

A Brave Generation

WALTER F. GONZÁLEZ

It is an honor for me to address you and test your ability to understand English spoken with an accent. English is the language of the Restoration, but I am sure that over time, with the growth of the Church, it will be English spoken with an accent. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have participated in making arrangements and preparing for this gathering so that we can hold this devotional. I am especially grateful for you, the students. You are wonderful people, and I marvel at all that you represent. In January of this year President Monson was talking to the young people at a Church Educational System devotional where he quoted an American poet whose words reflect my feelings today also. President Monson quoted:

*How beautiful is youth! how bright it gleams
With its illusions, aspirations, dreams!
Book of Beginnings, Story without End,
Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!*¹

You are in a wonderful time of your life and are learning so much. You are busy exploring possibilities and are gleaming with aspirations and dreams. You are at a point where you are making decisions that require you to be brave and bold. Your decisions are being recorded in

your book of beginnings, in your stories without end.

I know about those decisions. I was born and raised in Montevideo, Uruguay. I am a convert to the Church. I joined when I was 18 years old. Becoming a member of the Church meant that I often found myself in the minority. When I was baptized, I was the only member of my family to join the kingdom, and I was in the minority. In college I was usually the only Latter-day Saint, and so again I was in the minority. Later I moved with my family to Ecuador, and there I was still in the minority. Then I was called as a General Authority in the year 2001, and I continued to be in the minority as I served in the wonderful lands of Brazil, Colombia, and Peru.

I have come to learn that true principles are key factors that help us in making decisions in the crucial circumstances of our lives. To understand this, let me take you back to the wars of independence in South America. During those violent times, José Gervasio Artigas rose as the national hero of Uruguay, my home country. He

Walter F. González was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 3 November 2009.

was a man who cherished learning and often insisted on the importance of getting an education. In fact, his armies echoed his words by using his phrase as a greeting among soldiers: “Be . . . as educated as you are brave” or “Sean los orientales tan ilustrados como valientes.”² I learned this from an early age. Such a teaching of a true principle in my upbringing was very helpful when facing the challenges of always being in the minority.

I mention this because it is inevitable that sooner or later you will be in the minority in standing for righteousness and in standing for the principles and doctrines of the Church. You may already know what that is all about. When that time comes—if it has not yet come—you will be strengthened by what you have learned. You are so blessed with the opportunity to get an education, both of secular and of spiritual things. Such an education should lead you to be brave in making key decisions. For example, right now you might be concerned with key issues such as marriage, studies, employment, and serving others. You need to study these things out in your mind.³ Your academic preparation will help you do that. You also need to use the “eye of faith”⁴ to look forward to the fruit you can reap in those different fields. Your spiritual preparation will help you do that. In exercising faith, all of us should be bold. We need the faith of Peter, who decided to follow the calling of the Master even when it meant walking on water. We are to jump out of the boat with courage. We need the courage to believe.

Let’s focus now on three areas where it is certain that at some point you will be in the minority—areas that will require boldness. First, you will need to be brave in order to break the chains that hold you back; second, brave in defending the principles of truth and righteousness; and third, brave in serving others. There are so many decisions that have to be made in order for you to move in the right direction with your aspirations and dreams.

You can break whichever chain is holding you back. The Savior is there with His arm of mercy wide open to succor us in our efforts to break our chains. Breaking those chains, especially if they are heavy, requires great courage. In the scriptures we find a telling example of someone who was so weighed down by his chains that he felt it would be better to be “banished and become extinct both soul and body”⁵ than to continue wearing his heavy chains. This man was Alma the Younger. His chains were so paralyzing that he withered, “racked with torment [and] harrowed up.”⁶ And yet when we think of Alma the Younger, we remember him as one of the greatest examples and leaders in the great Nephite nation.

He was able to break the chains. How did he do it? In his own words, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, he explained:

While I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more. . . .

. . . Yea, my soul was filled with joy. . . .

