

A Living Prophet for the Latter Days

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Father in Heaven has chosen the pattern of revealing truth to His children through a prophet.

When I was a young boy, I loved Saturday because everything I did on that day seemed like an adventure. But no matter what I did, it was always preceded by the most important thing of all—watching cartoons on television. One such Saturday morning, as I was standing by the television and flipping through channels, I discovered that the cartoon I expected to find had been replaced by a broadcast of the general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While looking at the television and lamenting that there was no cartoon, I saw a white-haired man in a suit and tie sitting in a nice chair.

There was something different about him, so I asked my oldest brother, “Who is that?”

He said, “That’s President David O. McKay; he’s a prophet.”

I remember feeling something and somehow knowing that he was a prophet. Then, because I was a cartoon-crazed young boy, I changed the channel. But I’ve never forgotten what I felt during that brief, unexpected revelatory moment. With a prophet, sometimes it only takes a moment to know.¹

Knowing by revelation that there is a living prophet on the earth changes everything.² It causes one to be uninterested in the debate about when is a prophet speaking as a prophet or whether one is ever justified in selective rejection of prophetic counsel.³ Such revealed knowledge invites one to trust the counsel of a living prophet, even if we do not fully understand it.⁴ After all, a perfect and loving Father in Heaven has chosen the pattern of revealing truth to His children through a prophet, someone who never sought such a sacred calling and who has no need of our help to be aware of his own imperfections.⁵ A prophet is someone God has personally prepared, called, corrected, inspired, rebuked, sanctified, and sustained.⁶ That is why we are never spiritually at risk in following prophetic counsel.

Whether we like it or not, all of us were chosen in some fashion in the pre-earth life to be born in these latter days. There are two realities that are associated with the latter days. The first reality is that Christ's Church will be reestablished on the earth. The second reality is that things are going to get really challenging. The scriptures reveal that in the last days there will be "a great hailstorm sent forth to destroy the crops of the earth,"⁷ plagues,⁸ "wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, ... and iniquity shall abound."⁹

When I was a child, those prophecies of the last days scared me and caused me to pray that the Second Coming would not come in my lifetime—with some success I might add so far. But now I pray for the opposite, even though the prophesied challenges are assured,¹⁰ because when Christ returns to reign, all of His creations will "lie down safely."¹¹

Current conditions in the world have caused some to panic. As God's covenant children, we do not need to chase after this or that to know how to navigate through these troubled times. We do not need to fear.¹² The doctrine and principles that we must follow to survive spiritually and endure physically are found in the words of a living prophet.¹³ That is why President M. Russell Ballard declared that "it is no small thing ... to have a prophet of God in our midst."¹⁴

President Russell M. Nelson has testified that "God's long-established pattern of teaching His children through prophets assures us that He will bless each prophet and that He will bless those who heed prophetic counsel."¹⁵ So the key is to follow the living prophet.¹⁶ Brothers and sisters, unlike vintage comic books and classic cars, prophetic teachings do not become more valuable with age. That is why we should not seek to use the words of past prophets to dismiss the teachings of living prophets.¹⁷

I love the parables used by Jesus Christ to teach gospel principles. I would like to share a real-life parable of sorts with you this morning.

One day I walked into the cafeteria at Church headquarters to have some lunch. After getting a tray of food, I entered the dining area and noticed a table at which all three members of the First Presidency were seated, along with one empty chair. My insecurities caused me to make a quick detour away from that table, and then I heard the voice of our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, saying, "Allen, there's an empty chair right here. Come and sit down with us." And so I did.

Near the end of the lunch, I was surprised to hear a loud crunching noise, and when I looked up, I saw that President Nelson had stood his plastic water bottle straight up and then flattened it and replaced the lid.

President Dallin H. Oaks then asked the question I wanted to ask, “President Nelson, why did you flatten your plastic water bottle?”

He replied, “It makes it easier for those who are handling recyclable materials because it doesn’t take up as much space in the recycling container.”

