

Remembered and Nourished by the Good Word of God

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

I really don't want to apologize for being here, but I apologize in the sense that you are used to a General Authority. You will understand, however, that it is general conference week and a very busy time for them. So you do not have a General Authority. In me, you do not even have a specific authority. In me, you do not even have any authority at all. So I pray that you will be patient and that the Lord will provide. I feel a little bit like the politician who, after his fact-filled address, asked if there were any questions. There was only one: "Yes, who else is running?" Tonight, no one else is running, and I pray that you don't.

I'm deeply grateful for your attendance; I realize that you've been in meetings since six o'clock this morning. Somebody said the definition of a Mormon is one planning for, going to, sitting in, thinking about, or coming from a meeting. That is really the idea about which I want to speak tonight, but I have no illusions about why you're here (except perhaps in the case of the missionaries—I exclude them). But for the rest of you, don't kid me! I know why you're here. I didn't just fall off the turnip truck, you know. I see you out there, and you haven't looked up here to the podium once. Your vision is all horizontal, lateral. I can hear on the great eternal sound system what you

fellows are thinking: "She *is* here. She said she might not come, but she's here. I think a strategically timed stroll to the water fountain would do it." She's saying, "Oh, he's here! He's here! but he's with *her*." I know your thoughts; I went to this school.

Now I'll tell the only boy-girl story that I know and get right on with my message. It's really President Tanner's story. It's about the very shy, reticent young man who dated a girl for quite a while. She had waited through a mission and most of an educational career. He wasn't given to a lot of talk anyway (which was one of the things that bothered her), but one night he finally summoned up the supreme, ultimate courage and said this one line: "Will you marry me?" Well, she exploded. "Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! Where shall we have the reception? What colors do you think will be best for the bridesmaids? What about the open house? We ought to call mother!" She went on and on and on for I suppose thirty minutes and didn't take a breath. He just sat there in his silent, eloquent way.

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Finally she realized that she had monopolized the conversation. She said, “Oh, sweetheart, I’m so sorry. Say something. Say something. Don’t let me capture all of the splendor of this moment.” To which, after some silence, he said, “I think I’ve said too much already.”

It’s a great thing to belong to a church that brings us together. I have worried about, prayed about, and struggled over the message that I might give to you tonight, and I’m giving the message I feel I should. It is not a message that I might usually give, but through the blessing and timeliness of the calendar, it may be the kind of message that I will not have the opportunity to give you ever again so appropriately.

Purposes of Church Meetings

You do not have a General Authority here tonight because of general conference. And it is about general conference that I wish to speak. It is also about other conferences, not unlike that in which you now gather, that I also wish to speak. That is why I say it is great to belong to a church that brings us together. “And see that the church meet together often,” the Lord directs the priesthood; “it is expedient that the church meet together often” (D&C 20:55, 75). The same counsel was given to the Nephites (see Mosiah 18:25). But let me specifically suggest why, as it seems to me, the Lord asks us to come together—specifically at general conference, about which I wish to say more, but in part at firesides and sacrament meetings and family home evenings and family prayers and other kinds of conferences that we hold before the Lord.

Section 43 of the Doctrine and Covenants comes from a very, very rich period of Church history. It was one of those forty-five- or sixty-day periods in which the blessings and the revelations of the Lord were pouring out. You will note from the sequence of sections that within this period we have received section 42 containing the law of the Church, section 46

enumerating the gifts of the spirit, and other revelations. I quote from section 43:

And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given.

And thus ye shall become instructed in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me. . . .

And ye are to be taught from on high. Sanctify yourselves and ye shall be endowed with power.
[D&C 43:8–9, 16]

Administratively, ecclesiastically, in terms of priesthood power, that seems to be a marvelous description of what is supposed to happen when we come together: instruction, edification, ultimately sanctification, that we may “bind” ourselves “to act in all holiness” before him.

