

(Alma 13:28). Your daily prayers must include a heartfelt request for help in keeping your commitment to remain morally clean. When you do this, the Lord will bless you with the strength to remain morally clean.

Purity precedes power

Remember, young men, that purity precedes power. The Lord said, "But purify your hearts before me; and then go ye into all the world, and preach my gospel unto every creature who has not received it" (D&C 112:28). Missionaries discover this very early in their missions and make every effort to be worthy so they can serve with power.

The hope of repentance

Now, just a word to those of you who have violated the moral law. I hold out the hope of repentance to you. The Savior's atonement provides forgiveness when you have repented completely. You will necessarily suffer because of sin, but you can know the joy of being forgiven completely. Your bishop can guide you through the process of repentance, so talk to him as soon as possible. You must also seek divine forgiveness through your personal prayers. Alma said: "Never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul" (Alma 38:8). Once you have forsaken your sins, never return to them, because "unto

that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return" (D&C 82:7).

We need not fear the future

Tonight, I echo the prayer offered by President Hugh B. Brown in a setting such as this more than twenty years ago, when the moral misconduct of youth was not as commonplace as it is today. He prayed, "O Father, help these young men who are listening tonight, when they go home to get on their knees and commit themselves to thee; and then they may know, and I promise them in thy name that they will know, that with thy help they need not fear the future" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1967, pp. 116-17; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1967, p. 94).

Brethren, we need not fear the future if we will keep the Lord's commandments and live to be his worthy servants. You can stay morally clean and prepare now for a happy future. May the Lord bless every one of you to so live I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have just heard from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve.

Elder Marion D. Hanks, a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy, will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder J Ballard Washburn, who was sustained as a member of the Seventy at the April conference.

Elder Marion D. Hanks

Changing channels

A few days ago, I enjoyed the challenging experience of speaking to a large group of younger teenagers. Thereafter, I received a special letter from a wonderful mother who, with her husband, a bishop, had accompanied their fourteen-year-old son, with some

of his friends, to the meeting. These are the last few words of her letter:

"Please accept my thanks. . . . You spoke seriously to a group of youth who are used to being told how wonderful they are. They *are* wonderful, but they needed to do some heavy thinking for a change. You helped them do that. Thank you!"

I was pleased that the meeting had encouraged some serious thinking and consideration among at least some of those present. We referred, as we began, to the aimless habit some of us have of channel hopping or dial switching as we sit in front of a television set or radio, and suggested that in preparation, I had done a similar kind of searching through my memory and notes. I was seeking to select, out of many observations and experiences and thoughts, a few that might make a difference to those who were seriously listening and might thereafter think about what they had heard. I would like to do the same with you in these few moments this evening.

The object of good parents

A picture forms on my monitor involving a father aboard an airplane on a short business trip. He has with him his five-year-old son and is almost wishing his son were not there because it is a very rough trip. There are downdrafts and updrafts and head winds alternating with tail winds, and some passengers are feeling a bit queasy. Apprehensively, the father glances at his son and finds him grinning from ear to ear. "Dad," he says, "do they do this just to make it fun for the kids?"

Good parents and family and leaders and friends do go to great lengths to make it fun for the kids, but the fun they are thinking of is wholesome fun; it hurts no one, and it lifts the spirit and is good to remember tomorrow and through a lifetime and forever. It never detracts from the real, long-term joy we came into this world to experience.

The next scene on the screen illustrates that clearly—it is a personal testimony of a noble and loving father to his children shortly before his death. Says Lehi: "I have spoken these few words unto you . . . in the last days of my probation; and I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet. And I have none other object

save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls" (2 Nephi 2:30).

That is the object also of every good father and mother and grandparent and teacher and priesthood leader and friend.

Choose a course of giving

As we switch rapidly to another scene or two tonight, look for the principles of love and agency shining through the thoughts and illustrations. They are central principles of the gospel, encompassing "all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40), as Jesus said of the commandments to love God and love our neighbor, and they emphasize the individual responsibility and accountability in our choices with respect to all other virtues and values (see Matthew 22:36–40).

The Bible teaches us that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The Doctrine and Covenants teaches that "Jesus Christ your Redeemer . . . so loved the world that he gave his own life" (D&C 34:1, 3).

God so loved that *he gave*.

Christ so loved that *he gave*.

