

The Voice of the Lord

October 2017 General Conference

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I testify that in this conference we have heard the Lord's voice. The test for each of us is how we respond.

First, a kind word for the little children. Yes, this is the last session, and yes, I am the final speaker.

Recently, while visiting the Provo City Center Temple, I admired a painting entitled *First Vision from Afar*. The painting depicts the light and power from heaven as the Father and Son visited the young Joseph Smith.

While not making a comparison with the very sacred event that ushered in the Restoration, I can imagine a similar visual that would reflect the light and spiritual power of God descending upon this general conference and, in turn, that power and light moving across the world.

I give you my witness that Jesus is the Christ, that He guides the affairs of this sacred work, and that general conference is one of the very important times He gives direction to His Church and to us personally.

Being Taught from on High

On the day the Church was organized, the Lord designated Joseph Smith a prophet, seer, and apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ¹ and said to the Church:

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

"For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; ... and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good."²

Later, all members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were also sustained and ordained as prophets, seers, and revelators.³

Now, as we meet under the direction of President Thomas S. Monson, we anticipate hearing "the will of the Lord, ... the mind of the Lord, ... the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation."⁴ We trust in His promise: "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same."⁵

In the commotion and confusion of our modern world, trusting and believing in the words of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve is vital to our spiritual growth and endurance.⁶

We have come together for this wonderful conference. Millions of Latter-day Saints and others of faith in more than 200 countries, speaking more than 93 languages, attend these sessions or read the conference messages.

We come having prayed and prepared. For many of us, there are pressing worries and earnest questions. We want to renew our faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ, and to strengthen our ability to resist temptation and avoid distractions. We come to be taught from on high.

The Mind and Will of the Lord

For the First Presidency and the Twelve, who normally speak each conference, the enormous responsibility of preparing their messages is both a recurring burden and a sacred trust.

Years ago, before serving as a General Authority, I asked Elder Dallin H. Oaks if he prepared a separate talk for each stake conference. He responded that he did not but added, "But my general conference talks are different. I may go through 12 to 15 drafts to be sure that I say what the Lord would have me say."⁷

When and how does the inspiration for general conference talks come?

With no topics assigned, we see heaven beautifully coordinating the subjects and themes of eternal truth each and every conference.

One of my Brethren told me that his subject for this conference was given to him immediately after his talk last April. Another mentioned three weeks ago that he was still praying and waiting upon the Lord. Another, when asked how long it had taken to compose an especially sensitive talk, responded, "Twenty-five years."

At times the central idea may come quickly, but the content and details still require enormous spiritual climbing. Fasting and prayer, study and faith are always part of the process. The Lord wants no pretense diminishing His voice to His Saints.

Direction for a general conference talk often comes in the night or the early morning hours, when the talk is far from the thoughts of the mind. Suddenly, unanticipated insight and, at times, specific words and phrases flow as pure revelation.⁸

As you listen, the messages you receive may be very literal or they may be customized just for you.

Speaking many years ago in general conference, I told of a phrase that entered my mind as I wondered if I was prepared to serve a mission. The phrase was "You don't

know everything, but you know enough!"⁹ A young woman sitting in general conference that day told me that she was praying over a proposal for marriage, wondering how well she knew the young man. When I spoke the words "You don't know everything, but you know enough," the Spirit confirmed to her that she *did* know him well enough. They have been happily married for many years.

I promise you that as you prepare your spirit and come with the anticipation that you will hear the voice of the Lord, thoughts and feelings will come into your mind that are customized especially for you. You have already felt them in this conference, or you will as you study the messages in the weeks ahead.

For Now and the Months Ahead

President Monson has said:

"Take the time to read the conference messages."¹⁰

"Ponder [them]. ... I have found ... that I gain even more from these inspired sermons when I study them in greater depth."¹¹

The teachings of general conference are the considerations the Lord would have before us now and in the months ahead.

The shepherd "goeth before [his sheep], and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice."¹²

Often His voice directs us to change something in our lives. He invites us to repent. He invites us to follow Him.

Think about these statements from this conference:

President Henry B. Eyring from this morning: "I bear my witness that God the Father lives and wants you to come home to Him. This is the true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows you, He loves you, and He watches over you."¹³

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf from yesterday: "I testify that when we embark upon or continue the incredible journey that leads to God, our lives will be better ... and the Lord will use us in remarkable ways to bless those around us and bring about His eternal purposes."¹⁴

President Russell M. Nelson from yesterday afternoon: "I promise that as you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day, including even the gripping plague of pornography and other mind-numbing addictions."¹⁵

Elder Dallin H. Oaks yesterday: "I testify that the proclamation on the family is a statement of eternal truth, the will of the Lord for His children who seek eternal life."¹⁶

And Elder M. Russell Ballard from just a few minutes ago: “We need to embrace God’s children compassionately and eliminate any prejudice, including racism, sexism, and nationalism.”¹⁷

Because we have an extra minute, I would like to just add a brief reflection about Elder Robert D. Hales. The First Presidency had told Elder Hales that he could give a brief message in the Sunday morning session if his health permitted it. While his health did not permit it, he prepared a message, which he finished last week and shared with me. Given his passing approximately three hours ago, I share just three lines from his talk.

