savior a very significant question and received a hard answer which he did not want to hear. With the hard answer came a great promise. The meaningful question the rich man asked was, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answered, "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother."

And the ruler answered, "All these have I kept from my youth up."

The unwelcome answer then came from the Master: "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me."

When the ruler heard this, "he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

"And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:18, 20-24).

How people handle their earthly riches is among the great tests they have in life.

"New doctrines" taught by Jesus are often unpopular

This same Jesus of Nazareth spoke much novel doctrine which seemed hard to accept. Some said, "What new doctrine is this?" (Mark 1:27). Jesus did not speak of revenge nor of getting even. He spoke of loving our enemies and doing good to them that hate us, of blessing those that curse us, and of

praying for those which despitefully use us (see Luke 6:27-28). He counseled his followers, when smitten on one cheek, to "offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid [him] not to take thy coat also" (Luke 6:29).

Another interesting new doctrine was to go beyond loving only our own and being good just to our friends. Another strange idea Jesus taught was to lend goods and money, hoping for nothing in return. The Master counseled us to be merciful, to judge not and condemn not, and to be kind to the unthankful and to the evil (see Luke 6:34-37). He also spoke of being careful "when all men shall speak well of you" because all men spoke well of the false prophets (Luke 6:26).

The promise for those who can do this is great: "Ye shall be the children of the Highest" (Luke 6:35).

Respect the Sabbath day

May I mention two or three other messages which seem no longer popular? One is to respect the Sabbath day. While the Savior himself cautioned against extreme forms of Sabbath day observance, it is well to remember whose day the Sabbath is. There seems to be an ever-increasing popularity in disregarding the centuries-old commandment to observe and respect the Sabbath day. For many it has become a holiday rather than a holy day of rest and sanctification. For some it is a day to shop and buy groceries. The decision of those who engage in shopping, sports, work, and recreation on the Sabbath day is their own, for which they alone bear responsibility.

The Lord's commandment about the Sabbath day has not been altered, nor has the Church's affirmation of the commandment to observe the Sabbath day. Those who violate this commandment in the exercise of their agency are answerable for losing the blessings which observance of this commandment would bring. The Lord has spoken in our day concerning the Sabbath

day. We are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" and "go to the house of prayer." We are to rest from our labors and pay our "devotions unto the Most High" (D&C 59:9-10). The Doctrine and Covenants reminds us: "And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full" (D&C 59:13). The blessings for those who do righteousness are supernal. They shall enjoy "peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23).

Honor parents

Another transcendent but often unheeded message which peals down from Sinai is "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12). I have frequently walked by a rest home that provides excellent care. But it is heart-rending to see so many parents and grandparents in that good care facility so forgotten, so bereft of dignity, so starved for love. To honor parents certainly means to take care of physical needs. But it means much, much more. It means to show love, kindness, thoughtfulness, and concern for them all of the days of their lives. It means to help them preserve their dignity and self-respect in their declining years. It means to honor their wishes and desires and their teachings both before and after they are dead.

Some years ago I created a stake on one of the islands in Japan. As usual, we held many interviews with the leaders to become acquainted with them. One of the men had moved to that area from Tokyo to take care of his aged and ailing father and his father's business, which was in difficulty because of the father's ill health. After the father died, the son went to his father's creditors and acknowledged his father's debts. He requested time from those creditors so that he could assume and pay all of his father's outstanding obligations. In our interview I asked him how he was

managing to meet this responsibility. He answered that he was getting along quite well and that he would be able to handle his father's debts. The Lord saw fit to call him to be one of the leaders of that stake.

Besides being one of God's commandments, the kind, thoughtful consideration of parents is a matter of common decency and self-respect. On their part, parents need to live so as to be worthy of the respect of their children.

