

grateful to the Lord for temples. The blessings of the House of the Lord are eternal. They are of the highest importance to us because it is in the temples that we obtain God's greatest blessings pertaining to eternal life. Temples really are the gateways to heaven."

He said: "May we remember always, as we [visit and work in these glorious temples], that the veil may become very thin between this world and the spirit world. I know this is true." He declared, "It is well also that we keep in mind that it is all one great program on both sides of the veil and it is not too important whether we serve here or over there, as long as we serve with all our heart, might, mind, and strength."<sup>2</sup>

President Benson, your words are welcomed. We have heard them. We shall

follow them. They, like the temples you so much love, are as a refuge from life's storms—even a never-failing beacon guiding us to safety.

I echo the feelings of one and all, President Benson, in saying we love you and ever pray for you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. "What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple," *Ensign*, Aug. 1985, p. 8.
2. "Temple Memories" (address given at the Denver Colorado Temple dedication, 25 Oct. 1986).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now speak to us.

## Elder M. Russell Ballard

### Youth, live morally clean lives

This morning I want to speak primarily to the young men and young women of the Church. I pray for the Spirit to help me inspire you young people to want to live righteous lives.

Some of you may not understand our Heavenly Father's plan well enough to appreciate how important living a morally clean life is if you want to enjoy peace, happiness, and self-esteem. When you understand, the truths of the gospel will give you the guidance you need to be worthy members of the Church. When you accept the basic principles of the gospel and commit to live them, you will have the spiritual insight that will help you be young men and women of purity, integrity, and faith.

Unfortunately we live in a world that is awash in all kinds of moral pollution, including drugs, violence, filthy language, and pornography in literature, and videotapes, films, and television shows that promote illicit sex and promiscuity as

being normal. A national debate is raging to make elective abortion acceptable.

With challenges like these, you need to remember that you do not face them alone. There are people who love you and want you to be happy. We want the very best for you. Most especially, your Father in Heaven loves you and wants you to have joy and happiness. He has made marvelous promises to His faithful children who love Him, who are baptized, and who keep His commandments.

### Baptismal covenants

When you entered the waters of baptism, you made a promise to the Lord that you would "humble [yourselves] before God, . . . and witness before the church that [you] have truly repented of all [your] sins, and are willing to take upon [yourselves] the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by [your] works that [you] have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of [your] sins" (D&C

20:37). You were therefore bound by covenant to “a godly walk and conversation, . . . walking in holiness before the Lord” (D&C 20:69).

Many of you were baptized when you were eight years old, and you may not realize that this is the promise you made to your Heavenly Father when you were baptized. Always remember that you are under this covenant. Your Heavenly Father has promised in return that He will give marvelous blessings to those who honor their covenants, keep His commandments, and endure faithfully to the end. They will be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise and will be “given *all things*” (D&C 76:55; italics added; see also 76:50–54, 70), including an inheritance in the celestial kingdom (see 2 Nephi 31:16–20).

The Apostle Paul wrote that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Those who live clean lives and keep the commandments “shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever” (D&C 76:62). They “shall have eternal life, . . . the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

### **Priesthood covenants**

I remind you young men who have been ordained to the priesthood that you have made an additional covenant with God. When you were ordained, you made a sacred promise with the Lord that you would honor your priesthood faithfully. (See D&C 84:33–42.) We are pleased to know that many of you are true and faithful in every way to your priesthood covenants and are preparing yourselves to receive the Lord’s promised blessings. Unfortunately we know also that too many young men of the priesthood pay little attention to the serious nature of their sacred promises made with Heavenly Father.

### **Keeping covenants helps resist Satan**

Let me explain why you young men and women must keep your covenants you have made with God. In the pre-mortal world before we left the presence of Heavenly Father, He warned and cautioned us about new experiences we would have in mortality. We knew that we each would have a physical body of flesh and bone. Never having been mortal before, we had no experience dealing with the temptations of mortality. But Heavenly Father knew and understood. He charged us to control our mortal bodies and to make them subject to our spirits. Our spirits would have to master the physical temptations that our bodies would encounter in a temporal world. Spiritual power over the influence of Satan comes to us by keeping the commandments of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Being here on earth for the first time in our eternal existence, we are away from the protective presence of our Father in Heaven and are subject to the influence of Satan and his followers. Remember that Satan even tried to tempt the Savior into betraying the promises He had made to God. After Jesus was baptized, He went into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days. Satan chose that moment during Christ’s hunger and physical weakness to tempt Him. But Jesus did not succumb; He stood firm.