We are here on this earth to learn, after the example of the Father and the Son, to love enough to *give*—to use our agency unselfishly. We are here to learn to do the will of the Father.

The love we speak of is not just a word or a feeling or a sentiment. John wrote, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

So we are speaking of choosing a course of sharing, of giving, of graciousness, of kindness, not as optional elements of the gospel, but as the heart of it. Decency and honor and unselfishness, good manners and good taste are expected of us. What really matters, after all, is what kind of people we are and *that* we are daily, hourly, deciding and manifesting. Jesus said, "Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do" (3 Nephi 18:24).

Are you looking at me?

A sobering and poignant scene appears on our screen as we switch channels. A grieving young father and his two children sit before a television set in their home after a makeshift dinner. The children have been staying with Grandmother while their mother has slowly slipped away in a lingering illness; now they and their father are home again after her funeral. The little girl drops off to sleep and is carried to her bed. The little boy fights off sleepiness until he finally asks his father if tonight, just tonight, he can sleep with him in his bed. As the two lie silently in the dark, the lad speaks: "Daddy, are you looking at me?" "Yes, son," the father replies, "I am looking at you."

The boy sighs and, exhausted, sleeps. The father waits a time and then, weeping, cries out in the dark, in anxious anguish: "God, are you looking at me? If you are, maybe I can make it. Without you, I know I can't."

Our Heavenly Father *is* looking at us. He loves us and he wants us to choose the path that leads us to happiness here and eternal life hereafter. In his plan he authorizes us to act for him, to be instruments of his concern for his children. But he won't force any of us to make choices that lead to happiness. He has given each of us the right and responsibility to make personal choices, individual decisions, and has made us accountable for them. He not only affects our lives, he is affected by our lives, and sometimes he weeps for us.

The same prophet Lehi, to whom we referred, taught his children these truths:

"Because . . . they are redeemed . . . they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon. . . .

"Wherefore . . . they are free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:26-27).

A deacon chooses correctly

Switch channels with me to a scene on a Saturday night in a ranch home kitchen, where a boy who has just answered the telephone nervously approaches his mother with a question: "Mom," he says, "Bob is on the phone. He and his dad and Tom and his dad are going snowmobiling and shooting tomorrow morning, and they want to know if I can go with them." The mother seems startled at the question and uncertain as she answers. (Later, she explains that she was strongly tempted to respond sharply to her boy, reminding him that he had duties on Sunday morning, that in their family they went to church together, and that when Dad returned later that night he would not consider such a thing.) But instead, she says to her son, "Richard, you are twelve years old. You hold the priesthood. You are president of the deacons quorum. I am sure Dad would want you to make up your own mind and answer Bob yourself."

The boy goes back to the telephone, and the mother goes to her room and prays that their son will give the right answer. Nothing more is said about the matter, and on Sunday morning the lad and his parents go into town to church, park in the lot across the street, and are crossing, arm-in-arm, when a pickup truck passes. Two men and two boys are in the seat, snowmobiles in the truck bed, guns slung in the rear window. The boys wave to Richard as they pass. He pauses a moment and says, "Gee, I wish . . ." The mother catches her breath a bit, and then Richard finishes: "Gee, I wish I had been able to talk Bob and Tom into coming to priesthood meeting this morning."

The mother, telling the story, thanks the Lord for this choice lad and his personal decision to do the right thing. And then she weeps freely as she explains how important that was to all of them. You see, their son was killed in a farm accident that week.

We push the remote control, and a classic statement from a great mind and heart stands out boldly: "Ah, my soul, look to the road you are walking on. He who picks up one end of the stick picks up the other. He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to" (Harry Emerson Fosdick).

A young man aboard ship in wartime

I would like to share with you young men tonight one very unhappy recording in my mind of a promising young man aboard ship in wartime, who chose the beginning of a road that led him to a destination that was one of the last places in the world he really wanted to be. His initial mistakes were understandable; he was young and away from home and friends and familiar standards, and he wanted to be independent. His intentions were not evil, but because he was a little arrogant and proud, he rejected good counsel and let himself be led away by individuals who were described perfectly in the Book of Mormon, thousands of years ago, in their sinful persuasion of others. It is written of them that "they do it for a token of bravery" (Moroni 9:10).

Imitation men being imitated; these "macho" visions of life, so pitifully empty, can lead only to tragedy.

