

“Bind Yourselves to Act in All Holiness”

BRUCE CARLSON

I must admit to feeling a little out of place here this morning. This call to speak today reminds me of the Texan who went to an Oklahoma wedding. When the minister asked if anyone could think of any reasons why this couple should not be married, the Texan stood up and said, “Well, no, I can’t think of any reason for these two kids not to get married, but while I am up I would like to say a few words about Texas.”

I routinely meet with administration and foreign government officials and dignitaries and brief congressional delegations on various issues, but never have I felt the weight of responsibility more than I feel coming here today. I have earnestly sought interest in your faith and prayers that what I say will uplift you, that it will cause you to “bind yourselves to act in all holiness before [the Lord]” (D&C 43:9).

Despite the weight of responsibility associated with coming here today, I count it a great honor to share my testimony of this great work we are all a part of. I would like to talk about two basic gospel principles this morning.

First, I wish to proclaim with some degree of clarity and example our duty to be obedient, as Paul counseled the Romans: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are” (Romans 6:16).

Second, I want to follow with some thoughts on the crown jewel of our religion: selfless service or charity. Paul’s counsel to the Saints in Corinth highlighted this principle: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). I believe these two principles are inseparably connected—the former as the first law of heaven and the foundation of all other laws, and the latter as the ultimate expression of the first.

But before I begin, this is an important day in our nation’s history. It is the first national election of the new millennium. We have the right, the responsibility, and the obligation to vote today to change the direction of this nation. And I say “change” because regardless of which party wins this great contest, there will be a shift in the direction and climate of this nation. I urge you to be part of that process if you haven’t already exercised your privilege to make your choice known.

Bruce Carlson was an air force lieutenant general serving on the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C., when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 November 2000.

General Omar N. Bradley once said:

Freedom—no word was ever spoken that has held out greater hope, demanded greater sacrifice, needed more to be nurtured, blessed more the giver, . . . or come closer to being God’s will on earth.

General Bradley made it very clear that this concept of freedom—if it is to continue a reality—demands constant attention. His thoughts weren’t new. Woodrow Wilson said, “Freedom exists only where the people take care of the government” (speech in New York, 4 September 1912).

So, with this great gift of being free of restraint, slavery, detention, and oppression; with this great gift of political independence; with this great gift of civil rights and immunity from the arbitrary exercise of authority and the exemption from unpleasant conditions; with this great gift giving us the capacity to exercise choice and free will; and, finally, with this gift that allows us the right of enjoying all of the privileges of citizenship and the opportunity to worship the God of our fathers, in this, the greatest, richest, most blessed nation in the history of the world, comes responsibility—some very serious responsibility. I hope you have, or will before the day is over, exercised your responsibility and voted your conscience.

Now to this first law of heaven: obedience. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught us: “When we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). If you will permit me, I wish to weave in a couple of experiences to demonstrate these principles. The first of these is a personal one.

I have had the opportunity of flying a number of different high-performance jet fighters during my time in the air force, and flying each of them has been a unique experience. However, at one point in the past, I was flying a small two-engine turboprop airplane called the OV-10 Bronco. It was an observation aircraft, and in it I performed forward air con-

troller duties. The OV-10 was fully acrobatic, cruised at speeds ranging from 200 to 400 mph, and looked a lot like a oversized dragonfly with a large, clear bubble canopy protruding out the front. This allowed the pilot to see nearly all the way around the aircraft with an unobstructed view, and it flew slow enough and was maneuverable enough that you could locate and mark the position of targets using 2.75-inch rockets that it carried in pods located under its fuselage.

I not only flew this aircraft into combat but also flew it for two years while I was assigned to Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin, Texas. Although I was assigned to Bergstrom, I was away from home about half of the time, as we supported all of the army and air force units west of the Mississippi.

