

long to be married but are not, from women who yearn for children but cannot bear them, from women who are at risk from emotional and physical abuse in their homes. I have learned from women who work in their homes and women who work outside their homes. I have learned from women who endure chemical dependencies, experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and chronic illness.

Not many of these women thought they were giving me a gift. Most of them thought they were asking for help. But all of them blessed me as I listened and learned from them.

Speaking the language of the Spirit

When I was called to the Relief Society general presidency six years ago this month, President Hinckley counseled me: "You bring a peculiar quality to this presidency. You will be recognized as one who represents those beyond the borders of the United States and Canada and, as it were, an outreach across the world to members of the Church in many, many lands. They will see in you a representation of their oneness with the Church." He gave me a blessing that my tongue might be loosed as I spoke to the people.

President Hinckley, I want to bear witness to the Lord before you and this congregation that your counsel and your blessing have been literally fulfilled.

I do not speak Korean or Spanish or Tongan. But when I received my assignment to go among the Relief Society sisters and their priesthood leaders in lands where those languages are spoken, I was filled with a great desire to speak to them in their own language. I drew strength from President Hinckley's words of comfort and blessing. With the help of the Church Translation Department and good coaches who spent hours working with me, I was blessed to deliver my addresses in Spanish, Korean, and Tongan as I went among those people. I could feel the Spirit carrying my words to their hearts, and I could feel "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22) bringing back to me their love, their joy, and their faith. I could feel the Spirit making us one.

Brothers and sisters, whether your fruits are peaches or papaya, and whether you bring them in bottles or in baskets, we thank you for offering them in love. Father in Heaven, may we be one and may we be Thine (see D&C 38:27), I pray in the sacred name of our Savior Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Who says the women of this Church don't have a powerful voice? Sister Chieko Okazaki, first counselor in the general Relief Society presidency, has spoken to us.

We will now be pleased to hear from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Which way do you face?

As I face this congregation, I sense the responsibility entrusted to me. As you face the General Authorities and officers of the Church, you also bear re-

sponsibility. We are all accountable for acting upon the truths that are taught.

Facing you, I am reminded of military days long ago when our platoon heard shouts from a sergeant: "Attention!" "Right face!" "Left face!" "About

face!" We learned to respond to those orders with instant precision. In retrospect, I don't recall ever having heard his command to "face upward." Yet scriptures tell us to "look to God and live."¹

My topic today relates to the first of the Lord's Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."² This commandment may be better known than obeyed. May I share a suggestion that I have found useful in testing my own allegiance to this commandment? When confronted with a challenging choice, I ask myself, "Which way do you face?"

Life without looking to God

Sadly, many individuals don't know where to find God, and exclude Him from their lives. When spiritual needs arise, they may look to the left, the right, or round about. But looking to other people on the same level cannot satisfy spiritual shortages. When the immortal spirit is starved, hunger persists for something more filling. Even when material success comes, there is a hollow ache if living well falls short of living worthily. Inner peace cannot be found in affluence accompanied by spiritual privation.

Invitation to come to the Lord

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints invite all to come unto Christ and enjoy the spiritual feast that His gospel provides. The Saints savor a sweet spiritual nourishment that sustains them through life. This sustenance comes because they have made covenants to take upon themselves the name of the Lord and strive to obey His precepts. Strength comes in recognizing and in being grateful for the Lord's gifts of immortality and the opportunity for eternal life.

Loyal citizens

These gifts are available to all. Citizens of many countries claim membership in the Church. Regardless of their flag or form of government, they find that allegiance to the Lord does not preclude their being loyal citizens of their nations. Fidelity to God enables one to develop a more profound patriotic allegiance and become a better citizen.

In addition to their national citizenship, members of the Church are also citizens of God's kingdom.³ Their commitment to it, however, may be variable. The great majority seek "first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness."⁴ Some allow their allegiance to God and His kingdom to slip below that of other interests in life. They have not yet determined which way they face.⁵

Representatives of the Lord

I perceived such confusion in the mind of a newspaper reporter who asked one of our leaders when a representative of such-and-such a country would become a General Authority. While that question was being answered, I thought about our beloved General Authorities born in the countries of Asia; of Europe; of North, Central, and South America; and of the islands of the sea. Though these Brethren come from many nations and speak several tongues, not one of them was called to represent his native country. Presiding quorums of the Church are not representative assemblies. Each leader has been called to face the people as a representative of the Lord, not the other way around.

