

Follow the Prophet

SHELDON F. CHILD

My dear brothers and sisters, I am so grateful for the assignment to be here with you today. I trust that the Spirit of the Lord will be with us and that I might be able to express the thoughts that are in my heart. As I have thought about what the Lord would have me say today, I have been impressed with how blessed we are as a people to be living in this day and age when the gospel of Jesus Christ and the keys of the priesthood have been restored and the Church is moving forward in such a remarkable way.

It all began on a spring day in 1820 when a young boy walked into a grove of trees to pray. That was the beginning of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter days. It was through that young boy, Joseph Smith, that we learned the true nature of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. In time he brought forth the Book of Mormon. He received the priesthood from those who held it anciently. He organized Christ's church upon the earth today. He built temples so that men and women could make eternal covenants with God and enjoy the blessings of eternal life together as families.

How fitting it is that President Gordon B. Hinckley will dedicate the 113th temple of the Church in Nauvoo, Illinois—the City of Joseph—on June 27, the 158th anniversary of the martyr-

dom of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The temple, which is built on the original building site, will complete what Joseph left unfinished as he rode to Carthage and to martyrdom.

I am so grateful for the Prophet Joseph Smith and the role he played in helping the Lord bring about the restoration of the gospel and the establishment of the Church. I am grateful for the prophets who followed him and for our living prophets today. We sustain 15 men as prophets, seers, and revelators. President Gordon B. Hinckley holds the keys of the kingdom. He is the Lord's chief apostle on the earth today. In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord said:

For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye have received a commandment for a law unto my church, through him whom I have appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations from my hand.

And this ye shall know assuredly—that there is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abide in me. [D&C 43:2–3]

Sheldon F. Child was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 4 June 2002.

God’s prophet is the Lord’s mouthpiece. He gives us direction and guidance.

Many people in today’s world are seeking guidance and direction in their lives. A few years ago, while serving in the Philippines, I was assigned to reorganize a stake presidency in Northern Luzon. At the Sunday general session of stake conference, I asked the wife of the newly called stake president to bear her testimony.

She told of being raised in a good, religious home not of our faith but with wonderful, caring parents. She told how her father and mother would call the family together every day and read from the scriptures. As they read of the prophets of old, she asked her parents why the Lord did not have prophets on the earth today. They answered that God had spoken through the scriptures and that a prophet was no longer needed.

At the parochial schools she attended, she would ask her teachers why there were no prophets on the earth today. Again, she received the same answer. She could not understand why God would give some of His children prophets and not give them to others. When she reached college age, her parents sent her to Manila to study at one of the finest universities. She asked her instructors there the same question, and again she received the same answer.

One day while eating lunch at a small fast-food establishment near the university, she noticed two young men come in and sit down not far from her. She could see the name of Jesus Christ on the black badges that they wore. She boldly stood up and approached the young men.

She asked, “Are you ministers?”

“Yes,” was their reply. “We are missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

“Then may I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” was their response.

So she asked, “Does the Lord love the people today as much as He loved the people in biblical times?”

“Yes, He does,” they answered. “God loves all of His children equally. He is no respecter of persons.”

“Then why does not God send prophets to us today as He did to them?”

Well, you can imagine the excitement of those two missionaries: “He does! He does! We *do* have prophets on the earth today. Can we tell you about them?”

They taught her the six discussions, her questions were answered, and within a short time she was baptized. A year later she was serving as a missionary, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others and telling them about the Lord’s prophets. She faithfully served an honorable mission, came home, and later married the young man who had been called to serve as the new stake president.

What a blessing it is to know that a prophet of God is on the earth today. On April 6, 1830, the Church was organized, and Joseph Smith was called as the prophet. On that very day the Lord gave a revelation to the Church directing them to follow the prophet. In section 21 of the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. [D&C 21:4–5]

Does it take patience and faith to follow the prophet? Of course it does. His counsel may interfere with our lifestyle. He may say things that we don’t want to hear. President Marion G. Romney related the following:

It is an easy thing to believe in the dead prophets, but it is a greater thing to believe in the living prophets. I will give you an illustration.

One day when President Grant was living, I sat in my office across the street following a general conference. A man came over to see me, an elderly man. He was very upset about what had been said in this conference by some of the Brethren, including myself. I could tell from his speech that he came from a foreign land. After I had quieted him enough so he would listen, I said, "Why did you come to America?"

"I came here because a prophet of God told me to come."

"Who was the prophet?" I continued.

"Wilford Woodruff."

"Do you believe Wilford Woodruff was a prophet of God?"