Satan will seek to tempt us at times and in ways that exploit our greatest weaknesses or destroy our strengths. But his promises of pleasure are short-lived deceptions. His evil design is to tempt us into sinning, knowing that when we sin we separate ourselves from our Heavenly Father and the Savior, Jesus Christ. We begin to move away from Heavenly Father’s promised blessings toward the misery and anguish in which Satan and his followers languish. By sinning we put ourselves in Satan’s power.

Now, my dear young friends, I understand the struggles you face every day in keeping the commandments of the

Lord. The battle for your souls is increasingly fierce. The adversary is strong and cunning. However, you have within your physical body the powerful spirit of a son or daughter of God. Because He loves you and wants you to come home to Him, our Father in Heaven has given you a conscience that tells your spirit when you are keeping the Lord's commandments and when you are not. If you will pay more attention to your spiritual self, which is eternal, than to your mortal self, which is temporary, you can always resist the temptations of Satan and conquer his efforts to take you into his power.

### The trap of sinning a "little"

You must be honest with yourself and remain true to the covenants you have made with God. Do not fall into the trap of thinking you can sin a little and it will not matter. Remember, "the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance" (D&C 1:31). Some young men and women in the Church talk openly about sexual transgression. They seem to forget that the Lord forbids all sexual relations before marriage, including petting, sex perversion of any kind, or preoccupation with sex in thought, speech, or action. Some youth foolishly rationalize that it is "no big deal" to sin now because they can always repent later when they want to go to the temple or on a mission. Anyone who does that is breaking promises made to God both in the premortal life and in the waters of baptism. The idea of sinning a little is self-deception. Sin is sin! Sin weakens you spiritually, and it always places the sinner at eternal risk. Choosing to sin, even with the intent to repent, is simply turning away from God and violating covenants.

Gratefully, many of you young men honor your priesthood, and many young women "stand for truth and righteousness" as stated in the Young Women's motto (*Young Women Leadership Handbook* [1992], p. 5). We commend you for your fidelity and integrity.

For those who have strayed, the Savior has provided a way back. But it is not without pain. Repentance is not easy; it takes time—painful time! You deceive yourself if you believe you can break the promises you have made with Heavenly Father and suffer no consequence.

### Study For the Strength of Youth

You sustain the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. We prepared for you a pamphlet entitled *For the Strength of Youth*. Most of you know that this inspired pamphlet contains guidelines to help you measure your moral conduct. I urge you to read every word over and over again so you will understand what the Lord and His Church expect of you. The First Presidency message is so important that I will quote a few statements from it.

"Our beloved young men and women,

"We want you to know that we love you. We have great confidence in you. Because of that, we talk to you frankly and honestly. . . .

"God loves you as He loves each and every one of His children. His desire, purpose, and glory is to have you return to Him pure and undefiled, having proven yourselves worthy of an eternity of joy in His presence. . . .

"We counsel you to choose to live a morally clean life. The prophet Alma declared, 'Wickedness never was happiness' (Alma 41:10). Truer words were never spoken!

"You cannot do wrong and feel right. It is impossible! . . .

"We pray that you—the young and rising generation—will keep your bodies and minds clean, free from the contaminations of the world, that you will be fit and pure vessels to bear triumphantly the responsibilities of the kingdom of God in preparation for the second coming of our Savior" (pp. 3–5).

Please make sure you have a copy of the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* and regularly read it. Carry the small wallet-sized summary card with you. Read carefully the section in the pamphlet that teaches principles of sexual purity, and follow the counsel with exactness.

### **Repentance is the way back**

Those of you who have been unwise and have transgressed should read and pray about the section on repentance. This is also very important, so I will quote a few statements from this section:

“Some people knowingly break God’s commandments. They plan to repent before they go on a mission or receive the sacred covenants and ordinances of the temple. Repentance for such behavior is difficult and painful and may take a long time. It is better to not commit the sin. Certain sins are of such gravity that they can put your membership in the Church and your eternal life at risk. Sexual sins are among those of such seriousness.