Shortly after our arrival in Austin, Vicki and I were asked to visit with our stake president early one Saturday morning. He talked with Vicki and me for some time, during which I laid out in pretty graphic detail my travel and temporary duty schedule. Despite that heavy travel schedule, the stake president extended the call for me to serve as the elders quorum president in our ward. As he concluded that interview, he must have sensed my concern over what I thought would be a very difficult assignment made even tougher by my being gone almost half of every month.

He looked me in the eye and promised me that if I would do my best—the absolute best I could when I was home—and attend my meetings, work hard, and pick good men to be my counselors, the Lord would bless me with success in this calling. And then he added that the Lord would protect and watch over me while I was away from my family.

I was buoyed up by his promise of success in this calling in a large and recently organized ward, but quite frankly didn’t think much more about the promise that I would be protected and watched over. I was, after all, young, confident in my abilities, and a

combat veteran. I felt I could handle the OV-10 very well.

Several months later I was returning one Saturday evening from a two-week flying training assignment at a western base and stopped, along with a second airplane, in El Paso, Texas, for gas. It was late, and the two other pilots—in the second OV-10 in the formation—argued that we should spend the night in El Paso, get a room, have a good meal, sleep late on Sunday morning, and get home mid-afternoon on Sunday. I was also tired and hungry and agreed it would sure be great to get a good night's sleep, but I recalled the guidance of my stake president and knew that he would expect me to be at the early Sunday morning priesthood executive committee meeting and the other meetings that would follow. So I convinced the others to gas up quickly and get on our way. I called Vicki. She and our two-year-old son would be at the base in just a little under three hours to pick me up.

Since I had led from California to El Paso, it was the other pilot's turn to lead our two-ship formation. It was probably about a two-and-a-half-hour flight from El Paso to Austin. About halfway it grew dark, and the weather started to turn foul. I flew in close formation on the leader for the last half of the flight. About 15 miles away from the air base, in darkness and in some rough weather, we let down to just below the clouds to begin our approach to the field. We lined up on initial, which meant we would fly down the runway at about 1,000 feet above the ground. Then, over the approach end of the runway, the leader would execute a 180-degree turn, and I would take five seconds spacing and do the same 180-degree turn, slow down, extend our gear and flaps, and turn to final approach, with us landing one behind the other. We were flying just beneath the ragged edge of some very bumpy cumulus clouds, in and out of rain showers.

The leader approached the runway and gave the signal for me to take five seconds spacing

and then do my turn or pitchout to downwind. About the time we were approaching the field to land, a concerned wife and mother looked outside at the impending stormy weather and felt prompted to kneel with her two-year-old son and ask a loving Heavenly Father to protect and bring home a dad who had been gone for two long weeks.

I counted to five and pulled the throttles back on the engines powering the two three-bladed, eight-and-a-half-foot propellers to slow the aircraft down and snapped the airplane into a 60-degree banked turn. I pulled back on the stick to increase the G forces, which are needed to complete a level 180-degree turn to a downwind position parallel to the runway. The G forces also help to slow the airplane down from 300 mph to less than 150 mph in a matter of a few seconds.

Just as I pulled on the stick to tighten up the turn, the main oil line failed on the right engine. Oil pressure is needed to hold the propeller at the precise pitch, based on the throttle position. When the oil line failed, the propeller instantly feathered, causing the three propeller blades to rotate 90 degrees within the propeller hub and streamline into the relative wind. As they rotated, they created extremely high drag loads on the engine, similar to someone trying to pull three large oars through thick molasses. This excessive load caused the engine to fail, followed by an engine fire. This catastrophic loss of thrust on the right engine while I was in a steep left turn caused my airplane to yaw upward into the nighttime storm clouds. A relatively simple overhead pattern and landing to complete the mission had turned into a serious malfunction compounded by the inclement weather.

