

Anchor to the Soul

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

This is a wonderful time to be a student at Brigham Young University—no matter what *Sports Illustrated* says. In fact, it's a wonderful time to be a college student anywhere. I am so impressed with the opportunities and privileges that are yours as young adult members of the Church. Never before have young people had so many options available to them, whether you're talking about worldwide travel, higher education, or the opportunity to render meaningful and life-changing service to others.

As freedom continues to spread throughout the world and the message of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ rolls forth, great opportunities present themselves to those who are prepared to make a significant contribution. I commend you and congratulate you for preparing yourselves to take advantage of the opportunities that are ahead of you.

I don't need to tell you that life includes some problems for everyone—whether single, married, or somewhere in between. You should know that the Brethren are aware of some of your challenges. We discuss often the difficulties that young adult members of the Church are facing, and we pray for you. We keep you in our minds and hearts as we formulate policies

and programs that affect the young adults of the Church. You must remember that even though the General Authorities may seem old to you, we stay young at heart because we have children and grandchildren who share their concerns with us. We also have auxiliary general boards and your own ward and stake leaders who keep us well informed of your problems and challenges.

You are our future, and you must be prepared. You are the future leaders of the Church, of government, and of business, and of the professions. Most important, you will be leading your families into the most exciting and, perhaps, most critical time in the history of the Church and of the world.

This evening, I wish to speak about your future. I pray that I may help you in your preparation for the unique role that each one of you ultimately will play. Have you ever watched a large ship weigh its anchor? It is fascinating to see and hear the massive links of

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chain screeching against the metal bow of the ship as the anchor is lowered or raised. Now, the metal shanks of the anchor chain are incredibly heavy, but their weight is slight when compared to the total weight of the ship. Still, if an anchor is placed properly on the bottom of the sea, it can hold a giant ship fast, even in rough seas.

Just as ships need anchors to keep them from drifting away on the open seas, people need spiritual anchors in their lives if they are to remain steadfast and not drift into the sea of temptation and sin. Faith in God and in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the main anchor we must have in our lives to hold us fast during times of social turbulence and wickedness that seem to be everywhere today. This faith must be more than that of the generic dictionary variety. Our faith, for it to be meaningful and effective and to hold us fast, must be centered in Jesus Christ, in his life, in his atonement, and in the restoration of his gospel to the earth in the last days.

Recently I spoke to a group of prospective missionaries. Many of those young men and women had made the decision to serve a full-time mission, but others were not certain they should accept a call to serve. I told them that they did not have to decide that night whether or not to go on a mission. But I said they did need to decide whether or not Joseph Smith knelt in the presence of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, “on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty.” Listen to Joseph’s own words:

After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick

darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him! [JS-H 1:14–17]

If this happened to Joseph, then the question of whether or not these prospective missionaries should serve a mission or whether or not they should keep the Lord’s commandments faithfully, pretty well takes care of itself, doesn’t it? If anyone knows, I mean really knows, that Heavenly Father and his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to and spoke to Joseph Smith as he said they did, the natural outcome of that knowledge should kindle a strong desire to serve God and his Holy Son all the days of his or her life.

Nothing is more remarkable or important in this life than to know that God our Eternal Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, have spoken again from the heavens and have called prophets and apostles to teach the fullness of the everlasting gospel once again upon the earth. That is a glorious thing to know. When you know it, that knowledge affects your life. It influences every major decision you make. It changes the course of your life to a safer one because it provides an anchor that helps hold

you fast to the teachings of the gospel despite the evil influences all around you that entice you to drift toward sin and transgression.

I make the same argument for the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood through John the Baptist and the Melchizedek Priesthood through Peter, James, and John. Let's be very plain about this. Either the priesthood of God has been restored or it has not. When you know that it has, you have secured your spiritual anchor even more firmly against the turbulence and storms of life.

Similarly, either the Book of Mormon is the word of God and is another testament of Jesus Christ or it is not. Either it is the record of the Lord's dealings with the people on the American continent from 600 B.C. to A.D. 421 or it is not. Either it is a translation from gold plates completed by Joseph Smith under divine guidance or it is not. The issue is that simple and that profound. If the Book of Mormon is, in fact, the word of God, as I testify that it is, then the question of whether or not we should apply its principles and teachings in our own lives is already decided, isn't it?

The same simple test applies to our living prophets and apostles today. President Ezra Taft Benson is either a prophet of God in every sense, in every way, or he is not.

My dear brothers and sisters, it really is no more complicated than that. If we know these things to be true, we really have no question about how we should live and what we should do with our lives. If we know that we are anchored to "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth," our course is clear (see D&C 1:30). What a marvelous blessing to know this.