Quoting Elder Hales: “When we choose to have faith, we are prepared to stand in the presence of God. ... After the Savior’s Crucifixion, He appeared only to those ‘who had been faithful in the testimony of [Him] while they lived in mortality.’ [D&C 138:12.] Those ‘who rejected the testimonies ... of the ... prophets [could not] behold [the Savior’s] presence, nor look upon his face.’ [D&C 138:21.] ... Our faith prepares us to be in the presence of the Lord.”

How kind of the Lord to impress upon President Russell M. Nelson right at the end of this morning’s session to quickly leave the building, skip his lunch, and hurry to the bedside of Elder Hales, where he could arrive and be there, his quorum president, with the angelic Mary Hales as Elder Hales graduated from mortality.

Responding to the Voice of the Lord

I testify that in this conference we have heard the voice of the Lord.

We should not be alarmed when the words of the Lord’s servants run counter to the thinking of the world and, at times, our own thinking. It has always been this way. I am on my knees in the temple with my Brethren. I attest to the goodness of their souls. Their greatest desire is to please the Lord and help God’s children return to His presence.

The Seventy; the Bishopric; the General Presidencies of the Relief Society, the Young Women, and the Primary; and other auxiliary leaders have added tremendous inspiration to this conference, as has the beautiful music and the thoughtful prayers.

There is a treasure chest of heavenly direction awaiting your discovery in the messages of general conference. The test for each of us is how we respond to what we hear, what we read, and what we feel.

Let me share an experience about responding to prophetic words from the life of President Russell M. Nelson:

In 1979, five years before his call as a General Authority, Brother Nelson attended a meeting just prior to general conference. “President Spencer W. Kimball challenged all present to lengthen their stride in taking the gospel to the entire world. Among the

countries President Kimball specifically mentioned was China, declaring, 'We should be of service to the Chinese. We should learn their language. We should pray for them and help them.'"¹⁸

At age 54, Brother Nelson had a feeling during the meeting that he should study the Mandarin language. Although a busy heart surgeon, he immediately secured the services of a tutor.

Not long after beginning his studies, Dr. Nelson, attending a convention, unexpectedly found himself sitting next to "a distinguished Chinese surgeon, Dr. Wu Yingkai. ... Because [Brother Nelson] had been studying Mandarin, he began [a] conversation [with Dr. Wu]."¹⁹

Dr. Nelson's desire to follow the prophet led to Dr. Wu visiting Salt Lake City and Dr. Nelson traveling to China to give lectures and perform surgical operations.

His love for the Chinese people, and their love and respect for him, grew.

In February 1985, ten months after his call to the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder Nelson received a surprise phone call from China pleading for Dr. Nelson to come to Beijing to operate on the failing heart of China's most famous opera singer. With the encouragement of President Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Nelson returned to China. The last surgical operation he ever performed was in the People's Republic of China.

Just two years ago, in October 2015, President Russell M. Nelson was once again honored with an official declaration, naming him an "old friend of China."

Then yesterday we heard the now 93-year-old President Russell M. Nelson speak of President Thomas S. Monson's plea to "each of us [in last April's conference] to prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon each day."

Just like he did as a busy heart surgeon, when he hired a Mandarin tutor, President Nelson immediately took the counsel of President Monson and applied it to his own life. More than just reading, he said that he "made lists of what the Book of Mormon *is*, what it *affirms*, what it *refutes*, what it *fulfills*, what it *clarifies*, and what it *reveals*."²⁰

And then, interestingly, just this morning, as a second witness, President Henry B. Eyring also spoke of his response to President Monson's admonition. Do you remember these words? "Like many of you, I heard the prophet's words as the voice of the Lord to me. And, also like many of you, I decided to obey those words."²¹

May we see these as examples for our own lives.

A Promise and a Blessing

I promise that as you hear the voice of the Lord to you in the teachings of this general conference, and then act on those promptings, you will feel heaven's hand upon you,

and your life and the lives of those around you will be blessed.²²

During this conference, we have thought of our dear prophet. We love you, President Monson. I close with his words given from this pulpit. I believe it is a blessing that he would want to give to each of us today, were he able to be with us. He said: "As we leave this conference, I invoke the blessings of heaven upon each of you. ... I pray our Heavenly Father will bless you and your families. May the messages and spirit of this conference find expression in all that you do—in your homes, in your work, in your meetings, and in all your comings and goings."

He concluded: "I love you. I pray for you. May God bless you. May His promised peace be with you now and always."²³

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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