A key part of our training as we learn to fly is how to handle various emergencies that can occur in flight. With the illumination of the fire warning light, I instinctively followed the emergency procedures—first shutting down the engine and then discharging the fire extinguisher, taking care of the engine

problem. However, during the time I was concentrating on accomplishing the emergency procedure, I experienced a severe case of spatial disorientation—meaning I was no longer sure which way was up or down.

During those few seconds in the darkness of the clouds, a few hundred feet above my awaiting family, my brain fought to make sense out of what I saw on the instrument panel. As I struggled to overcome the compelling instinct to follow other sensory perceptions, I recalled the final part of the promise my stake president pronounced as he called me to be an elders quorum president several months earlier. He promised that the Lord would watch over me if I did my duty. In those brief seconds of fear and confusion, I prayed that Heavenly Father would make good on that promise.

Now, brothers and sisters, with a clarity that I cannot explain but with a power I could never deny, I knew with a confidence that defied the situation that I must simply turn left. Despite being in the weather and lacking the visual cues essential to land from an overhead pattern, I followed the promptings and quite easily and quickly maneuvered out of the weather without further reference to the instruments, completing a descending turn to final approach and landing without further incident. The first hint the control tower had that there was a problem came as I radioed them on landing rollout—after saying another short prayer of thanks—telling them that they needed to get the fire trucks and a tow truck out to the end of the runway.

I have thought about that experience many times and marveled at the peace I felt as the situation deteriorated in those brief seconds of frantic action and confusion. I have a better idea of what Helaman was talking about when he related the experiences of his stripling warriors to his commander.

Mormon quoted from Helaman's field report to Moroni from a time when they were

surrounded by their enemy, outnumbered, and nearly starving for want of food:

And it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, inasmuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him. [Alma 58:11]

There is power in obedience. There is power in following the counsel of those who have authority over us. There is peace and assurance in doing our duty and performing with exactness all that the Lord requires of us. We have His word that He will bless us. He will lighten our load when it seems too heavy to bear. He will bring order to situations that seem hopeless and beyond our control. There will be pain. It will be difficult at times. And there will be some turbulent and cloudy air to travel through. You may even become temporarily disoriented. But He will make it possible for us to succeed even when we cannot make out a clear path ahead.

President Ezra Taft Benson said:

Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace. [TETB, 361]

When we are obedient, the Lord opens our hearts to the second principle I wish to briefly discuss today: charity and selfless service. Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote:

Self-effacing service with all of our heart and mind is a high challenge for all of us. . . . Those who forget themselves and give service in this manner can look up to God "with a pure heart and clean hands" (Alma 5:19). [Pure in Heart (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 49]

Two events that I am very familiar with illustrate this principle of selfless service.

Although my combat experiences have been very limited—a point I am thankful for—these two events are close to my heart because of my selected profession. The first of the events involved a trip to France in the spring of 1994, not long before the 50th anniversary of Operation Overlord that began on June 6, 1944—a day commonly referred to as D-Day, a day in history that we should never forget. Approximately 150,000 men were landed in a single day on the beaches of Normandy using 5,000 ships of every size and nearly 12,000 aircraft. During the next three weeks a total of a million men would funnel across Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword Beaches.

The day I spent at Normandy was a cold and dreary day. The clouds hung low in the sky, and the wind caused the waves to crash against the shore—not unlike that day nearly 50 years before. During my short visit I climbed a 100-foot hill that overlooks Omaha Beach to the east and Utah Beach further to the west. From this vantage point, despite the distance of three to 10 miles, you can plainly see both beaches. It was on this point, according to Allied intelligence, that the Germans had placed six 155-mm howitzers. These guns had to be destroyed to prevent them from wreaking havoc on the Americans landing at Omaha Beach and the naval fleet offshore. The task was assigned to Americans of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, which landed below the cliff at what is known as Pointe du Hoc. As these men attempted to scale this cliff, German soldiers hurled grenades and opened fire from their positions of advantage in an effort to repel the attack. Only 90 of the 225 Rangers who began the ascent were able to still bear arms at the end of the climb, but when the fighting was over, Pointe du Hoc was in American hands.