You know how to find out for yourselves if these things are true because you understand the first principles of the gospel. Because you have an anchor of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand that you must pray to receive your personal testimony. You understand that the Holy Ghost "shall teach you all things, and

bring all things to your remembrance" (John 14:26). When you know and live these simple truths, they will be a spiritual anchor to help you keep your own life from being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

Becoming firmly grounded to these simple truths and focusing your attention on the lessons of eternity will keep your life moving in the right direction at all times and in all situations, regardless of which way the winds of current worldly trends may be blowing.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox made this observation while she was a passenger on a steamship and noticed that one ship went west and another east in the same wind:

*One ship drives east and another drives west
With the self-same winds that blow;
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
That tells them the way to go.*

*Like the winds of the sea are the winds of fate
As we voyage along through life;
'Tis the set of the soul
That decides its goal
And not the calm or the strife.*

["The Winds of Fate," by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, in *World Voices* (New York: Hearst's International Library Company, 1916), p. 51]

Many of you are just starting another school year and are working toward degrees in a variety of disciplines: the arts, science, medicine, law, humanities, business, language, engineering, and computers, for example. These ambitions and goals are praiseworthy and admirable and, when you graduate, will put you in a position to do much good in the world. But the most important knowledge you can acquire, and the area of learning that will keep everything else in focus for you and bring you true happiness and joy, will be your solid

anchor of assurance that you are a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word *disciple* comes from the Latin word *discipulus*; it means to learn or to know. Many people think that being a disciple means simply to follow, with an unfortunate connotation of following blindly. Becoming a true disciple is nothing of the sort! It requires us to learn and to know of Jesus Christ, to study the principles of truth for ourselves and to receive answers—in other words, to receive knowledge. Because President Benson knows this, he has called upon Church members to study the scriptures every day. Once we have knowledge of the simple principles of the Restoration, coupled with a deep and abiding faith in the truths we do not yet know, we become true disciples of Jesus Christ and not simply followers. The difference between a disciple and a follower is like the difference between a ship's anchor that is lodged solidly at the bottom of the sea, holding the ship fast, and an anchor that is merely suspended in water because the chain is too short. Such an anchor may appear to be doing its job when the seas are calm, but serves no purpose during storms or high waves. Remember these words from the prophet Nephi:

Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. [2 Nephi 31:20]

Every great prophet—including those in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or the Book of Mormon—has had to go through the process of becoming a true disciple by coming to an unshakable knowledge of Christ. Each one has had to ask himself, just as I have asked you to ask yourselves tonight, “Is Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Eternal Father?” “Does he live and does he preside over his Church today?”

The sure knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the World provided the courage for Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego to enter a fiery furnace without fear. Abinadi's knowledge of Christ gave him the power to testify of Christ while being burned to death by the wicked priests of King Noah. The same knowledge that Christ lives gave Nephi the power to endure the incessant insults of his brothers and gave him the strength to suffer until his brothers broke the strong cords that held him bound during a tumultuous storm at sea. Having come to know Christ, Elijah had the power to literally command fire to consume his soggy altar while the priests of Baal watched in awe. An absolute conviction that Jesus Christ is the Messiah gave Samuel the Lamanite the courage to stand on the city wall and bear testimony to the wicked Nephites and to receive protection from their arrows and stones. The brother of Jared was even able to move the mountain Zerin because he knew in his heart of hearts that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God! The scriptures are filled with righteous acts and testimonies of men and women who care to know for themselves that Jesus is the Christ.

That same sure testimony of Jesus can be yours because the gospel has been restored in its fullness in the last days. Testimony and knowledge come as a result of your personal faith and prayers. Ask your Heavenly Father to bless you with faith and courage, and he will help you endure any challenges you may face. He will help you overcome loneliness, feelings of desperation and hopelessness, setbacks of a personal, emotional, financial, and even spiritual nature. He will strengthen you when you are simply feeling overwhelmed by all of the demands for your time and attention. He will give you the ability to serve faithfully in every assignment you receive from your local Church leaders. Your faith and your knowledge of the restoration of the gospel will give you the strength to be faithful and true to the covenants

you have made with the Lord and to share your strengths and talents gladly to build up the kingdom of God here on the earth.

Brothers and sisters, your testimony of Jesus Christ is the most important anchor that you can have to help hold you steadfast and immovable to principles of righteousness, regardless of the challenges and temptations that may come in the future.