"Yes," said he.

"Do you believe that his successor, President Lorenzo Snow, was a prophet of God?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you believe that President Joseph F. Smith was a prophet of God?"

"Yes, sir."

Then came the "sixty-four dollar question."

"Do you believe that Heber J. Grant is a prophet of God?"

His answer: "I think he ought to keep his mouth shut about old age assistance."

Now I tell you that a man in his position is on the way to apostasy. He is forfeiting his chances for eternal life. So is everyone who cannot follow the living prophet of God. [CR, April 1953, 125]

After the Lord gave the Saints the commandment to follow the prophet in patience and faith, He listed the promised blessings we will receive if we keep that commandment. Continuing on in section 21, the Lord said:

For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory. [D&C 21:6]

These are wonderful promises. They are especially significant in today's world when Satan has marshaled all his forces and is determined to thwart the plan of God and lead our Heavenly Father's children away into sin and despair. We are promised protection from the buffetings of Satan if we but follow the words of the prophet.

How closely do we listen to and heed his words? President Hinckley has given us counsel and direction that will bring great blessings into our lives and the fulfillment of these wonderful promises. You will remember in his last October general conference address that he expressed concern over the times in which we are living:

President Hinckley stated:

Life is fragile, peace is fragile, civilization itself is fragile. The economy is particularly vulnerable. We have been counseled again and again concerning self-reliance, concerning debt, concerning thrift. So many of our people are heavily in debt for things that are not entirely necessary. . . . I urge you as members of this Church to get free of debt where possible and to have a little laid aside against a rainy day. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," Ensign, November 2001, 73]

You might have thought when you heard this counsel that it was good advice for your parents or for others. But, my dear brothers and sisters, it is great counsel for you and for each one of us. Our economy *is* particularly vulnerable. Today the world in which we live is much more complex than ever before. So many external influences, as well as internal influences, affect us. No one can accurately predict what will take place in even a few months from now—let alone a few years. Consequently we must make preparations for whatever lies ahead.

Our prophet has counseled us to stay out of debt. This is a principle you need to learn, even as students here at BYU. We have been

told that there are few things worth going into debt for. Some of you have needed to take out loans to pay for your schooling. This may be a necessary thing to do to get your education. In the future when you buy a home, a loan may be necessary to help you meet that need. But there are too many people who do not differentiate between wants and needs.

An article published this spring reported that “C. Britt Beemer, chairman of Charleston, S.C.–based America’s Research Group, estimates that the under-30 age group has an average credit card debt of \$10,000 to \$12,000, up 50 percent from five years ago” (Anne D’Innocenzio, “Held Hostage by Debt,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 March 2002, C8.) Brothers and sisters, this is a frightening statistic. When we assume personal debt, we are gambling on our future earnings. This can be very dangerous. A poor economy, unemployment, natural disasters, illness, or other emergencies can affect our lives and make it difficult, if not impossible, to repay those debts.

A recent *Deseret News* editorial was entitled “Woeful Bankruptcy Trend.” It stated that “the number of bankruptcies filed in Utah during 2001 is alarming.” It is up 28 percent from the year 2000. The article stated that lax credit policies “make it easy for people to get into serious debt.” Consumers are flooded with mail solicitations enticing them to use easy credit. “Unfortunately, it is far too easy for too many people to get in over their heads because of virtually unrestricted use of credit cards.” This article stated that “better laws and more restrictive credit card policies are just part of the equation to reverse this trend. The real key is individual commitment. People need to discipline themselves in a way that does not put themselves financially at risk.” (“Woeful Bankruptcy Trend,” *Deseret News*, 19 January 2002, A8.)

President Hinckley has said:

*I commend to you the virtues of thrift and industry. In doing so, I do not wish you to be a “tightwad,” if you will pardon that expression, or to be a freeloader, or anything of the kind. But it is the labor and the thrift of people that make a nation strong [and] the family independent. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “Thou Shalt Not Covet,” *Ensign*, March 1990, 4]*

We teach the importance of self-reliance. It is a prerequisite to service and giving. Each of us must become self-reliant before we can effectively help others.

Years ago I was on an airplane sitting by one of our small sons. The flight attendant was giving instructions. She said that in the case of an emergency an oxygen mask would automatically drop from the ceiling. She then described how to put the mask on so that oxygen would flow. Then she said something that bothered me. She said, “In case you are traveling with small children or someone who needs assistance, put on your own mask first and then proceed to help them.” I thought of how much I loved my son and that I would take care of his needs before my own. Then the thought came to me, “How can you help him if you are struggling?” That taught me a great lesson of self-reliance. In order to help someone else, we ourselves must be in a position to help.