You can get a good view of the geography from the vantage point of that high ground and

can easily visualize the thousands of German firing positions that surrounded the area. Standing on that point looking out over those beaches, particularly Omaha Beach, with its wide, soft-sand shoreline, it was difficult to visualize anyone surviving the fields of enemy fire placed in the way. It was humbling to realize that within a few short hours on a single day, within a few hundred yards of where I was standing, more than 12,000 men gave up their lives so that others could live free—others in a future generation that they didn't even know and would never see. That experience had a deep impact on me. Most of these men were your age or younger. They would never marry, never attend college, never experience the joy of children or grandchildren on their laps, and never see their wives or sweethearts again in this life. They gave their lives in selfless service so that we—and the rest of the world—could have one more opportunity to get it right. As Brother Hugh Nibley has said:

For charity there is no bookkeeping, no quid pro quo, no deals, interests, bargaining, or ulterior motives; charity gives to those who do not deserve and expects nothing in return; it is the love God has for us. [Since Cumorah, 2d ed., ch. 12, "Good People and Bad People," The Law of the Judgment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 347]

By the way, if I have my facts right, I believe a 34-year-old army intelligence officer possessing a PhD in ancient history from the University of California at Berkeley named Hugh Nibley came ashore at Utah Beach at first light on June 6, 1944.

The second event was a trip to the Orient just a few years ago. I flew to Japan, Korea, and China as part of a group of new general officers. Because we were flying in a small airplane, we island-hopped our way to Japan, stopping at Johnson Atoll and Kwajalein. We then overflew, along with several others, the island of

Iwo Jima. I was up in the cockpit on that leg and had a great view of Iwo Jima. It is known to the Japanese as Sulfur Island. Even from altitude, on that clear day you could see it was a black, hot, bubbling, volcanic island that still spewed sulfur gas. During February and March 1945 it was the scene of one of the most terrible battles of World War II. During the 36-day campaign to take that island, a Marine fell to Japanese fire every two minutes. Just think, for 36 days, every two minutes a Marine was killed or wounded. It was the only battle in the history of our corps where Marines suffered more casualties than the enemy.

Today the island still bears the scars of that incredible struggle. Those who have spent time on the island say that the winds that constantly blow across the black sands of the Iwo Jima beaches seem, at times, to carry the voices of the warriors that fought there a half-century ago. It is a mournful and reverent place, even when viewed from above.

Before I suffered a back injury and had to quit running regularly, I use to run one of two routes near the Pentagon. The long run took me across the Memorial Bridge past the Lincoln, Vietnam, and Washington Memorials, then across the 14th Street Bridge and back to the Pentagon. But on those days when my legs felt up to it, I would take a shorter but more difficult run up to the Iwo Jima Memorial, high atop a hill overlooking the Potomac and adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery. As I am sure all of you know, this large bronze and granite sculpture captures one of the most famous battle photographs ever taken, the raising of the American flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima. Five Marines and one navy corpsman took part in that flag raising. Three of the six did not survive the battle, but the navy corpsman did. His name was Pharmacist Mate 2nd Class John Bradley.

I would like to tell you a little of his story. He rarely spoke to his family about his experiences on Iwo Jima. When pressed, he would

gloss over and downplay how he had won the nation's second highest award for bravery—the Navy Cross.

He earned that decoration by rushing to the aid of two wounded Marines and then shielding them with his body from enemy fire while he tended to their wounds. When Bradley hurried to their aid, he didn't exactly rush, he crawled. He crawled because he had been shot through both legs just a few minutes before.

