

# Oh, Lord, Keep My Rudder True

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## Matters of Loyalty

A recent event on our campus helps set the stage for my remarks today. It was covered thoroughly by the press, including an excellent editorial published in the *Daily Universe*.

The date was November 16, 1985—just over two months ago. We made history. Television covered it, the print media published it, and in the best Clint Eastwood fashion, we made Beano Cook’s day. BYU booted its own quarterback.

One of America’s truly distinguished philosophers, Josiah Royce, wrote:

*Loyalty is for the loyal man not only a good, but for him chief amongst all the moral goods of his life, because it furnishes . . . him a personal solution [to] the hardest of [all] human . . . problems, the problem: “For what do I live?” [The Philosophy of Loyalty (New York: Macmillan Co., 1908), p. 57]*

It is loyalty—loyalty to true principles and true people and honorable institutions and worthy ideals—that unifies our purpose in life and

defines our morality. Where we have no such loyalties or convictions, no standards against which to measure our acts and their consequences, we are unanchored and adrift, “driven with the wind and tossed,” says the scripture (James 1:6), until some other storm or problem or appetite takes us another direction for an equally short and unstable period of time. The older I get—which isn’t old enough yet—the more I believe Professor Royce must have been right. “For what do I live?” is, in a sense, the inquiry every LDS missionary invites his or her investigator to make. If there is honest consideration of that question, then eternal truth has a fighting chance to bless the children of God. And such matters of loyalty and honor are important at BYU, for “to make [young people] capable of honesty,” according to John Ruskin, “is the beginning of education.” Samuel Johnson said it even better: “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful” (Emerson Roy West, *Vital Quotations* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], p. 177).

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*Jeffrey R. Holland was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 21 January 1986.*

Let me go back to Robbie Bosco. There are a lot of reasons why that booing incident bothers me. First of all it bothers me that any BYU fan would boo anybody for any reason. If someone can explain to me the Christianity of that, I invite you to do so quickly. Obviously it bothers me that such an experience would be seared by Mr. Cook into the entire national memory as *the* most regrettable moment of the entire collegiate football season.

It bothers me that we would do this to a fellow student, a neighbor, a friend, a convert to the Church in this case. Not to mention, of course, that he also led us to two of our greatest years in BYU football history, including two conference championships, two post-season bowl games, a victory in the famed Kick-Off Classic, one undefeated season, and a national championship.

It bothers me that a very small handful of individuals could cast a cloud over a very fine game (which, by the way, we went on to win against a team that would end up fifth in the nation) and also cast something of a cloud over the whole season and, at least for me, cast a bit of a cloud over BYU football itself. At the same time I'm confident that this small handful of rabid fans on virtually every other day of the week are probably pretty decent folks who wouldn't think of speaking so shamefully to anyone's face but who somehow get caught up—or get caught down, as the case may be—in the fever of a game and watch their boorish behavior increase in direct proportion to the anonymity of the crowd and their own safe distance from a blitzing linebacker. Someone once said that no individual snowflake ever felt any responsibility for an avalanche. Maybe that is true in some activities on our campus as well.

What I wish to ask of you today is to be the kind of person who stands loyally by the principles and people and institutions to which you have declared allegiance and that probably have given you most of the blessings you enjoy. In that sense, what I say here has very little to do with fans or football or Beano Cook, whoever he is. The booing of a fellow human being is probably soon forgotten (except, perhaps, by the booees), so we apologize to Robbie and all others who have received unchristian treatment at our hands and

move on to ask the larger question: "If every BYU student had exactly the same sense of loyalty I have, what kind of school or church or nation or world would ours be?"

How much pressure is too much pressure to remain true? How much disappointment is too much disappointment to stand firm? How far is too far to walk with a discouraged friend or a struggling spouse or a troubled child? When the opposition heats up and the going gets tough, how much of what we thought was important to us will we defend and how much, in that inevitable tug and pull of life, will we find it convenient to give away?

As with so many abstractions that need to be made concrete, our homes and families are very good settings for an initial application. Would we, for example, stand by a younger brother or an older sister in times of despair or pain? Would we defend to the death our parents if they really needed our help? Even if our prayers are embarrassingly skimpy, don't we at least pray for the members of our family? I assume that those questions are easy to answer, because we say something like "Well, I love them" or "I owe it to them" or "They would do the same thing for me."

Yet what we so often fail to remember is that we *should* feel that way about everyone, that "family" is the true Christian appellation for the entire human race. Have we made the Sunday greeting of "Brother Jones and Sister Brown" too common to remember why we say it? Has our hasty reference to "Father in Heaven" grown stale and insignificant? Will we ever widen our circle of influence beyond that already claimed by the Pharisees, who even in their benighted state did not boo other Pharisees? "What reward have ye? . . . And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" (Matthew 5:46–47). In matters of loyalty we all have a long way yet to go.

### **Your Brother's Brother**

The late Alvin R. Dyer faced something of this challenge when he was a bishop many years ago. He had a member of his ward who said that smoking was the greatest single enjoyment he got out of life. He said, "At night I set my alarm every

hour on the hour and wake up to smoke a cigarette. Bishop, I love smoking just too much to give it up.”

A few evenings later the man’s doorbell rang at 10:00 p.m. There on the doorstep was Bishop Dyer.

“Well, Bishop, what on earth are you doing here at this hour? I’m ready to go to bed.”

“I know,” said Bishop Dyer. “I want to see you set that alarm and watch you wake up and smoke.”

“Good heavens, I can’t do that in front of you,” the man said.

“Oh, sure you can. Don’t worry about me. I’ll just sit in the corner somewhere and be very quiet.”

The man invited him in, and they talked about everything Bishop Dyer could conjure up to hold the man’s interest. “I pursued every idea and conversation I could think of to keep him speaking. I thought he was going to throw me out a number of times, but shortly after three o’clock in the morning I said, ‘Well, heavenly days! You’ve missed five alarms already. Please forgive me! I have ruined your evening’s enjoyment. The night is such a disappointment now that you might as well just go to bed and forget the rest of the alarms this once!’”

Then note this language:

*At that moment [I] felt [in him] a sense of honor and a dignity. . . . He looked at me with a peculiar smile . . . , and he said, “All right, I will.” [And] he never touched another cigarette [for the rest of his life]. [See Alvin R. Dyer, Conference Report, 5 April 1965, p. 85]*

How would you describe *Brother Dyer’s* loyalty? Was it loyalty to that inactive man or loyalty to the members of his ward generally or loyalty to his office as bishop or loyalty to the Word of Wisdom or loyalty to the principle of revelation or loyalty to the Church or loyalty to God or—well, you get my point.

His *Father in Heaven* asks Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?” and Cain fires back, “I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9; emphasis added). Maybe the answer to that question is—as Professor Chauncey Riddle once said to me—“No, Cain, you are not expected to be your brother’s

keeper. But you are expected to be your brother’s brother.”

Consider for a moment the kind of treachery Cain introduced into the world—the betrayal of family, friends, and fellow citizens. His legacy is a chilling one, and his colleagues are legion.

*Dante reserve[d] the innermost circle of hell [for this crowd,] for those who [turn against their own]. There he has placed Judas, Brutus, and Cassius—the most notorious of traitors—in the three mouths of Satan himself. Revealingly, the poet does not rely on the image of fire for his description of their plight. The souls of traitors are held fast in a lake of ice. Clearly, the worst of sins against [one’s] brother [or sister] are those of the frozen heart. Those who are disloyal to others have chosen a life isolated and immobile, a life, in effect, hostile to life, for which the only adequate image is a sunless waste of ice. [William F. May, A Catalogue of Sins (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 111–12]*

Well, if we are not called upon to defend a member of the family quite so openly as Cain was, perhaps we will have opportunities to defend the Church.

### “True Blue, Through and Through”

After four years of missionary service in the Hawaiian Islands (begun at age fifteen, by the way), young Joseph F. Smith returned to the mainland and began making his way back to the Salt Lake Valley. But these were difficult times. Feelings toward the Latter-day Saints were running very high. The terrible experience at Mountain Meadows was fresh in the minds of many people. Polygamy had become a national political issue, and at that very hour Albert Sidney Johnston’s army was on its way to the Utah territory under orders from the president of the United States. Less disciplined than the U.S. Army were many frontiersmen scattered abroad who vowed openly they would murder every Mormon anywhere they could be found.

It was back into that world that nineteen-year-old Joseph F. Smith drove his team and wagon. One evening the little company with which he traveled had barely made camp before a company

of drunken men rode in on horseback, cursing and swearing and threatening to kill. Some of the older men, when they heard the riders coming, had gone down into the brush by the creek, waiting out of sight for the band to pass. But young Joseph F. had been out a distance from the camp gathering wood for the fire and so was not aware of the potential problem. With the openness of youth he walked back toward the camp, only to realize too late the difficult circumstance he now faced almost totally alone.

His first thought was to drop the wood and run toward the creek, seeking shelter in the trees in his flight. Then the thought came to him, “Why should I run from [my faith]?” With that compelling sense of loyalty firmly in his mind, he continued to carry his armful of wood to the edge of the fire. As he was about to deposit his load, one of the ruffians, pistol cocked and pointed squarely at the young man’s head, cursed as only a drunken rascal can and demanded in a loud, angry voice, “I’m a killer of Mormons, boy. Are you a Mormon?”

Without a moment of hesitation and looking the heathen directly in the eye, Joseph F., scarcely old enough to be entering the MTC, boldly answered, “Yes, siree; died in the wool; true blue, through and through.”

The answer was given so boldly and without any sign of fear that it completely disarmed this belligerent man. In his bewilderment he put down his pistol, grasped the young missionary by the hand, and said, “Well, you are the — — bravest man I ever met! Shake, young fellow, I’m glad to see a lad that stands up for his convictions.”

Years later, while serving as the president of the Church, Joseph F. Smith said that he truly expected to take at point-blank range the full charge from the barrel of that man’s pistol. But he also said that after his initial inclination to run, it never again entered his mind to do anything but stand up for his beliefs and face the death that appeared to be the inevitable result of such conviction. (Taken from Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938], pp. 188–89.)

Montaigne’s ancient cry of the storm-tossed sailor comes to mind: “Oh, Lord, thou shalt save me if thou please; if not, thou shalt lose me; yet

Lord will I keep my rudder true” (see Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Essays*, book II, chapter 16).

But of course it is not enough to be loyal to just any cause. What carried nineteen-year-old Joseph F. Smith so courageously was his answer to the question “For what do I live?” It was for gospel truth that he stood up to be counted and for which he was willing to die.

### **They Did Not Falter**

Brigham Young certainly had repeated opportunities to hold a steady course, particularly in those early and difficult years at the side of the Prophet Joseph Smith. While the First Presidency was away from Kirtland attempting to stabilize the difficult financial circumstances they faced in the winter of 1836–37, a council was called by those who were opposed to Joseph Smith’s continuing in his office as prophet and president of the Church.

*On this occasion [Brigham Young] “rose up . . . in a plain and forcible manner” and told them “that Joseph was a Prophet, and I knew it, and that they might rail and slander him as much as they pleased; they could not destroy the appointment of the Prophet of God, they could only destroy their own authority, cut the thread that bound them to the Prophet and to God, and sink themselves to hell.”*

*Some of those present reacted violently [toward Brigham]. One Jacob Bump . . . fancied himself a pugilist. While several held him back, he twisted and turned, shouting, “How can I keep my hands off that man?” “Lay them on,” responded Brigham, “if it will give you any relief!”*

But the man didn’t lay them on. A few nights later Brigham heard a man running through the Kirtland streets at midnight shouting loudly and denouncing the Prophet Joseph. Even at that late hour Brigham jumped out of bed, went into the street and

*jerked [the man] round, and assured him that if he did not stop his noise, and let the people enjoy their sleep . . . I would cowhide him on the spot, for we had the Lord’s Prophet right here, and we did not want the devil’s prophet yelling [up and down] the streets.*

These were days of genuine “crisis,” he reported, “when earth and hell seemed leagued to overthrow the Prophet and the Church of God. The knees of many of the strongest men in the Church faltered.” But Brigham Young did not falter, yet before that year was over his own life was in jeopardy for such loyalty. On December 22 he said:

*I had to leave to save my life. . . .*

*. . . I left Kirtland in consequence of the fury of the mob, and the spirit that prevailed in the apostates, who had threatened to destroy me because I would proclaim, publicly and privately, that I knew by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Most High God. [In Leonard Arrington, Brigham Young: American Moses (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 56–61 passim]*

And what of Joseph Smith himself? Even as he was being dragged away from his wife and children one more time, he said:

