

age and majesty. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir and congregation sang  
 "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

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### President Hinckley

We will now be pleased to hear from Sister Virginia U. Jensen, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency. She will be followed by Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

## Sister Virginia U. Jensen

### Love and reverence for prophets

One evening when I was 11 years old, I heard a commotion outside my window. I looked out the window, and in the street were newsboys carrying stacks of newspapers in their arms announcing the news that President George Albert Smith, the eighth President of the Church, had died. President Smith had been the only prophet I had known in my short time on earth. It was during his administration that I first felt the stirrings of a testimony, and even then I knew how important God's prophets are. I had been taught in Primary and in my home by loving parents that President Smith was our earthly link to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, that They could talk to me through him. What an empowering concept for a young girl! The Spirit had confirmed in my 11-year-old mind that this was true. When I learned of his death, I felt a tremendous loss.

However, just five days after President Smith's death, President David O. McKay stood in this tabernacle and spoke to those assembled. He had just been unanimously sustained as the prophet, seer, and revelator by the Saints. As he brushed back the tears, he said: "No one can preside over this Church without first being in tune with the head of the Church, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is our head. This is his Church. . . . With his guidance, with his inspiration, we cannot fail."<sup>1</sup>

I quickly came to love and revere President McKay just as I had loved and revered President Smith. In fact, I remember seeing him stand at this pulpit, with his white hair gleaming, and thinking he looked just like an angel.

### "Come, listen to a prophet's voice"

Prophets ancient and modern were and are giants of the Lord, chosen and ordained before they came to this earth. Our prophets are men whom the Lord has raised up specifically to preside over the Church for the particular time in which they have served. The Lord is working through the leaders of His Church today, just as He has always done in the past.

President Wilford Woodruff said, "If we had before us every revelation which God ever gave to man . . . and they were piled up here a hundred feet high, the Church and kingdom of God could not grow, in this or any other age of the world, without the living oracles of God."<sup>2</sup>

Brothers and sisters, listen to the instructions and promise found in the Doctrine and Covenants:

"Wherefore, . . . thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

"For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith."<sup>3</sup>

The Lord's will to Abraham was not sufficient for the people of Moses' time. The will of the Lord to Moses was not sufficient for the people of Isaiah's time. Different dispensations required different instructions. That is true today. The dispensation in which we now live is a dispensation into which the knowledge of all other dispensations of the gospel has merged. What a blessing it is for us to live in this time when the fulness of the gospel is ours to bless our lives.

I would like to extend to all within the sound of my voice today an invitation previously written in a hymn: "Come, listen to a prophet's voice, and hear the word of God."<sup>4</sup> Every member of the Church of any age or circumstance will be touched and blessed by the inspired counsel of prophets of the Lord!

#### **A photographer's experience**

The story is told of an event that happened in New York when President David O. McKay returned from a trip to Europe:

"Arrangements had been made for pictures to be taken, but the regular photographer was unable to go, so in desperation the United Press picked their crime photographer—a man accustomed to the toughest type of work in New York. He went to the airport, stayed there two hours, and returned later from [the] dark room with a tremendous sheaf of pictures. He was supposed to take only two. His boss immediately chided him, 'What in the world are you wasting time and all those photographic supplies for?'

"The photographer replied very curtly, saying he would gladly pay for the extra materials, and they could even dock him for the extra time he took. . . . Several hours later the vice-president called him to his office, wanting to learn what happened. The crime photographer said, 'When I was a little boy, my mother used to read to me out of the Old Testa-

ment, and all my life I have wondered what a prophet of God must really look like. Well, today I found one.'"<sup>5</sup>

#### **Blessings of having living prophets**

Do we fully appreciate what a wondrous blessing it is to each one of us that we have found our prophet? The ways in which our lives have been enriched by listening to our prophet's voice are numerous. We have a clearer picture of who we are and what we mean to our Father in Heaven. We have received commandments and counsel to guide us, reminders to keep us on the straight and narrow, and encouraging words to spur us on when we become disheartened or discouraged. If we listen to the voices of the world, we will be misled. But if we listen to the voice of the Lord through His living prophet and follow his counsel, we will never go astray.

In a recent newspaper article President Hinckley was praised as "clearly a man for the season. . . . He's a hand shaker, a praiser, a man who knows what to say and how to say it, often with a sense of humor."<sup>6</sup> Brothers and sisters, those are just the things the general public sees. We as members of the Church see so much more. Through the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, we know that the true head of this Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, does communicate with us through President Hinckley. It was my blessing and privilege to feel that Spirit when I was called into President Hinckley's office to receive my call to the general Relief Society presidency one and a half years ago. Before I knew the purpose of my being there, I shook his hand and received a powerful personal witness that I was in the presence of a prophet of God. That witness made me feel exceedingly humble and reverent. If I was kind of quiet that day, President Hinckley, that is the reason.

