

President Monson

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, followed by Bishop Keith B. McMullin of the Presiding Bishopric.

The choir and congregation will now sing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." Following the singing, Elder

Cree-L Kofford of the Seventy will address us. He will be followed by Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander, also of the Seventy.

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Elder Cree-L Kofford

I wonder if you have any idea how easy you are to love and how much I love you. Just before this session started, some of our grandchildren stopped by our hotel room. They had obviously been talking about Elder Marlin Jensen's talk of this morning. One of them said, "Are you scared, Grandpa?" I lied and said, "Not very." Another one said, "Don't worry, Grandpa, if you mess up, we'll still love you." But then reality came back into the room when someone added, "But, Grandpa, it would be very embarrassing." So I am going to try very hard not to mess up.

"Over this line you may not cross"

On June 26, 1858, what I believe to be the largest standing army in the history of the United States up to that date began its prearranged entry into Salt Lake Valley. They had come to quell a nonexistent rebellion. Almost anyone remotely familiar with the history of the Church can tell you that they marched in relative silence within a few yards of where this building now stands, through a city described by one writer as "deserted," and encamped some distance to the west. What followed is far less well known. In due course the army moved approximately 40 miles south of Salt Lake City to the village of Fairfield, a small farming community in Cedar Valley, home to what is estimated

to have been less than 200 people. Their local spiritual leader was John Carson, my great-grandfather.

Imagine how this small congregation must have felt. After all, how would you like to wake up some morning and find that several thousand soldiers, together with over 3,000 wagons, 10,000 oxen, and 12,000 mules, had moved into your ward? The challenges were immediate. From our oral family history, and subject to all of the romanticizing and inaccuracies of such histories, we learn that Bishop Carson was gravely concerned about the welfare of the people over whom he presided. All of the challenges that attended army encampments of that time descended upon Fairfield almost overnight.

To protect the members of the congregation as much as possible, Bishop Carson met with the commander of the fort, who often dined at his hotel and with whom he developed a good relationship based upon mutual respect. The two leaders surveyed the situation and then by agreement drew a line upon the ground. No army personnel would cross into the civilian community without specific approval of their superiors. And members of the congregation would not cross into the fort without specific approval from Bishop Carson. The line on the ground represented an unspoken command: "Over this line you may not cross."

When we were children, a line on the ground had special significance. Whenever boyhood tempers caused disagreement, the time-honored solution called for a line on the ground. The antagonists stood on opposite sides of the line, attempting to act as intimidating as possible. Someone would say, "Step over the line and you'll be sorry," though they usually didn't say it in those genteel words. In those moments I learned the great value of a line on the ground and the consequences of stepping over it. In the years that have followed, I have come to understand that figurative lines on the ground are placed there by a loving Heavenly Father who seeks to protect us from Lucifer's army.

"Your name is safe in our home"

While each of us may have dozens of lines on the ground in our life today, I would like to discuss just one of them—the line that says, "Keep each person's name safe in your home."

During the early years of my service as a General Authority, I was privileged to be in company with Elder Marion D. Hanks on one occasion when he related the following story. I use it here with his permission:

Oscar Kirkham was one of the great men of the Church and among the Church's most respected Scouters. He served in the First Council of the Seventy and was a significant presence wherever he went. Often in meetings he would rise to a "point of personal privilege" and then, when recognized, would proceed to say something good about someone. Near the end of his life, he spoke briefly at Brigham Young University on the theme "say the good word." On the morning that Elder Kirkham died, Elder Hanks was invited to the Kirkham family home. There he was handed a small, inexpensive notebook in which Elder Kirkham had kept his notes. The last two entries were: "Say

the good word" and "Your name is safe in our home" (see Marion D. Hanks, foreword to *Say the Good Word*, by Oscar A. Kirkham [1958], 4).

What a blessing it would be if all of us could follow that counsel, if each of our names truly could be safe in the home of others. Have you noticed how easy it is to cross over the line and find fault with other people? All too often we seek to be excused from the very behavior we condemn in others. Mercy for me, justice for everyone else is a much too common addiction. When we deal with the name and reputation of another, we deal with something sacred in the sight of the Lord.

Do not speak evil about others

There are those among us who would recoil in horror at the thought of stealing another person's money or property but who don't give a second thought to stealing another person's good name or reputation.

The old adage "Never judge another man until you have walked a mile in his footsteps" is as good advice today as it was the day it was first uttered. Someone once said:

There is so much good in the worst
of us,
And so much bad in the best of us,
That it ill behooves any of us
To find fault with the rest of us.
[In Hazel Felleman, sel., *The Best
Loved Poems of the American People*
(1936), 615]

The principle is not new, nor is it unique to our day and time. The book of Psalms from the Old Testament contains this urgent warning from the Lord: "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off" (Psalm 101:5).

James, a servant of the Lord in the meridian of time, repeated this eternal truth when he said:

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. . . .

" . . . Who art thou that judgest another?" (James 4:11-12).

And in this latter day, the Lord renewed His long-taught command in a revelation given through the prophet Brigham Young: "Cease to speak evil one of another" (D&C 136:23).

It is most significant to me that this simple commandment is set forth just a few verses from the Lord's words on the penalty for disobedience: "Be diligent in keeping all my commandments, lest judgments come upon you, and your faith fail you, and your enemies triumph over you" (D&C 136:42).

Accountable for our words

To those who doubt the importance of the commandment, may I pose two simple questions: (1) How can you say you love your fellowman when behind his back you seek to diminish his good name and reputation? (2) How can you say you love your God when you cannot even love your neighbor?

Any feeble attempt to justify such conduct only brings more forcibly to mind those explosive words of the Savior found in the book of Matthew:

"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? . . .

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:34, 36-37).

Children can remind families to speak only good

I would like to say a few words to the Primary children who may be listening.

Children, I've been trying to teach your moms and dads something very important, but I need your help. I'll make you a deal. If you will promise to listen very carefully, I promise not to talk very long.

Do you remember the story of Bambi, the little deer, and all of his friends in the forest? If you do you will remember that one of Bambi's good friends was a rabbit named Thumper. Thumper was about your age. He was a neat rabbit, but he had one problem. He kept saying bad things about people. One day Bambi was in the forest learning to walk, and he fell down. Thumper just couldn't resist the temptation. "He doesn't walk very good, does he?" Thumper blurted out. His mother felt very bad and said, "What did your father tell you this morning?" And then Thumper, looking down at his feet and kind of shifting his weight, said, "If you can't say somethin' nice, don't say nothin' at all." That's a good piece of advice that all of us need to follow.

What I need you to do, young people, is this. If you hear anyone in your family start to say something bad about someone else, will you please just stamp your foot and say in a loud voice, "If you can't say somethin' nice, don't say nothin' at all." Now, even though that isn't correct English, everyone will understand exactly what you mean. Now, Moms and Dads, that ought to make it a little easier to live the commandment.

I pray that the Lord will bless each of us that we may never cross over the line on the ground and that we may live so that it can be said, "Your name is safe in our home."

On this special Easter Day, I close with my solemn declaration, born of the Spirit, that Jesus Christ is indeed our Savior and our Redeemer and that salvation comes by and through His atoning sacrifice and in no other way. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.