

must love and serve one another. We are to be proved in all things (see D&C 98:14)—even little things like means. There will be trials. There will likely be other circles we will have to leave. How we respond to all of this will turn out to be the real measure of our salvation.

So to those, including myself, who from time to time have said, "I am not at fault—I was compelled by circumstances to do what I did," I say, "That may be so, but there is grave danger here. If there is any doubt at all, let us simply repent." For, in the words of Job, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse" (Job 9:20).

And to those who say, "I may have done a little wrong, but my purpose was good and I believe God will justify my behavior," my response is, "Maybe so, but don't count on it." For in the

137th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 9, we read,

"For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts."

May the Lord bless us to see ourselves as we really are and to repent as needs be, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "On This Day of Joy and Gladness" without announcement.

President Monson

Elder F. Burton Howard of the Seventy has spoken to us, following which the Mormon Youth Chorus sang "On This Day of Joy and Gladness."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Persian Gulf war

Since our conference last October, many have ridden roller coasters of emotion from the war in the Persian Gulf. Many Latter-day Saints had their lives changed by that conflict. In the military theater of operations, we had over 140 Latter-day Saint groups providing leadership, worship, and fellowship for members of the armed forces. At home, families were separated and in stress. We pay tribute to the Church leaders and members who shouldered extra burdens in looking after the families of our service people. They are still doing so. Stake, ward, quorum, and Relief Society leaders acted and are still acting in the best traditions of brotherly and sisterly service.

During this crisis, our hearts went out to those who were oppressed and

in jeopardy on both sides of the conflict. Week after week, in the leading councils of the Church, in Church meetings everywhere, in our homes, and in public and private gatherings, we prayed for the well-being of those in uniform. We also prayed that the war would be short and that the numbers of dead and wounded would be as small as possible.

Our prayers were answered, and in this national period of thanksgiving designated by presidential proclamation, we join millions of religious people everywhere in prayers of thanks to a merciful Father in Heaven. We offer love and sympathy to the families of those who lost their lives. And we continue to pray that the leaders who preside over the peacekeeping process and the care and repatriation of prisoners and refugees will be wise and

considerate and successful in binding up the wounds of war.

Honoring parents and the aged

Thousands of years ago, on a mountain across the Arabian peninsula from the recent conflict, the Lord God of Israel gave his people ten commandments. The fifth commandment that the Lord gave through the prophet Moses was "honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12).

This morning I wish to speak about honoring our parents and the aged among us.

The commandment to honor our parents has strands that run through the entire fabric of the gospel. It is inherent in our relationship to God our Father. It embraces the divine destiny of the children of God. This commandment relates to the government of the family, which is patterned after the government of heaven.

The commandment to honor our parents echoes the sacred spirit of family relationships in which—at their best—we have sublime expressions of heavenly love and care for one another. We sense the importance of these relationships when we realize that our greatest expressions of joy or pain in mortality come from the members of our families.

Other manifestations of this commandment include the bearing and care of children, the preparation of family histories, and efforts to see that the ordinances of eternity are performed for our departed ancestors.

The Savior reemphasized the importance of the fifth commandment during his ministry. He reminded the scribes and Pharisees that we are commanded to honor our father and our mother and that God had directed that

whoever cursed father or mother should be put to death (see Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 21:18–21; Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10). In this day, failing to honor our parents is not a capital crime in any country of which I am aware. However, the divine direction to honor our father and our mother has never been revoked (see Mosiah 13:20; Matthew 19:19; Luke 18:20).

Like many scriptures, this commandment has multiple meanings.

Honoring parents by living righteously

To young people, honoring parents is appropriately understood to focus on obedience, respect, and emulation of righteous parents. The Apostle Paul illuminated that focus when he taught, "Children, obey your parents in all things [I believe he meant all *righteous* things]: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:20).

President Spencer W. Kimball combined the ideas of obedience and emulation in these words:

"If we truly honor [our parents], we will seek to emulate their best characteristics and to fulfill their highest aspirations for us. No gift purchased from a store can begin to match in value to parents some simple, sincere words of appreciation. Nothing we could give them would be more prized than righteous living for each youngster" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 348).

Young people, if you honor your parents, you will love them, respect them, confide in them, be considerate of them, express appreciation for them, and demonstrate all of these things by following their counsel in righteousness and by obeying the commandments of God.

Honoring parents who are dead

To persons whose parents are dead, honoring parents is likely to involve thoughts of family reunions, family histories, temple work, and commitment to the great causes in which departed parents spent their lives.

Caring for aged parents

Middle-aged persons are likely to think of the commandment to honor our fathers and our mothers in terms of caring for aged parents. In a message given a year and a half ago, President Ezra Taft Benson encouraged families "to give their elderly parents and grandparents the love, care, and attention they deserve." He said:

"Remember that parents and grandparents are our responsibility, and we are to care for them to the very best of our ability. When the elderly have no families to care for them, priesthood and Relief Society leaders should make every effort to meet their needs in the same loving way" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, p. 6; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 6).

Recent years have seen great increases in the numbers and percentage of older people in our population. A recent study estimated that in another ten years, one-seventh of the population of the United States, about 35 million people, will be at least sixty-five years old. At that time, about five million citizens will be age eighty-five or older (see "Consumer Issues and the Elderly," *Deseret News*, 7 May 1990, p. C1).

From time to time, Church leaders hear of grown children who seem to be good Latter-day Saints but are negligent or even maliciously indifferent in caring for their aged parents. Some have encouraged parents to distribute their property and then have put them away in institutions, sometimes with inadequate care and sometimes without

regular visits and expressions of love from their children. I believe this was the kind of circumstance the Lord's spokesman, the prophet Isaiah, thundered against when he commanded, "Hide not thyself from thine own flesh" (Isaiah 58:7).

The best way to care for the aged is to preserve their independence as long as possible. President Benson explained:

"Even when parents become elderly, we ought to honor them by allowing them freedom of choice and the opportunity for independence as long as possible. Let us not take away from them choices which they can still make. Some parents are able to live and care for themselves well into their advancing years and would prefer to do so. Where they can, let them.

"If they become less able to live independently, then family, Church, and community resources may be needed to help them. When the elderly become unable to care for themselves, even with supplemental aid, care can be provided in the home of a family member when possible. Church and community resources may also be needed in this situation" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, pp. 6-7; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 7).

When aged parents who are not able to live alone are invited to live with their children, this keeps them in the family circle and allows them to continue their close ties with all members of the family. When a parent lives with one child, the other children should make arrangements to share the burdens and blessings of this arrangement.

When it is not possible for parents to be cared for in the homes of their children, so that some type of institutional care is obtained, their children should remember that institutional care will generally focus on physical needs. Members of the family should

make regular visits and contacts to provide the spiritual and emotional sustenance and the love that must continue in the family relationship for mortal life and throughout all eternity.

In some nations where our members reside, the obligation to care for aged parents is more keenly felt and more faithfully observed than in the United States. I saw this in Asia. But the care of aged parents is still a strongly felt obligation among most Americans. Six out of ten older persons questioned in a recent national survey had weekly personal visits with their children, and three-fourths of them talked on the telephone with their children at least weekly. Two-thirds of those surveyed expect to take care of their elderly parents. (See *Deseret News*, 7 May 1990, p. C1.)

Latter-day Saints have a good record of caring for their aged parents and for older citizens generally. I have seen wonderful examples of this in my own family and among my LDS friends and associates. Many of our General Authorities and their companions have been exemplary in caring for their aged parents.

Old Folks Day

When I was a young boy in a small Utah town, I remember seeing my grandmother overseeing the provision of food, favors, transportation, and entertainment for a large group of elderly in the community. As a counselor in the stake Relief Society presidency, she was making preparations for Old Folks Day.

Most of you have never heard of Old Folks Day. It was a unique Utah Mormon institution. It began in 1875, when Charles R. Savage, the pioneer photographer, persuaded Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter to declare a day for honoring what we now call senior citizens. The first Old Folks Day

transported guests by rail to an outing at Saltair, west of Salt Lake City. A monument honoring that celebration and its founder stands on the southeast corner of Temple Square.

The annual Old Folks Day celebrations were held in nearly every community in Utah. Travel, refreshments, and entertainment were given to all citizens seventy years of age and older. Although this holiday was conducted by the leaders and members of this Church, it was stipulated that "there are none to be excluded because of their religion, and the oldest guest present is the special guest of the occasion whether they be white or black or whatever the complexion of their religious belief" (quoted in Joseph Heinerman, "The Old Folks Day: A Unique Utah Tradition," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Spring 1985, p. 158).

The committee directing these celebrations was dissolved in 1970, and the responsibility for honoring those who had come to be called senior citizens was passed to the stake presidents of the Church. Since that time we have had further increases in the number of senior citizens in our midst, but perhaps not significant increases in the amount of honor accorded them. Fortunately, the advances in medical science that have produced increased longevity have also increased our senior citizens' effective participation in church, community, business, and social events. But the need for honor, especially for our fathers and our mothers, is undiminished.

Honoring parents increases longevity

The fifth commandment is often referred to as the first commandment with a promise: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12). I have wondered about the relationship

between the commandment and the promise. How could honoring our parents increase our longevity?

During almost forty years of marriage, I have observed something that provides at least a partial explanation of how this promise is fulfilled.

In the early days of our marriage, I spent many happy hours in the home of my wife's parents, Charles and True Dixon. There I met June's maternal grandmother, Adelaide White Call. Then a widow about eighty-five years of age, Grandma Call was a survivor of what older people called "the exodus." She had been among those valiant Latter-day Saints expelled from northern Mexico in 1912. Now her sons and daughters were living throughout the United States. In her later years, they helped her locate in Utah County, near June's parents.

During my visits, I saw the gentleness and love and concern with which the Call children and their companions looked after this older parent. They visited her frequently. My wife's mother looked in on her every day and often had her in their home. They made her part of every occasion in which she desired to participate, and they gave her every consideration and respect. They cared for her every need when she was ill. Surely, I said to myself, these Call children honor their mother.

It has been about forty years since I saw that honor given. Now I see its effects. I see June and her brother and sisters honoring their mother as they saw their mother honoring her own mother. Fortunately, True Dixon is blessed with good health and vigor and has no present need for the kind of care her mother required. Still, her children are attentive. There are frequent visits and phone calls and invita-

tions that include her in all the family activities she desires. I believe her days will be longer upon the land because of the attentiveness and companionship of her children, who learned the way to honor a parent by seeing how their own mother honored hers.

I am grateful for this example and for this principle, especially when I anticipate the effect of having our daughters and sons observe how their mother honors her mother. I am sure that when the time comes, my own companion's days will be lengthened upon the land because of the care her children will give to her because of the example she has set for them. A worthy example repeats itself from generation to generation. Truly, righteousness is a beacon and a worthy act is its own reward. As the Lord said, "He who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23).

In time to come, each of us will be judged by the Lord God of Israel, who commanded us to honor our fathers and our mothers. I pray that each of us will conduct ourselves toward our parents in such a way that we will be guiltless before God at that day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Open Thou Mine Eyes" without announcement.

President Monson

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Council of the Twelve has addressed us, and the Mormon Youth Chorus sang "Open Thou Mine Eyes."

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker for this session.