

resignation as an officer. She showed me their letter of refusal—they needed her wisdom, her strength of character.

She often spoke of being tested in her calling. Perhaps the greatest test came when, as a young woman, she learned to respect the power and authority inherent in the priesthood and that an ordinary man serving as bishop can receive direction from the Lord in calling members to serve.

The Lord honors those who serve Him

The spirit of service does not come by assignment. It is a feeling that accompanies a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Lord said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."¹²

"For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

"Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory."¹³

I bear witness that the power and inspiration of calls is present in the Church. I bear witness that the gospel is true and say God bless you who serve, bless you for what you do; and bless you

who serve, bless you for what you are! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Helen Hunt Jackson, "October's Bright Blue Weather," in Hazel Felleman, sel., *The Best Loved Poems of the American People* (1936), 566.
2. *Hymns*, no. 249.
3. Mosiah 18:10.
4. Acts 10:38.
5. D&C 58:26.
6. D&C 58:27–29.
7. John Milton, "On His Blindness," in *The Complete Poems of John Milton*, ed. Charles W. Eliot (1909), 84.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 154.
9. D&C 42:11.
10. D&C 36:2.
11. Jacob 1:17; italics added.
12. John 12:26.
13. D&C 76:5–6.

The chorus sang "I Believe in Christ."

President Hinckley

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Twelve, has just spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "I Believe in Christ."

Elder Richard B. Wirthlin of the Seventy will now speak to us, and he will be followed by Elder Carl B. Pratt, also a member of the Seventy.

Elder Richard B. Wirthlin

As a young missionary in Switzerland, I was strongly impressed with the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to change dramatically people's lives for the better, bringing to those who follow the precepts of the restored gospel peace of mind, self-worth, and joy. Such feelings are not always easy to achieve. After all,

we live in an often mean and brutal world. Our societies too frequently reflect violence, hatred, and immorality.

Our day foreseen

The Apostle Paul accurately described our day in his letter to Timothy:

“In the last days,” he said, “perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, . . . despisers of those that are good, . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; . . . Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”¹

Information, not wisdom

Clearly, the stresses and strains that assault us cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge. In fact, a current weekday edition of the *New York Times* contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a whole lifetime in 17th-century England.²

But unfortunately, the explosive increase in information has not led to a parallel increase in true wisdom. For example, Medicare has one of the largest data banks in the world. Yet it sent an official letter to a retired housekeeper which explained the reason for terminating her benefits in this way: “Your benefits have been denied because of your death. If you believe this information is not correct, please contact the Social Security Administration.”³

Situational ethics

Many have referred to the current era as the information age. But it is ironic that, in an information-rich era, the biggest threat to our world’s societies, rich or poor, and to each of us personally is the absence of moral clarity and purpose. Take the United States, for example, where 96 percent say they believe there is a God;⁴ yet a full 79 percent also believe that “there are few moral absolutes—what is right or wrong [they believe] usually varies from situation to situation.”⁵

Societies structured by situational ethics—the belief that all truths are relative—create a moral environment defined by undistinguished shades of gray.

An imperative need: a consistent moral compass

We cannot cope with the confusions and the challenges of this world unless we use a clear and consistent moral compass that will unerringly take us through our own personal trials and the tugs and pulls of our own temptations—a compass that will chart our way to peace of mind, self-worth, and joy.

Four absolute truths

This moral compass is built around four absolute truths. The first absolute truth is that there is a loving Father in Heaven, and His Son, Jesus Christ, is our personal Savior—a more certain truth than any worldly fact. This concept is expressed with unmatched eloquence in 1 John: “Hereby perceive we the *love* of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”⁶ Nothing could provide a truer “north” for every person’s own moral compass.

The second absolute truth is that there is an adversary—Satan, the tempter—who would lead us away from God and His infinite peace.

Note that the Hebrew translation for *devil* is the “spoiler.”⁷ Satan is the spoiler because he would confound our moral compass and spoil our journey back to a loving Father in Heaven.

Satan, “the father of . . . lies,”⁸ increasingly uses various devices, ancient and modern, to confuse us. He would convince us that joy *is not* where it is. And contrarily, he would have us believe that joy *is* where it is *not*. One of Satan’s most spiritually damaging lies, which undermines our sense of self-worth and hope, is that we cannot be forgiven of our sins.