The Book of Mormon prophet Ether explained this principle to the people of his day. From the twelfth chapter of Ether we read:

[Ether] *could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him.*

For he did cry from the morning, even until the going down of the sun, exhorting the people to believe in God unto repentance lest they should be destroyed, saying unto them that by faith all things are fulfilled —

Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.
[Ether 12:2–4; emphasis added]

The principle is clear. We believe, we hope, we have faith, we act upon that faith by “abounding in good works,” and we have an attitude of glorifying God. Then we shall, indeed, have a place at the right hand of God.

Now let’s step back and take a look at this from a little broader perspective. As each of you receives the education and the degree for which you are working and becomes successful in your chosen field of endeavor, whether within or outside of the home—all the while remaining disciples of Christ—think what a light you will be for those around you. Many are lost because they do not have a spiritual anchor of any kind to hold them secure when buffeted by the worldly waves and wind. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “there are

many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it”
(*Teachings*, pp. 145–46).

Those of our Father’s children who know that through Joseph Smith the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored are most blessed. With this precious knowledge comes a duty to prepare ourselves spiritually to serve God and our fellowmen.

My beloved brothers and sisters, please understand that the future of the Church will be yours and that you must do your part to help people turn their hearts to God. You can be the antidote to much of the moral decline in America and the world! You who have testimonies of the restored gospel, you who know the true nature of God, you who have the light of the Holy Ghost within you can be a spiritual lighthouse to the people of the world. You can be like a life preserver that people who are drowning in their own spiritual ignorance can grasp and cling to until they find safety within their own testimonies of Christ.

We know that we cannot look to the government, to the Church, or even to our own families to save us because we can be saved ultimately only through our own individual good works and our own testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, and that his gospel has been restored through Joseph Smith with the priesthood and the ordinances that will provide eternal life to the faithful.

A fervent personal testimony of Christ and his Church often comes in simple ways. From my own experiences, I can testify of this. I accepted a call to go to England on a mission when I was nineteen. Because of my missionary experience, I became anchored to a testimony of the reality of the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I stood in Hyde Park and on

many other street corners in the British Isles and bore my testimony that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, that the gospel had been restored in its fullness, and that the priesthood and authority to bless mankind is once again upon the earth. The more I bore my testimony, the more it became a part of me.

After I returned home, my testimony gave me the direction and the faith I needed to find the girl of my dreams, who would support me in my Church callings and in all my duties and help me live the teachings of the gospel. My sweetheart of over forty-one years, Barbara, is here with me tonight, and I publicly thank the Lord for her.

My understanding of the gospel has given me guidance on the kind of father and now grandfather I should be. My testimony, gained in my youth, has helped me respond to every call in the Church, including this current overwhelming call to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. My testimony, obtained a long time ago on the street corners of England, has grown line upon line and precept upon precept until I can stand before you tonight, my dear young friends, and testify as a special witness of the Lord Jesus Christ that our Savior lives and he is the Son of God our Eternal Father. My life has never been the same since I anchored my soul to the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, brothers and sisters, let's return for a moment to the analogy of the ship's anchor, especially the massive anchor chain. Suppose a beautiful sailing ship had been manufactured from the finest materials and had been reinforced and strengthened for the roughest seas. The mast and sails had been prepared carefully and were sturdy and seaworthy. Suppose the anchor was above standard in size and weight and craftsmanship. But, suppose, by some inadvertent error, the chain attached to the anchor was inferior and weak. Visualize what would happen the first time the anchor was lowered, or the first time a strong wave tried to

push the anchored ship out to sea. If any link of the chain holding the anchor broke, the anchor would be left to rust on the bottom of the ocean floor and the ship would drift and perhaps be destroyed.

The comparison to our lives is plain. The links in our chain of faith and testimony that enable our personal anchor to keep us safe and secure are the simple doctrines and teachings of the gospel. For example, can you see the value of the gospel link of personal prayer? Those of you who are single can kneel in a quiet and private place and pray for guidance before you leave your home and after you return each day. If you are married, you can join hands with your spouse and take turns offering companion prayers. Thanking your Heavenly Father for your blessings will help you remain secure. Pray for the help you need in your personal life, your education, your career, and your relationships. You students must know that the Lord will help you understand calculus and economics as surely as he will help you understand the principles of the gospel if you ask him after doing all that you can on your own.

Can you see another gospel link in your chain being the Word of Wisdom? By faithfully living the Lord's law of health, that link in the chain will help you keep your physical bodies strong. At the same time, you "shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures" that will help you be more committed to the Church (see D&C 89:19).

Another link is the law of tithing. You understand, I believe, that paying a full tithe is not a matter of money; it is a matter of faith. You can pay a full tithe regardless of your income if you develop the faith to do so. The Lord surely will "open the windows of heaven" as he has promised to those who are obedient to this commandment (see Malachi 3:10 and 3 Nephi 24:10).