General Authorities are "called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority."⁶ They are called as "especial witnesses"⁷ unto *all* the world, to teach and testify of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸

Obeying commandments of the Lord

No matter where we live or in what position we serve, all of us need to determine which way we face. God's commandments serve as a standard against which priorities can be measured. Our respect for the first commandment fashions our feelings for all the others. Consider the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy, for example.⁹ We live in a time when many people throughout the world have transferred their allegiance on the Sabbath from places of worship to places of amusement. Again I ask, "Which way do you face?"¹⁰

Scriptures give us encouragement to do right:

"If thou turn away . . . from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, . . . and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, . . .

"Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord."¹¹

Self-esteem is also earned by obedience to God's commandments regarding chastity.¹² Yet in our day those commands have been attacked and trivialized. The morality of self-discipline with appropriate "denial or restraint has been popularly depicted as unhealthy and dehumanizing." The truth is, "it is dehumanizing to define ourselves by our desires alone."¹³ Each human being is a child of God—created in His image—with natural appetites to control.

If we break God's first commandment, we cannot escape retribution. If we allow any other person or cause to come before allegiance to Him, we will reap a bitter harvest. Paul foresaw "destruction" for those "whose God is their belly."¹⁴ (I might include all forms of anatomical affection.) Any who choose to serve "the creature more than the Creator"¹⁵ deprive themselves of spiritual reward.

Thus, our priorities should be honestly evaluated in terms of that first commandment. If change in direction is needed, we may want to issue a self-command to "about face!" Doing so would please the Lord, who said, "Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations."¹⁶

Trees reach up for the light and grow in the process. So do we as sons and daughters of heavenly parents. Facing upward provides a loftier perspective than facing right or facing left. Looking up in search of holiness builds strength and dignity as disciples of Deity.¹⁷

Facing our families

Facing upward is crucial for successful parenting. Families deserve guidance from heaven. Parents cannot counsel children adequately from personal experience, fear, or sympathy.¹⁸ But when parents face children as would the Creator who gave them life, parents will be endowed with wisdom beyond that of their own. Wise mothers and fathers will teach members of their family how to make personal decisions based upon divine law.¹⁹ They will teach them that "this life is the time . . . to prepare to meet God."²⁰ They will teach them that decisions of a moral and spiritual character *cannot* be based on freedom to choose without accountability to God for those choices.²¹ With that understanding, parents and children will be rewarded with strength of character, peace of mind, joy, and rejoicing in their posterity.²²

Facing our neighbors

Similarly, relationships with neighbors, friends, and associates will be enhanced as we approach them with "the pure love of Christ."²³ A desire to emulate the Lord provides powerful motivation for good. Our craving for compassion will

cause us to act in accord with the Golden Rule.²⁴ By so doing we will find joy in feeding the poor, clothing the naked, or doing volunteer work of worth.

Service to neighbors takes on new stature when we first look to God. In the Church, when priesthood and auxiliary leaders face their congregations, quorums, and classes as would the Lord, they learn that it does not matter *where* they serve, but *how*. Position in the Church does not exalt anyone, but faithfulness does. On the other hand, aspiring to a visible position—striving to become a master rather than a servant—can destroy the spirit of the worker and the work.

Occasionally confusion exists regarding servants and masters. The Bible reports that a group of men “had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest” among them. Jesus said, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and *servant of all*.”²⁵

Was Jesus asking His disciples to respond to random requests from the crowd or to serve tables?²⁶ No! He was asking them to serve in *His* way. The people were not to be masters of His disciples. The *Lord* is their Master.

In rendering service to others, which way do we face? From the right or the left, we can only push or pull. We can lift only from a higher plane. To reach it we don’t look sideways; we look up to our Master. Just as we must look to God to *live* well, so we must look to God to *serve* well.

Attitudes of effective disciples

If we are called to positions of leadership, we are accountable to the Savior for the acts we perform in that office. Those actions are shaped by attitudes, and attitudes are elevated while lowering our heads in humble prayer. So state words in the hymn “Before Thee, Lord, I Bow My Head”:

Look up, my soul; be not cast down.
Keep not thine eyes upon the ground.
Break off the shackles of the earth.
Receive, my soul, the spirit’s birth.
And now as I go forth again
To mingle with my fellowmen,
Stay thou nearby, my steps to guide,
That I may in thy love abide.²⁷

Praying helps us to face trials in life. Prayer centers our attitudes precisely. With that focus we do not wander to the right or left through land mined with traps of temptation. Disciples do not flirt with danger at the jagged edge of disaster. Experienced mountain climbers do not lean toward the dangerous edge but toward safety, with ropes and other safeguards to secure them to those they trust. So it is with us. When we climb mountainous challenges of life, we should lean toward our Master and be yoked with Him, clinging tightly to the iron rod of the gospel, to family, and to trusted friends.