There is good, and there is evil, and there is a way to help us all tell the difference:

"All things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil. . . .

". . . My brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

"For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil" (Moroni 7:12, 15-16).

A football player chooses wisely

A new picture comes on the screen and rivets our attention. A strong-look-

ing young football player is responding to questions from sportswriters about his development from a disappointing earlier career to one of great promise. What had brought about the change?

"You know," he said, "in high school you can sort of make up your own world and be king of it. In the real world, you're with everybody else, and you're just part of it."

He seems to be wisely using his agency now to follow a more constructive path. He had been on a road that seemed to be leading where he really did not want to be, and he had been mature enough to turn around and choose a better way.

A young convert feels the Spirit

Oh, we have seen remarkable events as we have flipped the remote control of observation and memory. One of the most touching involved a young lady convert to the Church who had found in a Latter-day Saint fellow student, and in her fellow student's home, where she was invited for family home evening, a spirit and a caring relationship she had never known in her own life. She said that since her baptism, things had not really materially changed in her own home; there were still abuse and argument and alcohol and foul language. "But," she said, "there is one room at my house where I can go and shut the door and read the scriptures and listen to good music and pray and feel the Spirit of the Lord. In my little room I can have that blessing. One day, if the Lord will help me, I will marry a man with whom I can live in a home where we can have the Spirit of the Lord always."

A scene from Nha Trang, Vietnam

There is one last scene I would call up for you from my journal. The sobering realities of our present Middle East involvement, where many of our people are in threatening conditions, make this memory particularly pertinent and particularly appreciated. I read it as I

wrote it in Nha Trang, Vietnam, in May 1967:

“There was a memorable meeting this morning, which began with a senior military chaplain of another church addressing us warmly as ‘My brothers in Christ.’ This touched me deeply, and the meeting that went along was consistent with his gentle beginning.

“It was a very special, tender meeting; the Spirit was strong.

“It was uncomfortably warm in the room where we met. There were two ancient air conditioners, but they were ineffective. In fact, we discovered when we finally opened the door that it was cooler outside than in. Notwithstanding this, a great spirit was felt and a sweet experience enjoyed.

“Outside the room after the meeting, I walked quietly down the passage alongside the large room where we had met. As I passed the back door, I looked in and saw a kind of human barrier that had been set up to separate the many young men who were lingering in

the front part of the room from a few who were in the back. Three men had their hands on the head of another who sat on a chair. All four were dressed in battle gear; two had returned from air strikes to the north just in time for the meeting, and one was shortly to go. The three members of the district presidency were giving a blessing to an officer senior to them all, setting him apart as a district missionary.”

For some reason this sweet scene affected me more deeply than any priesthood sermon I have heard. Priesthood to them meant the right and the power to serve, to act in the name of the Lord as his agents and in his interests with their fellowmen. This scene I hope I will never forget.

The scriptures teach us, “My sons, be not now negligent: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him” (2 Chronicles 29:11).

That we may, faithfully, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder J Ballard Washburn

President Benson’s early life

Brethren, it’s an honor to be with you. I humbly pray for the Spirit to guide the things that I say, that we may look at a few brief events in the life of our prophet and resolve to try harder to be like him, to be true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Elder Kimball quoted Mr. F. M. Bareham as saying, “When a wrong wants righting, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants discovering [and, we might add, or God wants us to read the Book of Mormon], God sends a baby into the world to do it” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1960, p. 84).

And so it was that on August 4, 1899, in Whitney, Idaho, Sarah Benson started into labor. Her husband, George, gave her a blessing. “Dr. Allan Cutler attended her in the bedroom of their farm home, with both grand-

mothers, Louisa Benson and Margaret Dunkley, there. The delivery was protracted. As the baby, a large boy, was delivered, the doctor couldn’t get him to breathe and quickly laid him on the bed and pronounced, ‘There’s no hope for the child, but I believe we can save the mother.’ While Dr. Cutler feverishly attended to Sarah, the grandmothers rushed to the kitchen, praying silently as they worked, and returned shortly with two pans of water—one cold, the other warm. Alternately, they dipped the baby first in cold and then in warm water, until finally they heard a cry. The 11¾ pound boy was alive! Later, both grandmothers bore testimony that the Lord had spared the child. George and Sarah named him Ezra Taft Benson” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987], pp. 13–14).