While pondering that response, I heard the same crunching sound again. I looked to my right, and President Oaks had flattened his plastic water bottle just like President Nelson. I then heard some noise to my left, and President Henry B. Eyring was flattening his plastic water bottle, although he had adopted a different strategy by doing it while the bottle was horizontal, which took more effort than with the bottle straight up. Noticing this, President Nelson kindly showed him the bottle-straight-up technique to more easily flatten the bottle.

At that point, I leaned over to President Oaks and quietly asked, “Is flattening your plastic water bottle a new recycling requirement of the cafeteria?”

President Oaks responded, with a smile on his face, “Well, Allen, you need to follow the prophet.”

I’m confident that President Nelson was not declaring some new recycling-based doctrine in the cafeteria that day. But we can learn from the prompt response¹⁸ of President Oaks and President Eyring to President Nelson’s example and President Nelson’s attentiveness to help teach those involved a better way.¹⁹

A number of years ago, Elder Neal A. Maxwell shared some observations and counsel that are prophetically on point with respect to our day:

“In the months and years ahead, events are likely to require each member to decide whether or not he [or she] will follow the First Presidency. Members will find it more difficult to halt longer between two opinions. ...

“... Let us leave a record so that the choices are clear, letting others do as they will in the face of prophetic counsel. ...

“Jesus said that when the fig trees put forth their leaves, ‘summer is nigh.’ ... Thus warned that summer is upon us, let us not then complain of the heat!”²⁰

The rising generation is growing up in a time when there are more fig leaves and there is more heat. That reality imposes a weightier responsibility on the already risen generation, particularly when it comes to following prophetic counsel. When parents ignore the counsel of the living prophet, they not only lose the promised blessings for

themselves but even more tragically teach their children that what a prophet says is insignificant or that prophetic counsel can be picked through in a smorgasbord fashion without concern for the resulting spiritual malnutrition.

Elder Richard L. Evans once observed: “Some parents mistakenly feel that they can relax a little as to conduct and conformity ... that they can ease up a little on the fundamentals without affecting their family or their family’s future. But if a parent goes a little off course, the children are likely to exceed the parent’s example.”²¹

As a generation that has the sacred charge to prepare the rising generation for its prophesied role in the latter days,²² which role must be fulfilled in a time when the adversary’s influence is at its peak,²³ we cannot be a source of confusion about the importance of following prophetic counsel. It is that very counsel that will allow the rising generation to see “the enemy while he [is] yet afar off; and then [they can make] ready” to withstand the enemy’s attack.²⁴ Our seemingly small deviations, quiet neglect, or whispered criticisms in response to prophetic counsel may result in our only walking dangerously near the edge of the covenant path; but when magnified by the adversary in the lives of the rising generation, such actions may influence them to leave that path altogether. Such a result is a generational price that is too high.²⁵

Some of you may feel you have fallen short in your efforts to follow the counsel of President Russell M. Nelson. If that is the case, then repent; begin again to follow the counsel of God’s chosen prophet. Set aside the distraction of childish cartoons and trust the Lord’s anointed. Rejoice because once again “there is a prophet in Israel.”²⁶