Now, I assume that binding may have a couple of meanings. It surely means to bind ourselves to him, that we come together under covenant. Remember it is the *church* which is called to meet together—those who have made promises to the Lord. But I suspect it also means that we bind ourselves together, to each other, to act before God as a church ought to act, to administer in the affairs of his law, to see that the Church is what the Church is supposed to be, and to in fact see that the kingdom comes. Now that’s part of what we do, I think, when we get together and participate in that kind of binding. Let me read one more verse. It is one of the last lines Moroni gives before closing his book:

And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names

were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.

And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.

And they were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them. [Moroni 6:4–7]

I suppose there may be a branch president or a high councilor or an elders quorum president or a visiting teacher in the room who wants to know what it is we are to accomplish as Church members when we get together, even if it's only in a home evening group or an opportunity to pray together. Well, this passage indicates that it may have something to do with remembering each other. We all count. Everyone matters. We have a name and it's recorded and we need to remember that here. No one must get lost. "And their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God. . . to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ . . . to fast and to speak with one another concerning the welfare of their souls . . . to observe that there should be no iniquity among them"—what a great thought about meetings and what they are supposed to do, what a Sunday School class can be, what a scriptural discussion in an apartment can be.

History of General Conferences

Well, we've been having conferences and meetings of that kind for a long, long time. I don't know when the first was held—in a very private sense I suppose it was held in the Garden of Eden. More publicly, in any sense that we could talk about a general conference,

I suppose the first is the one described in section 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants. You will recall that passage describes the moment when Adam calls together his posterity in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman and there prophesies, to the very last generation of his family, about what would befall his people. And it says, "The Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael" (see D&C 107:41–57). That kind of gathering, to receive the word of the Lord, has continued ever since.

King Benjamin's sermon—for which he had to bring people together in such a crowd that they could not all see him or hear him, for which he had to build a tower and distribute a multilithed text of his talk—gave us the first example of the *Conference Report*, I suppose. That's part of the reason we have the *Ensign*. Every May and November we have a new religious text. Like King Benjamin, President Kimball wants the text to be heard and to be read. If we're not all able to crowd into the Tabernacle, as King Benjamin's people were not, then it is important that we see and hear and read as much as we can. The *Conference Report* becomes scripture to us in our own day. Christ, on both continents, held those kinds of conferences—on mountaintops, by the seashore, in a boat, in an upper room. He held them almost anywhere and everywhere because the people hungered and thirsted for the kind of message that comes by the voice of the Lord.

How hungry and thirsty are we? Let me read you one general conference address given by the Savior, or at least the conclusion of it:

I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time.

Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said. . . .

But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not

lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them.

And it came to pass that 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. [3 Nephi 17:2–5]

They were so sensitive and appreciative. Apparently no one was saying anything. No one said aloud, “Won’t you stay? We’re not tired. We haven’t even noticed that we haven’t eaten all day. Won’t you stay?” They said it with their eyes and with their spirits, however.

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

Have ye any that are sick among you? . . .

. . . and he did heal them everyone as they were brought forth unto him.

And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.

And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought. . . .

. . . he wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

And when he had done this he wept again;

. . . and [he] said unto them: Behold your little ones.

And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them. [3 Nephi 17:6–7, 9–11, 21–24]

If there is a more touching scene in all scripture anywhere, I don’t know where it is. I hope everyone cared enough to attend that kind of conference. I hope no one stayed home that day.

Perhaps there was a ball game on, or the gardening needed to be done, or some very legitimate work in the basement. But if anybody stayed home from the general conference that is just concluding in 3 Nephi 17, I can promise you that he must have surely missed what has to be, for me, one of the greatest moments ever recorded in scripture anywhere.

What would it have been like to hear the Savior pray?

He himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record. . . .

. . . The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father. [3 Nephi 17:15, 16]

How do you “see” a prayer? What did they see? I don’t know. It cannot be written. No one has ever been able to record what this group both *saw* and *heard* Jesus speak unto the Father. Surely no basement, no garden, no ball game was worth missing that. I don’t know any more about it than what I read here, but I am confident it was glorious to those in attendance.