I encourage you to visit the Iwo Jima War Memorial one day. When you do, step back and read the engraved words: "Where Uncommon Valor Was a Common Virtue." Then study the faces of those men, all young men, captured with great detail in bronze. You will have to go around to the south side and look toward the Potomac River. There you will find John Bradley. You will recognize him. He's the one with the empty canteen pouch. You see, prior to climbing Mount Suribachi, he gave the last of his water to a dying Marine. And on that hot bubbling sulfur island, John Bradley would go the next 24 hours without water.

There is something in what Corpsman Bradley did that goes beyond bravery—it goes beyond sacrifice. I think it is selflessness. The scriptures call it charity. John Bradley was certainly brave, and his sacrifices have surely secured a great reward for him in the next life, but most of all he was selfless. His brave acts were not done for any reward, nor were they intended to be captured by CBS or the News at 10. There was no public glory in what he did. In fact, men under fire rarely speak of glory. Instead, they speak of those who can be counted on and those who cannot. Above all, they speak about and remember individual acts of selflessness.

When Felix de Weldon, the sculptor of the Marine Corps War Memorial, asked John Bradley what happened to his canteen, Corpsman Bradley couldn't even remember. In the heat of the battle he had forgotten. But

the surviving Marines of Bradley's unit knew, and they remembered. They told de Weldon the story of his sharing his water. Selflessness, you see, is unforgettable—even small acts of selflessness are unforgettable.

In a few minutes we will all walk out of here and begin the rest of another day. Each of you will face responsibilities of one sort or another. You will face challenges, and most of those can normally be translated into a series of choices.

A choice to be of service or to step back and hope someone else will volunteer.

A choice to stand for something that is good and right or let the guy with the loudest voice rule.

A choice to accept a challenge or settle for second best.

But of all the choices you will face, there is none greater than the choice between self and selflessness.

Is the benefit for you? Is it for your team? How about your peer group or school or church?

Over the chapel doors at the United States Naval Academy is a simple Latin inscription: "Non sibi sed patriae." Translated, it reads: "Not for self but for country." Simple but powerful.

Selflessness takes time to develop. Rarely does a man or woman suddenly grow a brain and a spine in the middle of a crisis or on a battlefield. Likewise, rarely does a person develop a sense of selflessness in a single moment in time. Spontaneous selfless acts rarely just happen. Instead, they are built on a strong moral foundation and constant obedience to sound principles. They are perfected by doing the right thing—over and over again.

I am confident that most of you possess strong character and a sense of duty and are striving to be obedient. Before me I see some of the finest young men and women on the face of the earth, faithful members and friends of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Remember the mission of this great university,

seen by all as you arrive on campus: "Enter to learn; go forth to serve." I encourage you to build on the spirit of selfless service that Christ exemplified throughout His life.

John Bradley gave the last of his water to a wounded Marine on February 23, 1945. That afternoon he was struggling to climb the fire-swept heights of Mount Suribachi. The next day he braved enemy fire to aid two wounded Marines. And just a few days later, though wounded himself, he again braved enemy fire to aid two more Marines and shielded them with his own body as he tended to their wounds. It was not for sense of self that he performed those brave acts of courage. It was for others, for those he knew and for those he had never even met. Deep within his soul, John Bradley instinctually understood that "non sibi sed patriae" (not for self but for country) is contagious.

You see, after aiding those final two wounded Marines, Corpsman John Bradley, badly wounded, lost consciousness. He awoke 36 hours later aboard a hospital ship. How he arrived there is unknown. The names of those Marines or sailors who carried him off the field of battle, who placed him on the small boat, who carried him to the ship, have been lost to history. But their selfless deeds remain unforgettable in the life of John Bradley.

King Benjamin taught that when we are in the service of others we are only in the service of our God (see Mosiah 2:17). I would suggest that when we provide charitable or selfless service to others, we are acting in obedience to our Father in Heaven. It is my prayer that we will practice obedience to the laws of a loving Heavenly Father who knows what we need to be doing to be His covenant people. It is my prayer that we will exercise the capacity within each of us to become more selfless in our service to each other, to our community, to our church, and to our nation. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.