We are so blessed to have a living prophet who makes connections that have never been made before. Joseph Smith made this prophecy in the dedication of the Kirtland Temple: "That thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."<sup>7</sup> President Hinckley has been prepared for our day, for a media-savvy world.

Outside the windows of our lives are many voices announcing the death of honesty, the death of integrity, the death of goodness and righteousness, even announcing the death of the traditional family. How blessed we are as Latter-day Saints to know that God can speak to us through our living prophet today and give us guidance and instruction and encouragement so that we may continue, just as the Lord's true Church continues, steadfast and confident on the path that leads us back to Him.

### **The prophet will never lead us astray**

There aren't many guarantees in this life. There isn't a car made with a warranty that covers everything. No bank on earth can absolutely guarantee that your money is completely safe. Even the *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval has a disclaimer written right on it! Nothing man-made or man-controlled can ever be truly guaranteed! But here's the miracle. The Lord has given some marvelous guarantees without any disclaimers. And this is one of them: He will choose the prophet, and He will never let that man lead us astray. Imagine for a moment the impact of that promise. There is at least one place we can turn for pure, unpoluted guidance.

As sisters in Relief Society, it is our work, under the direction of the priesthood, to assist in bringing women and their families back to Heavenly Father to live with Him again, as we all did before we came to this earth. The voice of

a living prophet bearing God's message is clear and sure and safe and direct.

### **Lessons taught in the proclamation on the family**

God's message was never more clear and sure or safe and direct than when President Gordon B. Hinckley read, as part of his message at the general Relief Society meeting held September 23, 1995, the proclamation on the family.<sup>8</sup> Look at the lessons God taught a floundering world through this proclamation:

Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God.

We are created in His image.

Our gender was determined before we came to earth and is part of our eternal identity.

We lived with Him before we came to earth.

God commanded us to bear children but warned that the powers of procreation were to be employed only within the sacred bonds of marriage.

God tells us through His prophet that we have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other as husband and wife and to rear our children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs.

The family is ordained of God.

Parents have specific duties and responsibilities. Fathers preside, provide, and protect, and mothers nurture.

In addition, the proclamation contains this very important warning—that those who abuse spouse or offspring or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will stand accountable before God.

Further is this warning—that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets. Brothers and sisters, we are in the midst of that reality at this very moment. It is the duty of all of us to protect and strengthen the family.

### Heed the words of the living prophet

I invite you again to “come, listen to a prophet’s voice.” The Prophet Joseph Smith established Relief Society as a result of a revelation from God, so that “knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time henceforth.” Joseph Smith promised, “You will receive instructions through the order of the Priesthood which God has established, through the medium of those appointed to lead, guide and direct the affairs of the Church in this last dispensation.”<sup>9</sup>

In Relief Society we are taught ways to protect and strengthen the family.

President Hinckley has said: “The best lies ahead. . . . If you will stay on the straight and narrow, the best lies ahead. It is a wonderful time to be alive. It’s a great time to be a member of this Church when you can hold your head up without embarrassment and with some pride in this great latter-day work.”<sup>10</sup>

“Come, listen to a prophet’s voice,” that you may know the will of God, that you may have His light to direct your

path. It is my prayer that you may also have a personal witness, as I have, that our living prophet today, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has soul-saving instructions for you and yours—instructions that, if followed, will lead us all back to our heavenly home, safe and unspotted from the world. I say these things in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 157.
2. “The Keys of the Kingdom,” *Millennial Star*, 2 Sept. 1889, 548.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 21:4–5.
4. *Hymns*, no. 21.
5. Arch L. Madsen, quoted in “Memories of a Prophet,” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1970, 72.
6. Cala Byram, “President Hinckley, 87, Charms World As He Leads Church,” *Deseret News*, 23 May 1998, p. A1.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 109:73.
8. See *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:607.
10. “Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley,” *Church News*, 2 Sept. 1995, 2.

## Elder Robert D. Hales

### The healing process of the soul

Since we assembled in general conference last April, as many of you know, I experienced my third heart attack, which necessitated bypass surgery. Because of skilled doctors; a caring and well-trained medical staff; my wife, Mary, who is my patient, loving, and constant caregiver; and the prayers offered by so many in my behalf, I have been blessed with renewed health and strength. Thank you for your concern and for your prayers.

My message today is how to aid the healing process of the soul. It is a message to lead you and me to the Great Healer, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a plan to read the scriptures, pray,

ponder, repent if necessary, and be healed with the peace and joy of His Spirit. May I share my ponderings as I went through the healing process.

### Pondering is important for healing

While I was lying in my hospital bed and for several weeks at home, my physical activity was severely restricted by intense pain which disabled my weakened body, but I learned the joy of freeing my mind to ponder the meaning of life and the eternities. Since my calendar was wiped clean of meetings, tasks, and appointments, for a number of weeks I was able to turn my attention away from matters of administration to matters of