The third absolute truth is that all of us choose our own course, endowed by agency. This truth is clearly expressed in

the Book of Mormon: "Wherefore, men are free . . . free to choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose captivity and death, . . . for [the devil] seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself."⁹

Yes, who we are is the sum of all the choices we make. We should always remember that our choices do not begin with the act, but in the mind with the idea. As a poet stated:

Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny."¹⁰

Given our agency, we are therefore individually responsible for our ideas, acts, habits, character, and, yes, even our destiny.

The fourth absolute truth is that the temptations of the devil can always be overcome by renewed faith in God and by repentance. Yes, when we stray from that narrow and straight way, marked by our moral compass, our footing can be restored on the road that surely leads to salvation and eternal life.

When Christ went to the Garden of Gethsemane, clearly knowing of His impending Crucifixion, He prayed to His Father for His Apostles as well as for each of us. In that prayer, He commands us to avoid evil, but in His infinite compassion He also asks the Father to "keep [us] from the evil."¹¹

The light will shine out of darkness

Life will bring to each of us challenges and setbacks—both dark days and better ones. But remember these words of Paul:

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. . . .

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; . . . cast down, but not destroyed."¹²

Paul also reminds us gently, in fitting words for an information age, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."¹³

Yes, we can experience wisdom, peace of mind, self-worth, and joy not only in the life to follow but in the life each of us lives today by walking in the Savior's footsteps, guided by an unfailing compass calibrated on these four eternal and absolute truths.

Expressions of gratitude

In closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, his Counselors, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, my brethren in the Quorums of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric. I thank them for the inspiration that I have seen translated into so many actions that build and strengthen the members of the Church, and nonmembers as well. I express heartfelt gratitude to my family, who give unstinting support, and for the healing grace of prayer and priesthood blessings which recently I have felt so powerfully and personally. I am grateful for a living and loving Father in Heaven, for His Only Begotten Son, and for the peace and joy this knowledge brings. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 2 Timothy 3:1–4, 7.
2. See Richard Saul Wurman, *Information Anxiety* (1989), 32.
3. *1997 Page a Day Notes: The 365 Stupidest Things Ever Said* (1996).
4. 1997 Gallup study, in *Emerging Trends*, Apr. 1997, 1.
5. 1990 Wirthlin Worldwide study.
6. 1 John 3:16; italics added.

7. Bible Dictionary, "Devil," 656; see also Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (1970), 252.
8. 2 Nephi 2:18; see also Ether 8:25.
9. 2 Nephi 2:27.
10. Anonymous, quoted in John Bartlett, ed., *Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed. (1968), 1100.
11. John 17:15.
12. 2 Corinthians 4:6, 8-9.
13. 1 Corinthians 1:25.

Elder Carl B. Pratt

Love for Latin America

Brothers and sisters, I bring you greetings from the Saints of southern Mexico. I was born in Mexico, as were my father and my grandfather before me. Although I was raised and educated in the United States from about six years of age, I retained throughout my life a love for and a fascination with Latin America, its wonderful people, and its kaleidoscope of cultures. Although as a child I was always aware of my family roots in Mexico and their role in the establishment of the Lord's kingdom there, my real love began when, as a young missionary in Argentina, I watched people, prepared by the Spirit, eagerly accept the gospel and I saw the peace and joy that it brought to their lives. My growing love was not just for Latin America but for the work of the Lord among the people there.

So in 1975, when I was less than four years out of law school, there was no hesitation on my part when I was offered a position as Church legal counsel in South America. With three small children, my wife and I moved to Montevideo, Uruguay. We were blessed with five more children in the ensuing years, born to us in various countries of South America. Our children have been raised in the Spanish-speaking countries of the world, and each one has a deep appreciation for the diversity in their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Unfolding of the Lord's work

In the past 22 years we have had a front row seat to watch the explosive unfolding of the Lord's work in Latin America. Literally millions have joined the Church in these years, and we have seen it grow from a mere handful of stakes to over 700 at the present time. We have six functioning temples and five more under construction in these countries. What a tremendously exciting time to be alive and to be involved in this great work of blessing our Father's children.

Yes, these past years have been incredibly exciting, challenging, and immensely enriching for us as a family, but we have learned much more than geography, culture, and language. We have learned new and deeper meanings for words like *love, joy, service, and sacrifice*. For example, we have watched families save for years and then travel for up to 72 hours on a cramped bus, with small children over poor roads, just to be able to enjoy the blessings of the sacred ordinances of the temple. We have watched humble, devoted priesthood and auxiliary leaders strive to build the kingdom and to bless the lives of the Saints, but without having the advantages of telephones or personal vehicles.

Differences in wards' welcoming spirits

We have also learned that no one culture, people, or country has a corner