

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### Listen to learn

In his invocation for this session of conference, Elder Hugh W. Pinnock prayed that we might listen carefully. Many articles in Church literature have dealt with the important art of listening.<sup>1</sup> They support a proverb that teaches this vital lesson: "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise" (Proverbs 19:20).<sup>2</sup> Surely wisdom will come as we *listen to learn* from children, parents, partners, neighbors, Church leaders, and the Lord.

### Children

Parents and teachers, learn to listen, then listen to learn from children. A wise father once said, "I do a greater amount of good when I listen to my children than when I talk to them."<sup>3</sup>

When our youngest daughter was about four years of age, I came home from hospital duties quite late one evening. I found my dear wife to be very weary. I don't know why. She only had nine children underfoot all day. So I offered to get our four-year-old ready for bed. I began to give the orders: "Take off your clothes; hang them up; put on your pajamas; brush your teeth; say your prayers" and so on, commanding in a manner befitting a tough sergeant in the army. Suddenly she cocked her head to one side, looked at me with a wistful eye, and said, "Daddy, do you own me?"

She taught me an important lesson. I was using coercive methods on this sweet soul. To rule children by force is the technique of Satan, not of the Savior. No, we don't own our children. Our parental privilege is to love them, to lead them, and to let them go.

The time to listen is when someone needs to be heard. Children are naturally eager to share their experiences, which range from triumphs of

delight to trials of distress. Are we as eager to listen? If they try to express their anguish, is it possible for us to listen openly to a shocking experience without going into a state of shock ourselves? Can we listen without interrupting and without making snap judgments that slam shut the door of dialogue? It can remain open with the soothing reassurance that we believe in them and understand their feelings. Adults should not pretend an experience did not happen just because they might wish otherwise.

Even silence can be misinterpreted. A story was written of "a little boy [who] looked up at his mother and said, 'Why are you mad at me?' She answered, 'I'm not angry at you. What makes you say that?' 'Well, your hands are on your hips, and you are not saying anything.'"<sup>4</sup>

Parents with teenage youth may find that time for listening is often less convenient but more important when young people feel lonely or troubled. And when they seem to deserve favor least, they may need it most.

Wise parents and teachers, listen to learn from children.

### Parents

Children of all ages, learn to listen, and listen to learn from parents, as Elder Oaks taught us this morning. Spiritually or physically, it can be a matter of life and death.

Several years ago I was invited to give an important lecture at a medical school in New York City. The night before the lecture, Sister Nelson and I were invited to dinner at the home of our host professor. There he proudly introduced us to an honor medical student—his beautiful daughter.

Some weeks later that professor telephoned me in an obvious state of grief. I asked, "What is the matter?"

"Remember our daughter whom you met at our home?"

"Of course," I replied. "I'll never forget such a stunning young lady."

Then her father sobbed and said, "Last night she was killed in an automobile accident!" Trying to gain composure, he continued: "She asked permission to go to a dance with a certain young man. I didn't have a good feeling about it. I told her so and asked her not to go. She asked, 'Why?' I simply told her that I was uneasy. She had always been an obedient daughter, but she said that if I could not give her a good reason to decline, she wanted to go. And so she did. At the dance, alcoholic beverages were served. Her escort drank a bit—we don't know how much. While returning home, he was driving too fast, missed a turn, and careened through a guardrail into a reservoir below. They were both submerged and taken to their death."

As I shared my feeling of sadness, he concluded: "My grief is made worse because I had the distinct feeling that trouble lay ahead. Why couldn't I have been more persuasive?"

This experience will not have been in vain if others can listen and learn from it. Children, honor your parents,<sup>5</sup> even when they cannot give a satisfactory explanation for their feelings. Please have faith in this scripture, which applies to all age-groups: "Hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:8).

Parents have a divine duty to teach their children to love the Lord.<sup>6</sup> Children have an equal obligation to "obey [their] parents in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1).<sup>7</sup>

Wise children, listen to learn from parents.

### Partners

Husbands and wives, learn to listen, and listen to learn from one another.

I was amused to read of an experience recorded by Elder F. Burton Howard in his biography of President Marion G. Romney: "His good-humored love for Ida was manifested in many ways. He delighted in telling of her hearing loss. 'I once went to see a doctor about her hearing,' he would say. 'He asked me how bad it was, and I said I didn't know. He told me to go home and find out. The doctor instructed me to go into a far room and speak to her. Then I should move nearer and nearer until she does hear. Following the doctor's instructions, I spoke to her from the bedroom while she was in the kitchen—no answer. I moved nearer and spoke again—no answer. So I went right up to the door of the kitchen and said, 'Ida, can you hear me?' She responded, 'What is it, Marion—I've answered you three times.'"<sup>8</sup>

Even with normal hearing, some couples seem not to listen to one another. Taking time to talk is essential to keep lines of communication intact. If marriage is a prime relationship in life, it deserves prime time! Yet less important appointments are often given priority, leaving only leftover moments for listening to precious partners.

Keeping the garden of marriage well cultivated and free from weeds of neglect requires the time and commitment of love. It is not only a pleasant privilege, it is a scriptural requirement with promise of eternal glory.<sup>9</sup>

Wise partners, listen to learn from one another.

### Neighbors

Learn to listen, and listen to learn from neighbors. Repeatedly the Lord has said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour" (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19).<sup>10</sup> Opportunities to listen to those of diverse religious or political persuasion can promote tolerance and

learning. And a good listener will listen to a person's sentiments as well. I learned much from Brother David M. Kennedy as we met with many dignitaries in nations abroad. When one of them spoke, Brother Kennedy not only looked eye to eye and listened with real intent, but he even removed his reading glasses, as if to show that he wanted nothing in the way of his total concentration.

The wise listen to learn from neighbors.

### Church leaders

Members, learn to listen, and listen to learn from Church leaders. Faithful members love the Savior and honor His servants, having faith in the Lord's declaration that "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

One day in Italy I met a wonderful priesthood leader and his wife. In him I saw a man with great potential. But my language was foreign to them. Through an interpreter, I challenged them to study the English language. They listened obediently and studied diligently. Now six years later, ably sustained by his wife, Carolina, Vincenzo Conforte is faithfully serving his *second* assignment as a mission president, interviewing missionaries well in Italian or in English.

President Ezra Taft Benson has proclaimed the importance of studying the Book of Mormon. People throughout the earth are being blessed as they follow this and other counsel he has given.

Gratefully we thank God for a prophet to guide us in these latter days. But many turn a deaf ear to his teachings, oblivious to his prophetic position. They do so at great risk, for scriptures contain this warning:

"A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you . . . ; him shall ye

hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. . . .

" . . . Every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22-23).<sup>11</sup>

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said, "We do not lack a prophet; what we lack is a listening ear."<sup>12</sup> Words of the Lord are taught by His disciples (see D&C 1:4). Wise members listen to learn from Church leaders.

### The Lord

Above all, God's children should learn to listen, then listen to learn from the Lord. On several sacred occasions in the world's history, our Heavenly Father has personally appeared to introduce His divine Son with a specific charge to "*hear him*."<sup>13</sup>

Jesus taught this first and great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37).

Scriptures recorded in all dispensations teach that we show our *love* of God as we *hearken* to His commandments and *obey* them.<sup>14</sup> These actions are closely connected. In fact, the Hebrew language of the Old Testament in most instances uses the same term for both *hearkening* (to the Lord) and *obedience* (to His word).<sup>15</sup>

In addition to hearing the word of the Lord obediently, we manifest our love for God through prayer. And listening is an essential part of prayer. Answers from the Lord come ever so quietly. Hence He has counseled us to "be still and know that I am God" (D&C 101:16).

President Spencer W. Kimball said, "It would not hurt us, either, if we paused at the end of our prayers to do some intense listening—even for a moment or two—always praying, as the Savior did, 'not my will, but thine, be done' (Luke 22:42)."<sup>16</sup>

In a world scarred by scourges of tyranny and war, many of its inhabitants earnestly pray for inner peace. For example, not long ago a beautiful young mother named Svetlana developed an intense desire to obtain a Bible. But in her city of Leningrad, a Bible was very rare and expensive. Frequently and fervently she prayed for a Bible. Ultimately, she and her husband were impressed to travel with their small child to Helsinki, Finland, with that hope in mind. There one day while walking in a park, she stumbled across an object buried under the cover of autumn leaves. She picked it up and found it to be a Bible written in the Russian language! Excitedly she recounted the story of this great discovery to another mother who was also in the park with her youngster. The second mother rejoiced with Svetlana and added, "Would you like to have *another* book about Jesus Christ?" Svetlana, of course, answered in the affirmative. The other mother provided Svetlana with a copy of a Russian-language edition of the Book of Mormon and invited the family to church. She eagerly embraced the teachings of the missionaries and shortly thereafter joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Then they returned to their home, where they have helped pioneer the work in the Leningrad Branch of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Her experience typifies this promise of the Savior to those who seek Him: "Thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who *hearken* unto my precepts, and *lend an ear* unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more" (2 Nephi 28:30; italics added).<sup>18</sup>

While stressing the importance of listening well, I am mindful of those who cannot hear. Many labeled as deaf have received the Spirit "by the hear-

ing of faith" (Galatians 3:2).<sup>19</sup> The example of Rachel Ivins Grant is inspiring to me. She never complained about her own deafness. Though most women in their seventies would be completely worn out while rearing six growing children of another mother, she undertook that task. Rachel's deafness seemed to save her from the wear and tear of noise. Sometimes, when two were arguing, Rachel would burst out laughing. She said they had no idea how funny it was to see their angry faces and hear none of their words.

Before her son, Heber J. Grant, became the seventh President of the Church, she declared, "Of course the greatest trial I have is that I cannot hear, but I have so many blessings I cannot complain, but if we only will live so that we may receive the instructions of God, there is nothing we are called to pass through but will be for our good."<sup>20</sup>

The Redeemer loves such faithful souls: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12).

They qualify for this prophetic promise: "Before they call, I [the Lord] will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

To all of God's children, either able to hear or deaf to mortal sound, He offers this reward: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3).<sup>21</sup>

Your soul will be blessed as you learn to listen, then listen to learn from children, parents, partners, neighbors, and Church leaders, all of which will heighten capacity to hear counsel from on high.

Carefully listen to learn from the Lord through the still small voice—the Holy Spirit—which leads to truth.<sup>22</sup> Listen to learn by studying scriptures that record His holy mind and will.<sup>23</sup> Listen to learn in prayer, for He will answer the humble who truly seek Him.<sup>24</sup>

The wise listen to learn from the Lord. I testify of Him and certify that as we "hearken and . . . hear the voice of the Lord," we will be blessed, "for the hour of his coming is nigh" (D&C 133:16–17), in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## NOTES

- Examples include the following:  
Marvin J. Ashton, "Family Communications," *New Era*, Oct. 1978, pp. 7–9.  
Lynne Baker, "Please Take Time to Listen!" *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1968, pp. 110–13.  
Marilyn A. Bullock, "Listening to My Two-year-old," *Ensign*, Jan. 1983, p. 70.  
Henry B. Eyring, "Listen Together," in *1988–89 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1989], pp. 11–21.  
Winnifred C. Jardine, "Listen with All of You," *Ensign*, Feb. 1974, p. 51.  
Larry K. Langlois, "When Couples Don't Listen to Each Other," *Ensign*, Sept. 1989, pp. 16–19.  
Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, pp. 27–31; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, pp. 19–21.  
H. Burke Peterson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1990, pp. 105–8; or *Ensign*, May 1990, pp. 83–84.  
"Giving with Your Ears," *Church News*, 13 Jan. 1985, p. 16.  
"Parents, Are You Listening?" *Ensign*, Feb. 1971, pp. 54–57.
- See also Proverbs 8:32–33; Jacob 6:12.
- George D. Durrant, "Take Time to Talk," *Ensign*, Apr. 1973, p. 24; see also James 1:19.
- Florence B. Pinnock, "Let's Listen," *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1964, pp. 872–73.
- See Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Matthew 15:4; 19:19; Mark 7:10; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Ephesians 6:2; 1 Nephi 17:55; Mosiah 13:20.
- See Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 4:10; 6:5–7; 11:19; Mosiah 1:4; D&C 68:25, 28; Moses 6:57–58.
- See also Colossians 3:20.
- F. Burton Howard, *Marion G. Romney: His Life and Faith* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], pp. 144–45.

9. See Ephesians 5:25, 33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:1; Jacob 3:7; D&C 132:19.

10. See also Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8; Mosiah 23:15; D&C 59:6.

11. See also Jeremiah 5:21; D&C 1:14.

12. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "Not a Prophet— but a Listening Ear," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1948, p. 685.

13. See Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; 3 Nephi 11:7; Joseph Smith—History 1:17; italics added.

14. See Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9; 11:1; 30:16; Joshua 22:5; Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4; John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 5:2–3; 2 John 1:6; Mosiah 13:14; D&C 42:2; 46:9; 124:87.

15. That term was שָׁמַע (shâma'), which means "to hear intelligently." The term was used hundreds of times in the Hebrew Old Testament as Israel was counseled to *hearken* to the word of the Lord and *obey* it.

Different terms were used in some instances in the Hebrew text whenever reference was made to hearing or responding *without* implied obedience. Examples:

- "They have ears, but they *hear* not" (Psalm 135:17; see also 140:6; italics added). אָזַן ('âzan) to give ear—to listen

- "I will *hear*, saith the Lord, I will *hear* the heavens, and they shall *hear* the earth" (Hosea 2:21; italics added). אָנַח ('ânâh) to pay attention—to answer

- "Lift up thy voice, O daughter . . . : cause it to be *heard*" (Isaiah 10:30; see also Psalm 10:17; italics added). קָשַׁח (qâshav) to give heed

Still different terms were employed in the Old Testament when referring to obedience *not* to Deity but to other people. Examples:

- "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to *obey* his mother" (Proverbs 30:17; italics added). יָקַח (yiqqâhâh) obedience, to obey

- "The children of Ammon shall *obey* them" (Isaiah 11:14; italics added). מִשְׁמָחָה (mishmah'ath) audience—obedience

That link between *listening* and *obedience* is found not only in Hebrew but in Latin and Greek. The word *obey* comes from two Latin

roots: the prefix *ob* ("to" or "toward") and the root *audiō, audire* ("to hear" or "to listen"). This root occurs in words such as *audio, audience, and auditorium*. Literally, then, the word *obey* means "to hear or to listen toward," that is, "to comply."

The word for *obey* in Greek, *ὑπακούω* (*hupakouō*), literally means "listen under," from *hypo* ("under") as in *hypodermic*, also "in subjection or subordination," and the root *akouō* ("hear, listen") as in *acoustics*. In New Testament times, its use was gradually broadened to less sacred realms, including expressions such as "children, obey parents" (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20), "wives, [obey] husbands" (1 Peter 3:1), and "servants, obey . . . masters" (Colossians 3:22), and so on.

A parallel pattern is found in the Book of Mormon. Use of terms such as *listen, hear, and hearken*, written at the time of the Old Testament, generally carried the same implication of obedience to Deity. Those terms in Book of Mormon scriptures written after the earthly advent of Christ were also broadened to include the more familiar usage, as in the language of the New Testament.

16. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, p. 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, pp. 4-5.

17. Steven R. Mecham, president of the Finland Helsinki Mission, personal communica-

tion to the author, 26 Apr. 1990. Svetlana's last name is Artemova. The name of the other mother is Raija Kempainen, wife of Jussi Kempainen, who at that time was president of the Baltic District of that mission.

18. See also D&C 29:7.

19. For example, see Anne C. Bradshaw, "Listen with Your Heart," *New Era*, Mar. 1989, pp. 28-31.

20. *Woman's Exponent*, 1 and 15 Dec. 1902, p. 53. Earlier, at age sixty-seven, she wrote, "I look for the time when I will be able to hear by the power of God" (*Woman's Exponent*, 15 Aug. 1888, p. 46).

21. See also Mosiah 2:9; Alma 5:41; 36:3.

22. See 1 Kings 19:12; 1 Nephi 17:45; D&C 85:6.

23. See John 5:39; Alma 14:1; 33:2.

24. See Mosiah 9:18; 23:10; Alma 9:26; D&C 19:23; 112:10; Abraham 2:19; Joseph Smith—History, footnote to 1:71, paragraph 5.

## President Hinckley

Elder Russell M. Nelson has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Earl C. Tingey.

## Elder Earl C. Tingey

My beloved brothers and sisters, I am thankful for the opportunity to express my love and appreciation to the Lord for the call that came to me last December. I accept the call. I am grateful for the opportunity to bear testimony of Jesus Christ. I will consecrate all of my time, energy, and talent to magnify this calling. I express appreciation to the Brethren; my wife, Joanne; our children; grandchildren; our parents and extended family; and to all of our friends and neighbors who have voiced confidence in my ability to do this work.

## The redemption of the dead

I have been called to serve in the Family History Department of the Church, and I would like to speak of that today. Here we see the great work of the redemption roll forth in its decreed course.

I salute the thousands of workers, volunteers, and service missionaries who, as the scriptures say, "wear out [their] lives" (D&C 123:13) to redeem those who are living beyond the veil. Their complete and unselfish service is a true demonstration of the love we should have for the Savior and our fellowmen.