Yea, . . . there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.⁷

The key to Alma being able to break the chains that held him back was that he was brave enough to focus his thoughts on Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. He exercised faith in the Savior’s power to take away his pain. It is important to note that he moved his thought away from the pain, away from his sins, away from the chains that held him back, and focused on Jesus Christ. He looked up

to Christ, not down at the chains. Doing this required a great deal of courage. This required that he overcome his fear of failure. In other words, exercising faith requires the courage of believing. We are to be brave, believe in His redeeming power, and act accordingly.

Another key decision in life is to defend the principles of truth and righteousness even if you are the only one doing it. Those are moments to be brave and bold.

I remember attending college in Uruguay in the early 1970s, a time when materialism was taught with great strength in the educational system there. Materialistic philosophies, endorsed even by subversive groups, had infiltrated higher education to the extent that many fertile souls were taught in the classroom that there was no God. In the middle of those turbulent days I came to know that the Book of Mormon was a divine book and, consequently, that Joseph Smith was a prophet and that God was real. Even though those in authority denied the existence of God, and religion was frowned upon by all around me, I knew that God lives and that He had restored the truths found in the Book of Mormon through a living latter-day prophet.

I understand how Caleb, one of the 12 spies, might have felt when he heard the other 10 spies who had been sent by Moses to survey the promised land as they reported that the land was populated by enemies in great, fortified cities⁸ and that those enemies were giants, making the spies feel as small as grasshoppers.⁹ Such a report was very discouraging, but “Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.”¹⁰ That was a bold statement. Caleb explained what the source of his courage was. He said, “If so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said.”¹¹

Which is your source of courage? Sooner or later you will find yourself in a world where you are in the minority as Caleb was. It will

be up to you to act and to defend the truth in such a world. Take Caleb as your example. He was brave because he had faith in the Lord and in the promises made through His appointed representative on earth.

You may find yourselves in situations where you have to be brave in defending the principles of righteousness even when no one is watching. In such situations, you may draw courage to defend the principles of righteousness from your faith in God and also from your love toward God and your fellow man. Think for a moment of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. Through the blessings of the Lord he was able to gain his master’s trust to the point that Potiphar “made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had.”¹² And then, one day, Joseph found himself alone with Potiphar’s wife, who made advances on him. The book of Genesis tells us:

She said, Lie with me.

But he refused, and said unto his master’s wife, . . .

There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?¹³

Even though Joseph could have secretly yielded to the invitation to forsake the principles of righteousness, he did not. He was brave. When you are alone, when no one sees you, what is your source of courage to resist temptation? Joseph mentioned two sources for his courage in defending the truth, even when it seemed no one would know he had done so.

First, he would not betray his Egyptian master’s trust. And so it should be with us. Every time we fail to stand for truth or righteousness, we are betraying someone’s trust. It may be the trust of a father or mother, the trust of a wife or husband, the trust of a son or daughter, the trust of a Church leader, the trust

of a friend, or the trust of a missionary who taught us the gospel.

Second, Joseph would not sin against God. There is no question that Joseph loved God dearly. Consequently, he would do nothing to offend God. Our love of God is linked to our refusal to sin against Him. Through your love of God, be bold in defending truth and righteousness, even if you are the only one doing it.

If you are brave enough to break the chains that hold you back and brave enough to defend the principles of truth and righteousness, you will be better qualified to serve others and even contribute to the rescue by bringing back to Church activity the “lost battalions”¹⁴ President Monson has referred to.

Time in college is a wonderful time, a time to plant so many dear memories. However, you will have to face some hurdles. A lot of the restraints you had at home or in your mission are now gone. You more than likely enjoy greater autonomy now than in any other time in your life. In addition to that, you may find that you are thinking of yourself too much. What will I study? What nonacademic activities will I pursue? What will I do this weekend for fun? What will I . . . ? You may notice how often the pronoun *I* comes to your mind. This is especially the case if you are single and don’t have a spouse and children to look after. It becomes very easy to justify a self-centered existence in college. Such an existence is perilous for the soul.