President David O. McKay taught this about edges: “Many of us through selfishness are lingering near the edge of the animal jungle where Nature’s law demands us to do everything with self in view.”²⁸

The Lord said, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.”²⁹ I have learned that such faith gives emancipating power. Facing God first lets us decide firmly what we shall not do; then we are free to pursue what we ought to do.

Recently President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: “Love of God is the root of all virtue, of all goodness, of all strength of character, of all fidelity to do right. Love the Lord your God, and love His Son, and be ever grateful for their love for us. Whenever other love fades, there will be that shining, transcendent, everlasting love of God for each of us and the love of His Son, who gave His life for us.”³⁰

Brothers and sisters, race, nationality, occupation, or other interests need not stand in the way. All can look to the Lord. All can place Him first in their lives. Those who do so and remain faithful will qualify for His sublime promise: "Every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am."³¹ This glorious destiny can be ours. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Alma 37:47; see also Psalm 5:3; Alma 5:19; 37:37.
2. Exodus 20:3; see also Doctrine and Covenants 20:17-19.
3. See Ephesians 2:19.
4. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38.
5. See Joel 3:14.
6. Articles of Faith 1:5.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 107:25.
8. What they speak "when moved upon by the Holy Ghost" represents the will of the Lord, the mind of the Lord, and the word of the Lord (Doctrine and Covenants 68:4).
9. Among the many, see Exodus 20:8; 31:15; 35:2; Leviticus 23:3; Jarom 1:5; Mosiah 13:16; 18:23; Doctrine and Covenants 68:29.
10. See 1 Kings 18:21.
11. Isaiah 58:13-14.
12. Some of the many are Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:22; Matthew 5:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 3 Nephi 12:28; Doctrine and Covenants 42:24; 59:6.
13. Report of the Ramsey Colloquium, *Wall Street Journal*, 24 Feb. 1994, A-18.
14. Philippians 3:19.
15. Romans 1:25.
16. Ezekiel 14:6.
17. The importance of looking up to the Lord is also emphasized in a vision to the Prophet Joseph Smith, dated January 21, 1836:
"I saw the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, who are now upon the earth, who hold the keys of this last ministry, in foreign lands, standing together in a circle, much fatigued, with their clothes tattered and feet swollen, with their eyes cast downward, and Jesus standing in their midst, and they did not behold Him. The Savior looked upon them and wept" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 107).
18. See Proverbs 3:5.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:20-21, which teaches that any blessing from God is obtained by obedience to that law upon which the blessing is predicated.
20. See Alma 34:32.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 101:78.
22. The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 9:22 adds this insight: "When thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall tremble with joy."
23. Moroni 7:47.
24. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12).
25. Mark 9:34-35; italics added. Another gospel writer phrased that truth in a similar way: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). In these scriptures, the word *servant* comes from the Greek noun *diakonos*, which means "one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master." *Diakonos* is the Greek word from which the English word *deacon* is derived.
26. See Acts 6:2.

27. *Hymns*, no. 158.
28. In Conference Report, Apr. 1957, 7. President James E. Faust issued this solemn warning:
 "Living on the edge can also mean being perilously close to the Bottomless Pit. . . .
 "Some of you may think that you will discover your strengths and abilities by living on the edge. . . . There will always be enough risks that will come to you naturally without your having to seek them out" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 61; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 46).
29. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.
30. Address delivered at Ricks College regional conference, 29 Oct. 1995; reported in *Church News*, 2 Mar. 1996, 2.
31. Doctrine and Covenants 93:1. He has also given many other promises, among which are:
 "Blessed are you; for as you now behold me and know that I am, even so

shall ye come unto me and your souls shall live" (D&C 45:46).

"I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88).

The chorus sang "High on the Mountain Top."

President Hinckley

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "High on the Mountain Top."

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will be our concluding speaker for this session.

President Boyd K. Packer

Youth can avoid unseen dangers

These marvelous young people in this choir are typical of the young people that we meet all over the Church. How we love them. How grateful we are for you, our youth. *Nothing* is more precious than our children, our youth. And it is to you, our youth, that I speak.

Several years ago in Africa I learned how dangerously invisible crocodiles can be. I then warned our youth about unseen spiritual crocodiles lying in wait to destroy them.

Those invisible dangers have greatly increased in number, and now there are many kinds of them.

Some of them are like land mines hidden about in a field you must cross on

your way to maturity. Neighborhoods and schools, which once were safe, are no longer secure. Fortunately you have within you a spiritual power much like a mine detector. If you learn how it works, it will warn you of the presence of unseen crocodiles and mines, and you can avoid trouble.

Regulations of the Word of Wisdom

Three years after the organization of the Church, a revelation came which described our day in these prophetic words: "Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving