

Footprints on the Sands of Time

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This is a wonderful audience. Brethren and sisters, it's a challenge and an honor to address this large body of young people. Students of Brigham Young University, I hope and pray that I may be able to say something that will strengthen your faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and your determination to draw nearer to the Lord and keep his commandments, that you may have joy and rejoicing in this life as well as eternal happiness in the life to come.

Develop Your Spirit

It's been a glorious experience for me to devote so many years of my life to secretarial service to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. Now in the later years of my life it is wonderful to give another service in the Lord's kingdom—namely, visiting the stakes and missions of the Church, as well as giving attention to other duties that come to those of us who are called to serve as Assistants to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. My service with the Brethren over the past fifty-three years has been a source of great education, not only in matters we normally speak of as ecclesiastical, but also in general matters pertaining to the various phases of work of the Church and life.

In my many years of reporting sermons delivered by the General Authorities, my mind has been filled with many expressions of truth that I wish I might always remember. I've written down many of these noble thoughts and endeavored to make them a part of my thinking also. President David O. McKay, for instance, was a great prophet of the Lord, as have been all of the Brethren who have been prophets in this dispensation. On one occasion, President McKay made special reference to the nature of man, that he is a dual being consisting of spirit and body. May I paraphrase some sentiments that he expressed on this subject. He said:

The whole lesson of mortal life is whether we devote our time and attention to the mortal body, the house in which we live, or to the development of the spirit that lives within. The development of the spirit is the purpose of life, and man is the only animal in the world who has the power of choice. He may choose whether he will go through life devoting his

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thought and attention to gratification of the flesh, or he may choose to subdue the physical being and develop the spirit.

The Savior said on one occasion, “consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28–29). People say that is not practical, that one has to think of tomorrow, the future, and we are told that he who does not take care of his loved ones is worse than an infidel. We need to analyze this expression by the Lord in order to get a proper understanding of it. A lily bulb is planted in the earth. It obtains its sustenance from nature. In the due course of things the bulb bursts and a sprout comes from that bulb. If that were all that happened, if it remained covered in the earth, it would not fulfill the purpose of its existence or its creation. The real purpose of its existence is that it should sprout and grow, obtaining its sustenance from nature. It sends forth a little plant into the sunshine. It continues to draw its food from the earth, and behold, a beautiful blossom appears, thus performing the purpose of its existence. In further fulfilling the purpose of its existence, it perpetuates its own kind.

Man has his brains, his hands, his nerves, and he gains his sustenance from nature as does the flower. He produces a life from the earth and from his transactions in life. Whether he’s a farmer, a merchant, a teacher, a doctor, a lawyer—whatever he may be—he gains his sustenance from the earth and has the right to choose whether he’ll devote his abilities, all his efforts, to the gratification of his physical body or to the development of the soul. If he give the proper consideration and attention to matters pertaining to the soul, it develops and grows in perfection under the guidance, light, and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. If he chooses to devote himself to the physical things alone he

has not accomplished the real purpose of his existence.

This brings to my mind an illustration contained in the scriptures. You’ll remember a rich young ruler came to see the Savior and asked him what he should do to obtain eternal life. Brethren and sisters, that’s what we’re seeking for, isn’t it? We want to obtain eternal life. The ruler was a fine young man, and the Lord said to him, “You know the commandments. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness.”

“Oh,” the ruler said, “all of these things I have done from my childhood up.”

But the Savior said, “There is yet one thing that thou lackest. Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor and come follow me.” And the young man went away sorrowing because he had much wealth (see Matthew 19:16–22). Now, the Lord doesn’t always require that of us, does he? He doesn’t require us to sell all that we have and give to the poor and come follow him. He does expect us, however, to be willing to give all that we have and follow him if that should be necessary. But as I see it, the reason he told the ruler to sell everything was to illustrate that his mind was set more on wealth and the things of this world than it was upon the things of eternal life. That is the principle we should have in mind.

President Grant said on one occasion:

Supplicating the Lord for guidance of his spirit places around us a safeguard, and if we earnestly and honestly seek the guidance and the Spirit of the Lord, I can assure you that we’ll receive it. I am convinced that one of the greatest and one of the best things in all the world to keep a man faithful in the gospel is to supplicate God secretly in the name of the Son for guidance of his holy Spirit. But when a man stops supplicating God for his Spirit and direction, just so soon he starts to become a stranger to him and his works. We should all pray that God may never leave us alone without his Spirit and assist us in withstanding sin and temptation.

Choose Friends Wisely

Friends and friendship play a very important role in our lives. It is of the utmost importance that, particularly while one is young, he seek out the right kind of companions and associates. Environment is also of the utmost importance, whether it be in the matter of employment, recreational activities, or whatever it may be. Speaking of employment, I worked for Merchants Bank in Salt Lake City when I was a young man. This was in the days before Prohibition. There was the Heidelberg Saloon (there were saloons in those days) on Third South just east of the bank. And the saloon did its banking with the Merchants Bank. At the end of every month it was the policy that the employees would stay rather late in the evening and mail to the depositors statements of their personal accounts. On these occasions, the Heidelberg Saloon invited the employees of the bank to come to the saloon and have a drink without cost. I went with other employees to the saloon on such occasions, but I never partook of the alcoholic drinks. I usually asked for ginger ale. I recall on one occasion that the head paying-and-receiving teller of the bank, who was a Catholic, said to me, "Why do you come here if you're going to drink ginger ale? This is a saloon and you should do the same as the rest of us do." He was rather outspoken and antagonistic in his remarks. I said to him, calling him by name, "I am making no complaint about what you drink, and you have no right to complain about the drink that I take."

I have loved all of the Brethren of the General Authorities who I have known. It might be questionable wisdom to say that I have loved some more than others, but my close association with President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., certainly made him one of my favorites. In June 1958 President Clark related the following to me about his own life:

I do not remember where liquor was offered to me that I had any doubt in my mind as to what I should do. I could like champagne. I could be a good drinker, but there never came into my mind, "Ought you to drink or ought you not to drink?" I knew I ought not to drink, and I did not drink. The same is my experience with women. I never had to wonder whether it was right for me to commit myself with a woman. That was always with me. All of my conduct had to be based on that. To me the important thing is that my training has been such that I never was in a position that I did not know what I ought to do. I never had to argue about it with myself, and I think that was the strength. If I had had to stop and wonder if this was right or that was right, it would have been different.

I realize that in one's youthful years one is more fearless than when adulthood adds its problems and worries. His or her youthful curiosity is inclined to tempt him or her to experiment or to make investigations into matters sometimes of a questionable nature.

One is fortunate if he has the strength to resist temptation and evil when he encounters them in their various phases. The poet has said:

Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime

And, departing, leave behind us footprints in the sands of time.

[Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"]

Young men of the Church hold the priesthood. And the priesthood is the power of leadership and should strengthen one in his determination to keep on the Lord's side of the line. In spite of our intentions, sometimes it is not possible to select our own environment so far as employment is concerned. But it is usually possible and desirable to choose one's own friends. I think it was Josh Billings who said, "Never judge a man by his relatives; they're

crowded upon him. But judge him by the company he keeps, for he chooses his own.”

Bless and Help Others

It was my experience in my early years to work with some whose traits of character were not commendable, but I’m grateful that the greater part of my life has been devoted to an association with great and good men, men whose footsteps in the sands of time are such as to influence others to seek to conduct themselves in a manner that would lead to light and truth. President Clark was one such person who I dearly loved. May I mention the traits of another person who I loved and who wielded a great influence upon my life when I was young, which influence made such an impression upon my mind that I’d like to adopt the virtues his life exemplified. President Heber J. Grant was a man who loved his fellowmen and devoted his life to blessing and helping others. Among other traits of character was his desire—it was almost a mania with him—to give good books, books that he enjoyed, not only to his friends, but to people generally with whom he came in contact. I’m sure that libraries of thousands of members of the Church and others contain copies of this literature with his inscription therein, which I feel sure has influenced their lives for good.

I’ve never know a more generous man than President Grant. Many a widow’s mortgage has been paid out of his personal funds. I recall one incident that came to my attention. This was when he learned that one of his Brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was struggling to make the monthly payments on the mortgage on his home. This brother mentioned in the Council one day that within a year he would be able to make the final payment. President asked me, inasmuch as I was his secretary and had charge of his accounts and books, to ascertain what amount was still owing on his dear brother’s mortgage. This I did, and President Grant sent him a check for

the amount necessary to take care of the balance. I recall that he lent to young men on different occasions the money necessary to meet their expenses in their study of medicine. He, of course, charged no interest for such loans, which were ultimately paid. At various times when I have met these men since the completion of their studies and their entrance into the field of medicine, they have wept with appreciation for the help thus extended to them, without which it would not have been possible for them to accomplish their ambitions.

In our friendly relationship humorous incidents sometimes occurred that indicated the human nature of this good man. (And all the Brethren have a good sense of humor.) On one occasion President Grant was dictating his journal, and he mentioned the fact that he had attended a Sunday afternoon meeting in the Tabernacle. It was customary at that time to hold public meetings in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City every Sunday afternoon. And I reported those meetings. President Grant in his dictation mentioned the Brethren who had spoken at the Tabernacle service, but he overlooked one good brother who had participated, and I reminded him of that fact. He said, “Oh, I must have slept through his remarks.” I said, “Well, we can insert in the journal that you very much enjoyed his sermon.”

Dare to Stand up to Giants

There are others of the Brethren of the General Authorities with whose lives I’ve been intimately related. They also have left footprints upon the sands of time, which footprints I would like to walk in because of the influence they’ve had upon my life. I have always enjoyed the account given in the Old Testament regarding David and Goliath the Philistine. You’ll recall that the giant mocked David as he came out to meet him with rocks and sling. And the Philistine cursed him in the name of his gods. David in answer said, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear,

and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defiled.” (1 Samuel 17:45). You know the outcome of that particular combat. The important part to me in the story is this: “I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel.”

You young men are going out to meet giants in the world. Some of you hold the priesthood, perhaps all of you. If you do not, you should make yourselves worthy of this blessing. By virtue of the priesthood you will meet the giants of temptation in the world in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. These giants may be sin or creatures of sin. There are those who will endeavor to persuade you to become involved in the use of drugs and to live a useless and careless life. There are giants of evil, but if you have the priesthood of God conferred upon you, that is power, the greatest power in the world. You are leaders and the power is within you.

The world needs leaders today, men who will stand for the right in spite of everything, men who will honor this priesthood power that the Lord has given them. That which entices to do evil is of the devil; that which persuadeth to do good is of the Lord. If you are leaders—and you are if you will live up to the power that is within you—by virtue of the priesthood you will be leaders among your associates, not followers of those who would make weaklings of you. Be men and women with minds of your own, guided and inspired by the Holy Ghost. Dare to be morally clean when others seek the primrose path. Dare to say no when you are invited to drink or smoke or take into your system drugs or those things that will take from you the Spirit of the Lord and the power of the priesthood. You will then not have merely a form of godliness, but the true power of godliness by which you will bless yourself and mankind generally.

You young women do not have the priesthood, of course, but you have the power that

comes through the gift of the Holy Ghost. You can distinguish between right and wrong, and if you will keep in contact with your Heavenly Father in prayer, there will be given to you inspiration—yes, even revelation to guide and direct your footsteps along the course that will bring joy and happiness to you, not only in this life but throughout all eternity. And when you marry, if you marry an elder of the Church, you will share in the blessings that he enjoys. Make certain that he is worthy of you.

Do Not Compromise with Wickedness

In the early days of the Church, when the pioneers first came to Salt Lake City, and even before that time for that matter, our people indulged in recreation and clean amusement as we do now. The Salt Lake Theater was built during the presidency of Brigham Young and dedicated on March 12, 1862. In the prayer of dedication Daniel H. Wells, one of the counselors in the First Presidency, said, among other things:

Accept our gratitude, our Father, for the privilege we now enjoy of assembling within these spacious walls for the purpose of consecrating and dedicating this building, which has been erected for a theatre wherein thy people may receive amusement and recreation. In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and in the authority of the Holy and eternal Priesthood of Almighty God, we consecrate and dedicate this building with its surroundings above and below and upon each side thereof, unto Thee, our Father and our God. . . .