I cannot help wondering about parents who adopt the attitude with their children, "do as I say, not as I do" with respect to using harmful substances, going to inappropriate movies, and other questionable activities. Children often take license from their parents' behavior and go beyond the values the parents wish to establish. There is one safe parental rule: do not just avoid evil, avoid the very appearance of evil (see 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Deal honestly with others

I should like to speak of one more strong message. It is frequently astounding to see the dereliction of people in keeping the standards of ordinary fairness and justice. This delinquency manifests itself in so many ways. It is sometimes evident in commercial transactions, as well as in private contacts. Injustice to others is manifest even in the way automobiles are sometimes driven. This unfairness and injustice results principally from one person seeking an advantage or an edge over another. Those who follow such a practice demean themselves greatly. How can those of us who do not practice ordinary fairness and justice have serious claim on the blessings of a just and a fair God?

Do some of us seek to justify our taking of shortcuts and advantage of others by indulging in the twin sophistries, "There isn't any justice" and "Everybody does it"? There are many others who seemingly prosper by violating the rules of God and the stan-

dards of decency and fair play. They appear to escape the imminent law of the harvest, which states, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Worrying about the punishment we think ought to come to others is self-defeating to us. Brigham Young counseled that unless we ourselves are prepared for the day of the Lord's vengeance when the wicked will be consumed, we should not be too anxious for the Lord to hasten his work. Said he rather, "Let our anxiety be centred upon this one thing, the sanctification of our own hearts, the purifying of our own affections" (in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:3).

Avoid rationalization

Many modern professors of human behavior advocate as a cure to an afflicted conscience that we simply ignore the unwanted messages. They suggest that we change the standard to fit the circumstances so that there is no longer a conflict, thus easing the conscience. The followers of the divine Christ cannot subscribe to this evil and perverse philosophy with impunity. For the troubled conscience in conflict with right and wrong, the only permanent help is to change the behavior and follow a repentant path.

The prophet Isaiah taught, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

During all of my ministry, I have been fascinated by the manner in which Jesus hardened the bone and spirit of his chief Apostle, Peter. When Jesus told Peter that he had prayed that Peter's faith would strengthen, Peter affirmed that he would go with the Savior to prison or to death. Peter was then told that the "cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (Luke 22:34). After the predicted three denials, the powerful, unwelcome, but steel-hardening message came: Peter

heard the cock crow. "And he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75), but this strengthened Peter to fulfill his calling and to die for the cause.

Listen to the still, small voice for life-changing messages

There is one unerring voice that is ever true. It can always be relied upon. It should be listened to, although at times this voice too may speak unwelcome warning messages. I speak of the still, small, inner voice which comes from the divine source. As the prophet Elijah learned, "the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

"And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12).

One single unwanted message may be a call to change our lives; it may lead to the specially tailored opportunity we need. I am grateful that it is

never too late to change, to make things right, to leave old activities and habits behind.

I wish to testify that the prophetic messages of this conference will lead any who will listen — and follow the counsel given — to the promise of the Savior, which is peace in this life and eternal life in the world hereafter. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

The chorus and congregation will now join in singing "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," following which Elder Marion D. Hanks, a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy, will speak to us.

The chorus and congregation sang "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel."

Elder Marion D. Hanks

Importance of daily decisions

In the early days of the Restoration, the Lord commanded one of his servants to "declare glad tidings" and to do this "with all humility, trusting in me, reviling not against revilers" (D&C 19:29-30). In the constructive spirit of that directive, I desire to bear my testimony this morning about the vital effect in our lives and the lives of others of the day-by-day decisions all of us are making — and where we can find help in making them.

A teacher once wrote of the unanticipated consequences of some of our decisions. We didn't really ever intend those consequences, but we followed the paths that led to them. "He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to," he said. "He who picks up one end of a stick,

picks up the other." And it is not only our own course we are affecting when we choose the beginning of a road; we inevitably travel with others, and sometimes we bring anguish and distress to those we love and to other innocent persons.

Agency a peril and a privilege

Over this pulpit President David O. McKay taught us:

"Next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct that life is God's greatest gift to man. . . . Freedom of choice is more to be treasured than any possession earth can give" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1950, p. 32).

The oppressing presence of problems all about us — personal, family, and in our society — accentuates the