

Elder Ben B. Banks

The road we call life

Brethren, I am delighted to be with you this evening. I too want to speak specifically with the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood. I love you and care very much about you.

In the new *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, the First Presidency says to you:

“Our beloved young men . . . , we have great confidence in you. You are choice spirits who have come forth in this day when the responsibilities and opportunities, as well as the temptations, are the greatest. You are at the beginning of your journey through this mortal life. Your Heavenly Father wants your life to be joyful and to lead you back into His presence. The decisions you make now will determine much of what will follow during your life and throughout eternity” (page 2).

I hope in some small way this evening that you can learn from my nearly 70 years of traveling this road we call life. Your parents or grandparents may have already told you this: “The older you get, the quicker time seems to pass.” It is as though one minute you are 12 with your whole life in front of you, and the next minute you are nearly 70 with an expanding waistline in front of you!

It is hard to believe it was nearly 13 years ago when I last spoke in general priesthood meeting. At that time I told the brethren about a journey I made by bicycle with my sons and drew from that experience the importance of preparing well for the journey of life.

Today I want to tell you about other journeys I have made and share the lessons I have learned from them.

Preparing for a bicycle trip—and for life

Recently some members of my family determined it would be fun to bicycle from Bozeman, Montana, to Jackson Hole,

Wyoming, in the United States. This 225-mile journey would take us three days, and we would cross the Continental Divide on three occasions. We determined that traveling through the mountain passes with good weather would be a wonderful experience that would help us appreciate God’s creations.

After careful planning and preparation, two of my sons and my only daughter and I set out on the first day to cycle to our overnight stop in Big Sky, Montana. The morning was perfect, and we expected a delightful journey. However, as we traveled along, dark clouds gathered and brought rain, which eventually became sleet and hail and made us extremely cold and wet and miserable. As we concluded day one of our journey and reached our overnight destination, I was reminded that life can be just like that day. Fortunately, we had prepared for all types of weather conditions; had we not done so, it would have been difficult to complete our journey that first day. At each stage of life’s journey, we should set out full of hope and optimism, but we should be prepared nonetheless to face opposition or hardship at some point.

Establish good patterns while young

The patterns you establish in your youth may accompany you throughout the rest of your mortal life. By making the right choices now, you will be able to take the path that will help you endure the coldest and bleakest moments later.

For example, if you are in the habit of using foul language, the longer you use it, the harder it is to change and stop using it. Better now to choose a different road, one that leads to cleanliness in thought and word and action so you can enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Imagine the difficulty of serving a mission and having bad language pop into your mind when you need to have the Spirit with you

as your constant companion. If using bad language is a problem for you, now is the time to change.

Give credit to God, not to ourselves

On day two of our trip, we headed to West Yellowstone. Everything was as it should be—the bicycles were running smoothly and our legs were rested as we progressed toward our second destination. It was then that I realized if we are not careful when everything is going just right in life, there can be a temptation to forget our Heavenly Father and give credit to ourselves for our happy state. Don't make that mistake.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 255–56).

The Book of Mormon is replete with accounts of those who were blessed by the Lord and then became boastful of their accomplishments. Eventually in their pride they left the correct path and lost all they had as they fell away from the truth. Make sure you don't become like the Nephites of old; always remember the true source of your blessings.

Start early to achieve goals

On day three of our journey, I learned that even though we may have some uphill struggles in our lives, our attitude will determine how we face them. On that day we crossed the Continental Divide three times, rising from an elevation of 4,800 feet to 8,300 feet. Climbing steep mountain passes on a bike requires the right attitude to get to the right altitude. It's the same with life. By setting worthwhile goals and keeping your eyes fixed on them, you will learn self-discipline and accomplish

much. Yes, there were times when climbing the steep mountain grades was as much as I could bear, but I didn't give up, because I was fixed in my purpose.

Young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, I urge you to set goals for yourselves, such as completing seminary, serving an honorable mission, graduating from college, and being worthy of a temple marriage. At your age these may seem like very big goals, but if you start climbing now you will be so much better prepared to accomplish them.

Rely on the Spirit in making decisions

Two years ago Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and I had the opportunity to go on a canoe trip into the Quetico wilderness area in Ontario, Canada, portaging from lake to lake. As we reached the halfway point across one of the larger lakes, the weather turned very bad, and the once tranquil water turned angry and perilous, tossing our little canoe to and fro.

We had a decision to make. Do we try to reach our planned destination, or do we head for the nearest island and wait for the storm to pass? The answer seems obvious now, but at the time it was not an easy decision to make. By carrying on, we might arrive at our planned campsite. By delaying our journey, we would arrive very late and may have to travel in the dark. As we pondered the options, we had the impression to head to the nearest island quickly. As we did so, a much worse-than-anticipated storm rolled by us. Had we elected to continue canoeing, we would have put our lives in great peril.

Here in mortality we are called upon to make serious decisions, the outcome of which can have a lasting effect upon our spiritual future. I encourage you to always be worthy to seek for the Spirit to help you always choose the right.

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi tells us, "Then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye

have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 31:18).

Enduring the journey brings happiness

As our family concluded the 225-mile bicycle journey, we learned that no matter how difficult things can become on this road we call life, great happiness is waiting for those who keep the commandments and endure to the end.

Young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, you have a responsibility to remain firmly focused on your eternal destination. Yes, life's journeys can have many ups and downs. Yes, there will be days when you will feel the going is tough. But as you stay on the right path, the reward

at the end of life's journey is well worth the moments of adversity you experience along the way.

Again, from the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, the First Presidency writes: "May you keep your minds and bodies clean from the sins of the world so you can do the great work that lies before you. We pray that you will be worthy to carry on the responsibilities of building the kingdom of God and preparing the world for the Second Coming of the Savior" (page 3).

My young friends, please know the importance of being wise by following the counsel of our prophets, and happiness will be yours throughout life's journey.

Of this I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Spencer J. Condie

Wilford Woodruff's missions bless others

As a young man of 27, Wilford Woodruff was ordained a priest on November 5, 1834. Eight days later he began a two-year mission in the southern states.¹ One night he and his companion found lodging with a family who provided them with a bare floor for a bed, which he described as "pretty hard after walking sixty miles without anything to eat."²

The next day they walked 12 miles through the rain until they came to the house of a man who happened to be a member of the Missouri mob. Brother Woodruff said:

"The family were about to sit down to breakfast as we came in. In those days it was the custom of the Missourians to ask you to eat even though they were hostile to you; so he asked us to take breakfast, and we were very glad of the invitation. He knew we were Mormons; and as soon as we began to eat, he began to swear about the Mormons. He had a large platter of bacon and eggs, and plenty of bread

on the table, and his swearing did not hinder our eating, for the harder he swore the harder we ate, until we got our stomachs full; then we arose from the table, took our hats, and thanked him for our breakfast. The last we heard of him he was still swearing. I trust the Lord will reward him for our breakfast."³

At the end of the first year of that mission he recounted that he had "traveled three thousand two hundred and forty-eight miles, held one hundred and seventy meetings, [and] baptized forty-three persons."⁴

His first mission to the southern states was followed by two brief missions to the Fox Islands off the coast of Maine⁵ and then subsequently two missions to England.⁶ During his latter mission in England, in 1840, he acknowledged that "through the blessings of God," he had been an instrument in bringing over 1,800 souls into the Church within a period of eight months.⁷

Wilford Woodruff claimed the Book of Mormon promise that "God has pro-