And wilt Thou, O Lord, preserve for ever this house pure and holy for the habitation of thy people; suffer no evil or wicked influences to predominate or prevail within these walls, neither disorder, drunkenness, debauchery or licentiousness of any sort or kind, but rather than this, sooner than it should pass into the hands or control of the wicked or ungodly, let it utterly perish and crumble to atoms; let it be as though it had not been, an utter waste, each and every part returning unto its native

element; but may order, virtue, cleanliness, sobriety and every excellence obtain and hold fast possession herein, and the righteous control and possess it, and holiness unto the Lord be forever inscribed therein. [Deseret News, 12 March 1862, p. 290]

I have had the privilege on many occasions of witnessing performances in that temple of drama, music, and comedy, but there came a time when traveling companies brought to that playhouse shows that were vulgar, that were not pure, shows that did not manifest an influence such as President Wells prayed would prevail and predominate. President Grant loved the drama. He loved the stage. I think he personally was the principle owner of the stock in the old Salt Lake Theater. Accordingly, the theater was closed. It, the property on which it stood, were sold and the theater was torn down. The Church has always stood for clean amusement, moral cleanliness and those things which tend toward righteousness. We cannot compromise with wickedness.

The Brethren who have succeeded President Grant as Presidents of the Church have also made footprints on the sands of time and have helped to direct my course. The same can be said about their counselors, the Twelve, and the other General Authorities. May I just mention our President, Spencer W. Kimball. I have loved President Kimball since I first met him. He is a special spirit who the Lord knew before he came here and who he has prepared for the work he is now doing as President of the Church. He is the Lord's chosen servant at this time. He is a miracle man. I was recently reading his book *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, from which I quote the following:

There are a few things that came to my attention recently that strengthen me and in which you might be interested—particularly with reference to prophecy made by my father. This was made known to me only a week ago. In preface to his statements, I will read a line or two from his patriarchal

blessing given to him by Patriarch John Smith back in 1898. He said to my father: "Andrew Kimball [and I knew this man]—thou shalt have the spirit of discernment to foretell future events and thy name shall be handed down with thy posterity in honorable remembrance from generation to generation." And then Brother Hatch, another patriarch, said [talking to Brother Andrew Kimball]: "for thou art a prophet and came upon earth in this dispensation to be a great leader."

Just the other day, Orville Allen came into the office to talk to me intimately and confidentially. After closing the door, he said, "Spencer, your father was a prophet. He made a prediction that has literally come to pass, and I want to tell you about it." He continued, "Your father talked with me at the corral, one evening. I had brought a load of pumpkins for his pigs. You were just a little boy and you were sitting there, milking the cows, and singing to them as you milked. Your father turned to me and said, 'Brother, that boy, Spencer, is an exceptional boy. He always tries to mind me, whatever I ask him to do. I have dedicated him to be one of the mouthpieces of the Lord—the Lord willing. You will see him some day as a great leader. I have dedicated him to the service of God, and he will become a mighty man in the Church.' " [Faith Precedes the Miracle (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975), pp. xvi–xvii]

Further referring to President Kimball, to indicate the great spirit of this man, I remember in the same book he mentions his call to be an apostle and the feeling he had of unworthiness. Brother Spencer refers to the experience of Jacob wrestling all night with an angel for a blessing, and the same thing happened with Enos, who went out into the forest and prayed, as recorded in the Book of Mormon. Enos prayed all day long and into the night for the forgiveness of his sins. And the word of the Lord came to him that his sins had been forgiven. President Kimball said:

For eighty-five nights I've gone through that sexperience [when he was called to be a member of the Twelve]. Eighty-five times the breaking of the day has found me on my knees praying to the Lord to help me and strengthen me and make me equal to this great responsibility that has come to me. [Faith Precedes the Miracle, p. xv]

I repeat that it has been a great joy to be associated with these men of God, truly prophets of the Lord. Today President Kimball is our President, a prophet of the Lord. He lives as close to the Lord as any mortal man can do. And this Church is led by inspiration and revelation from heaven. I testify to you that these men have been and are prophet of the living God. This is the dispensation of the fulness of times. We have the responsibility of carrying the gospel message to the world so that every ear may hear the truth. This is in preparation for the time when the Savior will come to rule and reign upon the earth for a thousand years

in peace and righteousness. President McKay said on one occasion:

One of the great comforts of this life is that we can go to him, the Lord, and receive his guidance in the only church which he recognizes. Some say it is arrogance to say he does not recognize other churches. He recognizes all good deeds, but there must be only one official avenue through which God's will is given to man.

May the Lord help us to conduct our lives in such a manner as to have his Spirit to be with us. I bear testimony that God lives, that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Savior of mankind, that this is his church. The men who have stood at the head of this Church in this dispensation including President Spencer Kimball, who presides today, have been and are prophets of the living God, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.