How about the links of honesty, moral purity, service to others, attendance at Church

meetings, and studying the scriptures, to name just a few? These links of your gospel anchor chain may seem somewhat elementary, but they are as important as the anchor of faith and testimony itself. Remember, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. We must take care every day to examine our own personal chain to anchor our souls to the gospel and see if we have any weak links that may make us vulnerable to the influences of the devil.

One good way to keep every link strong is to partake of the sacrament each week. As you know, the sacrament is a renewal and a reminder of all our covenants with the Lord. What a great time for personal introspection and reflection on our life during the past week. Make the sacrament a time to review your personal gospel chain and see if each link is equal to the task of anchoring you securely to the Church.

Last of all, for those of you who have been temple endowed, doing temple work will keep this link strong. The temple is the house of the Lord. Take the time to go as often as you can to feel the presence of Heavenly Father and his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

My dear young brothers and sisters, your personal chain that anchors your soul to the gospel can be as strong as you want to make it through a daily review of your life. Be grateful for the principle of repentance, which provides the way for us to strengthen any weak links in our personal chain. Be worthy and at peace within yourself. If you know that you are anchored to the Lord Jesus Christ but still feel like life's trials are more than you can handle, find peace and strength in the knowledge that each day you have done the best you can in honoring the Lord. Remember that strengthening your testimony is a lifelong process. Never become discouraged and overwhelmed. Look to the Lord for strength to overcome discouragement and hopelessness. Work on one link at a time and strengthen each until you can feel

anchored safely and securely to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of what Helaman said to his sons, Nephi and Lehi, some thirty years before Christ was born:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. [Helaman 5:12]

My dear brothers and sisters, we cannot fall if we are anchored securely to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and if we forge strong links in an anchor chain that will hold us fast to the sure and simple principles of the gospel.

Repentance is a great blessing that our Father has given to us. Use it if you need to. And I promise you, in the name of the Lord, that as you honestly deal with yourself in those quiet moments and resolve to strengthen any link in your gospel anchor chain that needs your attention, you will find that strength.

Now, in closing, I think many of you who are here in the Marriott Center and in the stake centers hearing our broadcast feel it would sure be nice to get to the point where Brother Ballard is where you don't have any worries. Let me tell you, and put your mind at ease, at least about this apostle. I better not speak for all of my associates. We've all had our challenges. I've certainly had mine. I've had my challenges and disappointments. I've had those moments of feeling somewhat desperate—when I was in business and decisions seemed to go against me, and I wondered why. I've had health struggles, as perhaps many of you have. But all of the challenges, if we handle

them right, staying solidly anchored to the Master, we can manage.

Years ago I took a young man to meet President Kimball. He said he had given up hope, that he didn't believe there was a God anymore because his mother had passed away with cancer. He loved his mother, and he said to the president, "If there really was a God, he never would have let my mother suffer and die as she did."

Then President Kimball, in that wonderful sweet way of his, put his hands on the shoulders of my nineteen-year-old friend and said, "My boy, your mother is all right. Sit down, and let's talk about you."

Then he taught him in a beautiful way. One of the things he taught that I shall never forget ties to this matter of strengthening your anchor chain. He said, "My boy, I've had a lot of health challenges. I had cancer of the throat. I've had my body opened from here to here with open-heart surgery in my mid-seventies. I've had all kinds of challenges healthwise." Then he looked at my friend and at me and said, "And through my suffering I have come to know God."

My beloved young brothers and sisters, you do face and will face challenges. You did not come here thinking that you were going to pass through this experience without difficulties and challenge. I promise you in the name

of the Lord, and bless you, by and through the holy apostleship invested in me, if you will remain unwaveringly anchored to the Lord Jesus Christ and devote your heart and soul to him, and if you've made mistakes if you will come unto him and give away your sins through the principle of repentance and commit to serve him and honor him all the days of your life, you will be blessed and all of the promises of the eternities will be given unto you. That I know.

How grateful we are for every one of you. You are precious to the Church. You are precious to your families. You are precious to the countries of your origins.

I invoke a blessing also that you may have strength come to you now, that as you study at whatever university you are attending you will prepare yourselves to take up the labors of the sons and daughters of God who know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he has restored the church and kingdom of God to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

With that knowledge, my beloved young friends, go forward now, bless this great world that you live in. Bless your associates. Bless your families. And may all of the peace and joy and happiness be yours because of your faithfulness, I humbly pray in the sacred and beloved name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.