*I am exposed to far greater danger from traitors among ourselves than from enemies without. . . . All the enemies upon the face of the earth may roar and exert all their power to bring about my death, but they can accomplish nothing, unless some who are among us and enjoy our society . . . bring their united vengeance upon our heads. [HC 6:152]*

And bring their united vengeance they did. Does a prophet of God deserve that from his “friends?” What does one have a right to expect from those who “enjoy our society?” (Remember that Macbeth’s crime against his king is all the more treacherous because Duncan was a guest in Macbeth’s house.) Is it possible that each of us who claims the privileges and benefits of the kingdom of God will have our own fiery furnace to pass through in which our loyalty is purified as dramatically as it was for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego? Is there some kind of battleground out there ahead of us, some kind of moral Kirtland or metaphysical Carthage that will yet give us our chance to stand up and be counted, like the 2,000 stripling warriors of whom it was said, “They were . . . true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted” (Alma 53:20)?

### Your Word of Honor

With so much that so many have loyally given to provide us with what we have, perhaps you can imagine my disappointment when from time to time a few who accept the university’s opportunity and the Church’s significant financial contribution then violate those standards of behavior and propriety and integrity to which each has voluntarily agreed. And lest anyone be mistaken, please be assured that I am not speaking just now of crowd behavior at a ball game. I speak of a few clubs and club members and others who brag of drinking beer and partying like would-be prostitutes and then seem absolutely amazed that they and their groups are in terminal jeopardy at the university. I speak of returned missionaries who violate temple covenants, of a faculty member who violates the tender testimony of a youth, of thieves on a campus that now must post warning signs in “high theft areas” that are a disgrace to everything BYU stands for. I speak of off-campus housing violations that see flagrant abuse of our moral standards where neither those guilty participants nor their roommates display enough integrity to make a wrong circumstance right. Though these may not be committed on the field of battle nor result in the death of a famous figure, they seem to me nevertheless villainy and treachery indeed—dishonesty of a terribly destructive kind.

Karl G. Maeser, the first president of this university, once wrote:

*[My young friends,] I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape; but stand me on the floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I’d die first! [West, Vital Quotations, p. 167]*

At the start of a new calendar year and the beginning of another important academic semester, may I invite you to examine your very soul, to look deeply within your habits and inclinations and measure your loyalties against the divine standard of our Savior, Jesus Christ. How

prepared are you for the difficult things you may yet face in acquiring an education or serving a mission or raising a family or defending your beliefs? As preparation for the assault that will yet be made upon your character and convictions, is it hoping too much to see you cherish clear language and clean entertainment and hard work and disciplined behavior? If we were, this very hour, in a fictional foxhole somewhere against an enemy who put our eternal lives at risk, would I be safe in your hands? Would you be safe in mine?

### Sergeant Stewart

More than thirty years ago, about fifteen LDS soldiers crowded into a frontline bunker in Korea to hold a Sunday service. They used their canteen cups and C-ration crackers to bless and partake of the sacrament. Then they held a testimony meeting. One young man introduced himself simply as Sergeant Stewart from Idaho. He was a short, small man about 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighing about 150 pounds. His great ambition had been to become a good athlete, but coaches considered him too small for most team sports. So he had concentrated on individual competition and had gained some success as a wrestler and a distance runner. Sergeant Stewart related to his fourteen battle-weary brethren an experience he had just had with his company commander, a giant of a man named Lieutenant Jackson who was 6 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 245 pounds; an outstanding college athlete. The sergeant spoke of him in glowing terms as a tremendous officer and a Christian gentleman, inspiring those who were fortunate enough to serve under his command.

Shortly before the Church service in which they now found themselves, Sergeant Stewart had been assigned to a patrol under the direction of Lieutenant Jackson. As they moved down near the base of a hill they held, they were ambushed by enemy fire. The lieutenant out in front was

*riddled . . . by automatic small-arms fire. As he fell he managed to drag himself to the shelter of a nearby rock . . . while the rest of the patrol scrambled up the hill to regroup.*

*Since he was next in command, the responsibility now fell upon Sergeant Stewart. He [sent the] largest*

*and seemingly strongest man . . . down the hill to rescue the lieutenant. The others would provide him with cover.*

*The man was gone for approximately half an hour, only to return and report that he could not budge the wounded officer—he was too heavy. . . . The men started grumbling about getting out of there before somebody else got hit. [Then] someone was heard to say, “Let’s forget about the lieutenant; after all, he’s just a [\*\*\*\*\*]!” At this point Sergeant Stewart turned to his men, and pulling himself up to his full 65-inch stature, he spoke in very matter-of-fact tones: “I don’t care if he’s black or green or any other color. We’re not leaving without him. He wouldn’t leave any of us in similar circumstances. Besides, he’s our commanding officer and I love him like my own brother.”*

Then he headed down the hill alone.