Of course the early Church continued its general conferences. You’ll remember in the first book of Acts that Peter called the Church together. The attendance figure given is 120. That’s interesting. I wonder whether that meant some sort of conference by invitation or whether it meant that the antagonism and the antipathy and the emotion of what had just been experienced, both in terms of Roman persecution and Jewish persecution and the death of the Savior, meant that we now had a church of only 120. Remember the five thousand that met out on the hill? It was four thousand on another occasion and probably in the thousands frequently. Now we’ve got 120. I don’t know whether that’s the entire Church or not, but it is at least a general conference of some sort (or a

general priesthood meeting) in which Peter, the presiding officer of the Church, calls the brethren together and says that they have to fill the quorum and go on with the work of the Lord. Of course, they do so in a dramatic and impressive way.

All of this is only to suggest that we come down in our own day to the work of the Lord, to continue the work of Adam and of King Benjamin and of Christ and of Peter after him. Now we meet at the feet of President Spencer W. Kimball, whom I testify with all my heart to be a prophet. Whatever else I may choose to say at the conclusion of this talk, I need *you* to know that *I* know this with all my heart.

General Conferences Early in this Dispensation

The practice of holding a Church conference in our dispensation was officially initiated on April 6, 1830, the same day that the Church was organized. At that time this very small congregation was called upon to ratify something (a brief document) called the *Articles and Covenants of the Church*.

It stipulated:

The several elders composing this Church of Christ are to meet in conference once in three months, or from time to time as said conferences shall direct or appoint;

And said conferences are to do whatever church business is necessary to be done at that time. . . .

It shall be the duty of the several churches, composing the church of Christ, to send one or more of their teachers to attend the several conferences held by the elders of the church. [D&C 20:61–62, 81]

Pursuant to that instruction given by the Lord the day the Church was organized, the first conference thereafter was held, as directed, three months later—on June 9, 1830, in the Peter Whitmer, Sr., home of Fayette, Seneca County, New York. Approximately thirty members assembled in this very small home, which I

hope you have had a chance to visit. According to the minutes which were taken by Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith, Jr., read the fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel and then offered prayer. If I were to call for a response, how many of you could tell me what is contained in the fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel? That’s an interesting text for the first conference of the Church. I would not have known, quite frankly, what was in the fourteenth chapter until I reviewed this history and read it again. May I invite you to do so, and then may I invite you to compare it with the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, which as you know is called the “preface” to this dispensation. Would you see if there is any theme in Ezekiel’s chapter fourteen which would link it with section one of the Doctrine and Covenants, which of course had not yet been revealed? I leave with you the invitation to read Ezekiel 14 and D&C section one.

Joseph Smith in his own diary supplemented the minutes of Oliver Cowdery and documented that they sang a song and partook of the sacrament and then received by unanimous voice the *Articles and Covenants of the Church*. Oliver Cowdery ordained Samuel Smith an elder, and Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum Smith were ordained priests. At this conference:

Much exhortation and instruction was given and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon us in a miraculous manner. Many of our number prophesied whilst others had the heavens opened to their view. . . . The goodness and the condescension of a merciful God unto such as obeying the everlasting gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ combined to create within us a sensation of rapturous gratitude and inspire us with fresh zeal and energy in the cause of truth. [Times and Seasons, 4:23]

If there has ever been given a line about the purpose of a general conference of the Church or a stake conference of the Church or a sacrament meeting of the Church, it surely could be that: “[It] combined to create within us a

sensation of rapturous gratitude and inspire us with fresh zeal and energy in the cause of truth.”

Fourteen years later John Taylor, soon to be the President of the Church, said of this experience:

A few men assembled in a log cabin; they saw visions of heaven, and gazed upon the eternal world; they looked through the rent vista of futurity, and beheld the glories of eternity; they were laying the foundation for the salvation of this world.