Even if you are unsure, I witness that we can withstand the heat of the latter days and even thrive in them. We are the Saints of the latter days, and these are great days. We were anxious to come to the earth at this time, having confidence that we would not be left to stumble when confronted by the adversary’s increasingly darker and more confusing mists²⁷ but rather to take counsel and direction from he who is authorized to say to us and the entire world, “Thus saith the Lord God.”²⁸ In the sacred name of the prophet whom God raised up, the Holy One of Israel,²⁹ even Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. President Russell M. Nelson recently invited the students at Brigham Young University to have the same personal revelatory experience: “Ask your Heavenly Father if we truly are the Lord’s apostles and prophets. Ask if we have received revelation on this and other matters” (“The Love and Laws of God” [Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 17, 2019], speeches.byu.edu). See also Neil L. Andersen, “The Prophet of God,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 26–27: “We have the privilege as Latter-day Saints to receive a personal witness that President Nelson’s call is from God.” The story of Alma’s conversion from listening to the prophet Abinadi provides further evidence that revelation concerning a prophet is available to all of us (see Mosiah 13:5; 17:2).
2. “We either have a prophet or we have nothing; and having a prophet, we have everything” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 122).
3. “They began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face” (Helaman 4:23; see also Doctrine and Covenants 11:25). “We sing and have done so constantly, ‘We thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet to guide us in these latter days.’ There are a great many who [ought to] put a postscript to that and say: ‘Provided he guides us to suit our own fancies and our own whims’” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* [2002], 80).
4. “Sometimes we will receive counsel that we cannot understand or that seems not to apply to us, even after careful prayer and thought. Don’t discard the counsel, but hold it close. If someone you trusted handed you what appeared to be nothing more than sand with the promise that it contained gold, you might wisely hold it in your hand awhile, shaking it gently. Every time I have done that with counsel from a prophet, after a time the gold flakes have begun to appear and I have been grateful” (Henry B. Eyring, “Finding Safety in Counsel,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 26; see also 3 Nephi 1:13; Doctrine and Covenants 1:14).
5. See 2 Nephi 4:17–18. “Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, ... but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been” (Mormon 9:31).

6. See Doctrine and Covenants 3:6–8; see also Doctrine and Covenants 93:47.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 29:16.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:97; see also Doctrine and Covenants 87:6.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 45:26, 27.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.
11. Hosea 2:18. “For I will reveal myself from heaven with power and great glory, with all the hosts thereof, and dwell in righteousness with men on earth a thousand years, and the wicked shall not stand” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:11).
12. See 1 Nephi 22:16–17; see also Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.
13. “For behold, they have rejected the words of the prophets. Wherefore, if my father should dwell in the land after he hath been commanded to flee out of the land, behold, he would also perish” (1 Nephi 3:18; see also 2 Nephi 26:3; Doctrine and Covenants 90:5).
14. M. Russell Ballard, “His Word Ye Shall Receive,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 65; *Liahona*, July 2001, 65.
15. Russell M. Nelson, “Ask, Seek, Knock,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 82. “No man can be more happy than by obeying the living prophet’s counsel” (*The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, ed. Clyde J. Williams [1996], 86).
16. “Keep your eye upon those who preside in the Church today, or tomorrow, and pattern your life after them rather than to dwell upon how ancient prophets may have looked or thought or spoken” (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* [1996], 525).
17. President Spencer W. Kimball once observed that “they who garnish the sepulchers of the dead prophets begin now by stoning the living ones” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 462). “The most important words we can hear, ponder, and follow are those revealed through our living prophet” (Ronald A. Rasband, “The Things of My Soul,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 40).

18. “When we hear the counsel of the Lord expressed through the words of the President of the Church, our response should be positive and prompt” (M. Russell Ballard, “His Word Ye Shall Receive,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 65; *Liahona*, July 2001, 65).
19. “The Church of Jesus Christ has always been led by living prophets and apostles. Though mortal and subject to human imperfection, the Lord’s servants are inspired to help us avoid obstacles that are spiritually life threatening and to help us pass safely through mortality to our final, ultimate, heavenly destination” (M. Russell Ballard, “God Is at the Helm,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 24).
20. Neal A. Maxwell, “A More Determined Discipleship,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1979, 69, 70.
21. Richard L. Evans, “Foundations of a Happy Home,” in Conference Report, Oct. 1964, 135–36.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 123:11; see also Robert D. Hales, “Our Duty to God: The Mission of Parents and Leaders to the Rising Generation,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010, 95–98.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 52:14.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 101:54.
25. See Mosiah 26:1–4.
26. 2 Kings 5:8.
27. “Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, ... for by doing these things ... the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 21:4, 6). “No man who ever followed the teachings or took advice or counsel from the one who stands as the representative of the Lord ever went astray” (*Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie [1998], 243).
28. Ezekiel 3:27. “For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 21:5).
29. See 1 Nephi 22:20–21; see also 3 Nephi 20:23.