*. . . When he finally reached [the lieutenant, the officer] was weak from loss of blood, and he assured the sergeant that it was a hopeless cause—there would be no way to get him back to the aid station in time. It was then that Sergeant Stewart’s great faith in his Heavenly Father came to his assistance. He took off his helmet, knelt beside his fallen leader and said, “Pray with me, Lieutenant.” . . .*

*“Dear Lord,” he pleaded, “I need strength—far beyond the capacity of my physical body. This great man, thy son, who lies critically wounded here beside me, must have medical attention soon. I need the power to carry him up this hill to an aid station where he can receive the treatment he needs to preserve his life. I know, Father, that thou hast promised the strength of ten to him whose heart and hands are clean and pure. I feel that I can qualify. Please, Dear Lord, grant me this blessing.”*

Then he thanked his Father in Heaven for the power of prayer and the privilege of holding the priesthood. He then put on his helmet, reached down and picked up his fallen friend, cradled him over his shoulders, and carried him back up the hill to safety. (From Ben F. Mortensen, “Sergeant Stewart,” *The Instructor*, March 1969, pp. 82–83.)

### Remaining True

Someone else ascended a difficult hill once—with us cradled carefully on his shoulders. But

as Christ moved closer and closer to Calvary, his defenders became fewer and fewer in number. As the pressure mounted and the troubles increased, he said:

*There are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. . . .*

*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. [John 6:64]*

Later, the Roman soldiers and the chief priests came to capture him, “a great multitude with swords and staves,” Matthew says. “Then *all* the disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matthew 26:47, 56; emphasis added).

Enter Judas with the calculated kiss of betrayal.

We cannot know exactly what Judas was thinking nor why he chose the path he did. Perhaps he did not think it would end that way. As William F. May said:

[One who is disloyal] *may not* [have intended malice]. . . . *He may even be convinced that he accomplishes a certain good by his actions. In these cases, it is well to be reminded that [some kinds of] betrayal ha[ve] a way of producing results [far] beyond [our] . . . control. [A sequence] more savage than [we] intended. [I take a certain stand or make a certain speech toward another], only wanting to see him cut down to size, but I may live to see him get cut to ribbons. . . . “When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself!’” (Matthew 27:3–4). Precisely because everything has been placed beyond the traitor’s reach . . . , the sense of the irreversibility of it all is overwhelming. There is nothing left to be done. Judas hangs himself, [perhaps] as an act of atonement . . . , but [also perhaps] because no [act] of atonement—from Judas—is [any longer] possible. [May, *A Catalogue of Sins*, pp. 118–19]*

Yet it is also here in this hour, in absolute and utter loneliness, that loyalty to principle and love

for one’s brothers and sisters reaches its most exalted and eternal manifestation. Sweating great drops of blood from every pore and pleading that the cup might pass, yet Jesus remains true, submitting his will to that of his father and determined to do the work of the kingdom. Moments later, with taunts and spit and scorn and jeers, and spikes rending his perfect flesh, principle triumphs over both passion and pain as the saving sibling of us all prays for his brothers and sisters: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

At this crucial time in your life, I urge you to give your deepest loyalties to the highest causes in eternity—those contained in the life and mission and message of the Only Begotten Son of God. If we can remain true there, with an eye single to that standard, all other loyalties will fall naturally into place. Inasmuch as we do not sing at the close of these devotionals, perhaps you will forgive me if I quote two verses from two hymns before our benediction.

To all who wish to know heaven’s determination to stand by them in difficult times, we sing:

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose  
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake!*  
[“How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 85]

And for the personal strength to stand true, even in such times of personal pain, we sing more privately to ourselves:

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never  
call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his  
judgment seat.  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer him; be jubilant  
my feet!  
Our God is marching on.*  
[“Battle Hymn of the Republic,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 60]

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.