[*Documentary History of the Church*, 6:295]

Sidney Rigdon, who was to have difficulties of his own, said fourteen years later:

We knew. . . that the Church would become as large as it is today. We were as big then as we ever shall be. We began to talk like men in authority and power. . . . If we did not see these very people [who fourteen years later were before them], we saw by vision the Church of God, a thousand times larger . . . , although we were then not enough to well man a farm. . . . all the Elders, all the members met in conference in a room twenty feet square. . . . We talked about people coming as doves to the windows; and nations should flock into it. . . . We talked such big things that most men could not bear them.

[*Documentary History of the Church*, 6:289. The first conference that Sidney Rigdon could have attended personally was held in January 1831. This may have been the one to which he was referring.]

Take the opportunity, if you can, to be in Salt Lake City sometime this next weekend. Ask yourself if the doves are flocking to the windows and if from every nation there are not those representatives of the church and kingdom of God coming. Whatever talk Oliver and Sidney and the Prophet Joseph and the Whitmers had, however big it must have seemed to all twenty or thirty in attendance, I suppose—could they have seen it—they

would not have imagined what salvation of men they were in fact initiating.

Modern General Conferences

From that day to this, general conferences have been held under the commandment of God and have provided us with opportunities to note our growth and to reassess our faith and to recommit our efforts. I noticed something last night in the *Church News*. (I hope you read the *Church News*.) These are the opening lines on page one. The purpose of general conference, according to President Spencer W. Kimball, is to

“refresh our faith, strengthen our testimonies, and learn the ways of the Lord from his duly appointed and authorized servants.” With the opening of the 146th Semiannual General Conference of the Church on October first in the Tabernacle on Temple Square, members of the Church in many parts of the world will have a chance to be refreshed, strengthened, and taught. “For me conference is really a happy time I have always enjoyed conference. I always come away from conference with a new resolve that I will do better.” [*Church News*, 25 September 1976]

President Kimball leaving conference, committed to do better! How does that make the rest of us feel? I suppose that you and I can profit from that kind of commitment to an event that is about to take place. Institutionally, and in a very dramatic way, we are allowed to see that which is the lifeblood of this Church.

Revelation

Joseph Smith once said that the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. Why is the Book of Mormon the keystone of our religion? What is the Book of Mormon? Whatever else it is, it is revelation. In fact, it is a revelation about revelation. It is the basic document by which we would begin to testify to the world, with a copy in our hands, that the heavens are opened and that God lives and that he speaks

and that Jesus is the Christ. That is a basic message of salvation. And the process by which that message comes is revelation. And Joseph Smith taught that that is the characteristic of this Church, a characteristic by which it will always be known and recognized. This weekend will be a most majestic example of revelation. Surely in terms of numbers and impact and scope and concentration and power and priesthood we will learn anew, as a church, that God does live, that Jesus is the Christ, that the heavens are opened, that there are living prophets alive and well in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. They will be on television, and people can see and hear them and respond to their testimony if they will.

I do not minimize the revelations that come privately. I do not minimize in any sense, as you would know, the revelation that comes to a stake president or to a bishop or to a Relief Society president or to a father and mother. But I am saying simply as a declaration to this world that the heavens are open in a much broader way. I quote Joseph Smith: "Salvation cannot come without revelation. It is vain for anyone to minister without it. . . . The plea of many in this day is that we have no right to receive revelations; but if we do not get revelations, then we do not have oracles of God; and if they do not have oracles of God, they are not the people of God" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 160, 272). Well, we are the people of God, because we have oracles who receive revelation. We cannot with impunity act as if this were any other weekend. It is not. It never has been. It never will be. It is the most dramatic moment in any six-month period of the year, wherein the power and the ability and the voice of the Lord are made manifest to the inhabitants of this earth, and that includes the students at Brigham Young University.