We must listen to the words of our living prophet and take care of our temporal needs. He advises us to stay out of debt, live within our means, be thrifty and industrious, and become self-reliant so that we can reach out and help others. This is good advice for each of us and will bring blessings to our lives.

President Hinckley is also concerned about our spiritual needs. He reminds us that we must be examples of honesty and integrity in all our dealings with our fellowmen. He has said:

In all this world there is no substitute for personal integrity. It includes honor. It includes

performance. It includes keeping one's word. It includes doing what is right regardless of the circumstances. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "These Noble Pioneers," *Brigham Young University 1996–97 Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 1997), 178]

A few years ago, Warren Buffet, chairman of the board of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., and one of the world's wealthiest men, accepted an invitation to speak at the BYU Marriott School of Management. During a question-and-answer segment he was asked by one of the students, "What do you look for in your managers and those you hire to work for you?"

Mr. Buffet stated that he looked for three things: "First, integrity. Second, intelligence. And third, effort." Then he added, "If you don't have the first one—integrity—the other two will make no difference."

As important as it is to be honest with our fellowmen, it is even more important to be honest with our God. In Malachi we read:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. [Malachi 3:8]

President Hinckley has told us it does not take money to pay tithing; it takes faith. He counsels us: "Pay your tithes that you may be worthy of the Lord's blessings" (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Pillars of Truth," *Ensign*, January 1994, 7). If we fail to pay our tithing, we are depriving ourselves of temple blessings.

In temples we receive the greatest blessings that can come to us from God. You can see why temple building is so important to our prophet. You can see why he pleads with us to put our spiritual lives in order so that we can receive the blessings of the temple. Only in temples can all of His faithful children receive the blessings of eternal life with God and with those they love.

One afternoon while in my office in Manila, a man came to see me. I invited him in. He had such a sweet, peaceful countenance that he almost glowed. Yet I could tell that he was a man of very humble circumstances. He told me that he lived on one of the outer islands and had come to Manila to take his family to the temple. From his pocket he pulled out a letter written to me by his district president.

The letter told of the man's faithfulness. He and his family had joined the Church four years earlier. Since that day they had worked to save enough money to go to the temple in Manila. The fare for the long boat journey seemed almost impossible for this family to save. They had hoped to go to the temple the previous year, but they hadn't been able to save enough money for the trip. Attending the temple this year was so important to them that they sold most of their worldly possessions to buy tickets for him, his wife, and their two daughters. The letter indicated that his wife was not well and asked if we could arrange to have her see a doctor while she was in Manila.

I was touched as I read of the faithfulness of this humble man and his family. I asked him where his wife and daughters were. He said that they were waiting for him outside. We went out and invited them in. He was so proud of his wife and his two beautiful teenage daughters.

I could tell that his wife was not well. When I asked about her health, she said that she was plagued by constant, severe headaches. She took off the scarf she was wearing and showed me that her hair was falling out. She said that sometimes she would pass out and fall. Then her husband spoke and said, "President, I love my wife and my daughters. I don't know what will happen to my wife. I don't know whether she will live or die." As he stopped to wipe away some tears, he looked out the window across the street to the beautiful Manila Temple.

“President, this morning we were sealed as a family together in the holy temple. We don’t know what the future will bring. But whatever happens, it will be okay because we now can be together forever. This is the happiest day of my life.” That humble, faithful Saint from the Philippines did not know what the future might bring for him, his wife, or his family, but there was peace in his heart because of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Last year in President Hinckley’s October general conference address, he said:

I do not know what the future holds. I do not wish to sound negative, but I wish to remind you of the warnings of scripture and the teachings of the prophets which we have had constantly before us. . . .

. . . I do not wish to be a prophet of doom. I am optimistic. . . . There is so much of the Lord’s work yet to be done. We, and our children after us, must do it. . . .

Are these perilous times? They are. But there is no need to fear. We can have peace in our hearts and peace in our homes. [“The Times in Which We Live,” 73–74]

My dear brothers and sisters, there is no need to fear. The Lord tells us in section 38 of the Doctrine and Covenants, “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30). President Hinckley is encouraging us to be prepared, both spiritually and temporally, so that we might receive all the blessings Heavenly Father has in store for His children.

How blessed we are to live in this day and this age and to have a living prophet to guide us. I want to bear solemn witness and testimony that President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord’s prophet on the earth today. I pray that we will have faith to heed his words and follow the prophet, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.