Let me suggest an antidote for that danger: Be brave and serve others. This, of course, is our prophet’s call. Just this last October in general conference he encouraged us to serve with these words:

My brothers and sisters, we are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness—be they family members, friends, acquaintances, or strangers. We are the Lord’s hands here upon the earth,

*with the mandate to serve and to lift His children. He is dependent upon each of us.*¹⁵

With jobs, school, social activities, and so many other commitments and responsibilities, you probably feel that the day is far too short. How can you then serve others? As always, the answer lies in the Savior.

I cannot imagine someone with more things to do than the Savior Jesus Christ. After His crucifixion, the Savior came to the ancient Americas and taught the people. When He finished, He commanded the people to go home and study His words and return in the morning for more teachings. It seems clear He had plenty to do when He said, “Now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel.”¹⁶ But pay attention to what happened after He announced he had to go and do other things:

*When Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.*¹⁷

In that moment he was flexible and adapted what He was planning to do. Instead of going right away to the Father, He stayed longer in order to serve His beloved ones.

And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you.

Have ye any that are sick among you? . . . Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. . . .

*. . . And he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him.*¹⁸

He took the time to heal them one by one. This wonderful edifying experience is recorded in 3 Nephi 17 in the Book of Mormon. It is a powerful example for us. We need to develop the ability to see the need in others and break away from our own to-do list in order to serve

our fellow man. This will require courage, no doubt, because we may be afraid that if we take time for unprogrammed service, other things will be left undone. We need flexible agendas to leave room for the promptings of the Spirit. The Savior was moved by love to meet the needs of others. But most of all, let us remember that He loved His Father and He had the courage to obey.

When thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is hard not to evoke the feelings of that night in Gethsemane as He agonized under the weight of the sins and pains He would suffer for all. In those critical moments that He wished He did not have to go through, “he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”¹⁹ Glory be to the Father, the Son partook of that bitter cup. In that moment He showed more courage than any man ever has. He showed the courage to break away “the bands of death, and the chains of hell.”²⁰ He showed the courage to stand for truth in the direst of hours, the courage to serve all, but, above all, he showed the courage and love to put the will of the Father before His own.

If we are bold enough to put the will of the Father before our own, in due time we could say as Paul said:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.*²¹

How beautiful you are! Here you are working on an outstanding education. Be brave enough to defend truth and righteousness and to develop a spirit of service by putting your faith in Christ.

May the Lord bless you with your book of beginnings and your stories without end.

I know that the Prophet Joseph Smith was brave in not denying what he knew was true. I testify that there is a prophet living on the earth today, namely, Thomas S. Monson, who is also valiant, brave, and courageous in defending truth. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Holy Messiah. I bear this witness in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Morituri Salutamus* (1875); quoted in Thomas S. Monson, “Great Expectations,” CES fireside for young adults given at Brigham Young University, 11 January 2009.

2. José Gervasio Artigas, at festivities celebrating the opening of the first public library, Biblioteca Nacional del Uruguay, Montevideo, 30 May 1816; in Juan Silva Vila, *Ideario de Artigas* (Montevideo: Ediciones Ciudadela, 1973), 53.

3. See D&C 9:8.

4. Ether 12:19.

5. Alma 36:15.

6. Alma 36:17.

7. Alma 36:17–21.

8. See Joshua 14:12; Numbers 13:28.

9. See Numbers 13:33.

10. Numbers 13:30.

11. Joshua 14:12.

12. Genesis 39:5.

13. Genesis 39:7–9.

14. See Thomas S. Monson, “Lost Battalions,” *Ensign*, June 1971, 95–97; also First Presidency Message, *Ensign*, April 1987, 2–6.

15. Thomas S. Monson, “What Have I Done for Someone Today?” *Ensign*, November 2009, 86.

16. 3 Nephi 17:4.

17. 3 Nephi 17:5.

18. 3 Nephi 17:6–7, 9.

19. Matthew 26:39.

20. Alma 5:7.

21. 2 Timothy 4:7–8.