“Where choices have already led to sexual impurity, repentance is the way back. Talk to your parents and your bishop. They love you and will explain to you how to repent and put your life in order again. Follow their counsel.

“The miracle of forgiveness is real, and true repentance is accepted by the Lord. Full repentance of some sins requires that we not only confess and resolve them with the Lord but that we also do so with the Church. The bishop and stake president have been appointed by revelation to serve as judges in these cases.

“Only the Lord can forgive sins, but these priesthood leaders can assist the transgressor in the process of repentance. . . . If you have sinned, the sooner you begin to make your way back, the sooner you will find the sweet peace and joy that come with the miracle of forgiveness” (pp. 17–18).

Stake and mission presidents and bishops and branch presidents recently received instructions from the First Presidency on recommending worthy and qualified members for full-time missionary service. Brethren, we expect that you will teach youth leaders, parents, and the youth these long-established principles. Missionaries must be morally clean and spiritually prepared by you to serve the Lord in today’s world. I urge you to follow the instructions precisely and to do all in your power to help young people avoid any sin that could disqualify them for service in the kingdom of God.

### **Honestly assess obedience to covenants**

My dear young friends, I encourage you to take time each week to be by yourself, away from television and the crowd. Have your scriptures with you, and as you read, ponder, and pray, take an honest look at your life. Evaluate where you stand with the promises you have made with Heavenly Father. If you have a problem, talk it over with the Lord in earnest and humble prayer. Counsel with your parents; they will help you. Your bishop and your Young Men and Young Women adult leaders will help. They love you and want you to be at peace with yourself so you can partake of the sacrament worthily each week. When all is said and done, however, only you know if you are living true to your covenants made with God.

You will be grateful, when the day comes for you to attend the temple, that you followed the counsel of the Lord and chose to be morally clean. May God bless each of you young men and women with a pure heart and a sincere desire to serve the Lord worthily.

I know this Church is true. I know God lives and Jesus is the Christ. I know that if you, the youth of the Church, will have the courage to keep your covenants and follow the counsel of your parents and Church leaders, you will have the desire and the strength to live worthy lives. You then will be prepared for your

responsibilities in your homes, in the Church, and in your communities and will be prepared to return to your Heavenly Father. May God bless every one of our precious youth, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The chorus sang "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief."

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### President Monson

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief."

Elder J. Richard Clarke of the Presidency of the Seventy will now address us. He will be followed by Bishop Richard C. Edgley, who was sustained as Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric at the October conference.

## Elder J. Richard Clarke

First, may I thank my grandchildren, who have been praying the last couple of weeks that their grandfather would have the Spirit of the Lord with him on this occasion.

### The Lord of Life

Springtime in Utah brings the anticipated renewal of life. Easter approaches, and once again we ponder the Resurrection and our Father's plan of salvation. The miracles of nature and the gospel combine to remind us that the Lord of Life is a God of miracles.

For many, perhaps the most spectacular miracle would be the raising of someone from the dead. The scriptures describe the supreme joy of the widows of Zarephath and Nain whose dead sons were restored to life (see 1 Kings 17:17-24; Luke 7:11-15). The most dramatic episode tells how the Savior went to the sepulcher of His beloved friend Lazarus, who had lain dead for four days. Asking them to take away the stone, "he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes" (John 11:43-44).

### Being born again through Christ

The Prophet Joseph Smith shared a profound insight which I'll rephrase in the

form of a question: *Is it any more incredible that one could be raised from the dead than to be spiritually reborn?* (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 191).

John the Apostle taught that the highest manifestation of our Heavenly Father's love was to send "his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

Few understood this during His ministry. The intellectual Nicodemus was impressed with the miracles of Jesus; but even with extensive knowledge of the scriptures he could not grasp the doctrine of spiritual rebirth, the transformation of the human soul, what it means to be born again (see John 3:1-10).

Nature provides some striking parallels. The late film producer Cecil B. DeMille shared this experience:

"One day as I was lying in a canoe, a big black beetle . . . climbed up to the canoe. I watched it idly for some time.

"Under the heat of the sun, the beetle proceeded to die. Then a strange thing happened. His glistening black shell cracked all the way down the back. Out of it came a shapeless mass, quickly transformed into beautifully, brilliantly-colored life. . . . There gradually unfolded iridescent wings from which the sunlight flashed a thousand colors. . . . The blue-green body took shape.