I have here a sheaf of quotes of which I will not read all, but I would like to read you two. One is from John Taylor about the role of a

prophet in this Church, that thing by which this Church is known. John Taylor said:

We require a living tree—a living fountain—living intelligence, proceeding from the living priesthood in heaven, through the living priesthood on earth. And from the time that Adam first received a communication from God, to the time that John, on the isle of Patmos, received his communication, or Joseph Smith had the heavens opened to him, it always required new revelations, adapted to the peculiar circumstances in which the churches or individuals were placed. Adam's revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah's revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. These all had revelations for themselves, and so did Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, and Joseph. And so must we, or we shall make a shipwreck. [Gospel Kingdom, p. 34]

I remember President Harold B. Lee's last conference as vividly as if it were yesterday. I remember him leaning across the pulpit and sort of sliding his text aside and looking at the people in the audience. This is what he said at his last conference:

Now, you Latter-day Saints, I think you've never attended a conference where in these three days you have heard more inspired declarations on most every subject and problem about which the world is worrying. If you want to know what the Lord would have the Saints know and to have his guidance and direction for the next six months, get a copy of the proceedings of this conference, and you will have the latest word of the Lord as far as the Saints are concerned. And [also] all others who are not of us, but who believe what has been said has been "the mind of the Lord, the will of the Lord, and the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation." (D&C 68:4) [Ensign, January 1974, p. 128]

Within three months of that conference President Lee was gone, leaving that powerful testimony with us.

Elijah's General Conference

Conference can do a great deal to caution us if we need cautioning. I'm reminded of one general conference that was not as pleasant as some we've described. This is what the Lord said about Ahab. It is not the kind of thing that I personally would want to record in *my Treasures of Truth*, but this is what was said: "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. . . . And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings, of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16:30, 33). That's not a great thing to have said about you, but I suppose, if you need it, someone should say it.

You'll recall the story that Elijah comes under the direction of the Lord and calls down a famine, a drought, in which there is no rain and no product from the fields. Then after three years the Lord calls Elijah out of the mountains, where he has been fed by ravens and has drunk water at the brook Cherith. He comes down out of the mountain and faces Ahab, who walks up and says with alarm or disbelief—or both—"Art thou he who troubleth Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17). It hasn't been a great three years for Elijah. (I don't know what ravens bring this season, but it's not a heavy menu.) Elijah confesses that, in the name of the Lord, he *has* been the cause of Israel's grief. He then says that he would like to call a general conference:

Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty. ["I've got a general conference address I want to give."] . . .

Let them [the priests of Baal] give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and

put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under;

And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. [1 Kings 18:19, 23–24]

You can just hear that murmur, their response, right out of the tabernacle, can't you?

And they [the priests of Baal] took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. [1 Kings 18:26]

They were getting a little nervous by about noon and they were sort of leaping around, crashing into the altar a little bit. It was a lot less formal than what had happened about eight o'clock in the morning. The pressure was on them.

Now at this point Elijah removed himself slightly from the traditional prophetic role. By and large, prophets do not mock their opposition. But, as I said, this had not been a particularly pleasant three years for him either. And so at noon, when everyone was getting nervous and crashing into the altar as they did their chanting, Elijah was over resting on a chaise lounge nearby. He'd just been watching. It wasn't his turn yet. The scripture says, "It came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them" (1 Kings 18:27). (That's why I say it's not the traditional prophetic role, but the tenth-century B.C. equivalent of "ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" Elijah mocked them and said something like this: "Cry louder. The problem obviously is volume. You've got to get up there with this message. Cry louder. Surely he's there; there's no question about that. Perhaps he's talking—you know, been in a long conversation. His wife's worried about the petunias, and perhaps she's talking to him about them. Or perhaps he's 'pursuing.' Maybe

he's in the basement woodworking and they don't have a phone down there. Or perhaps he's on a journey. Or perhaps he's sleeping and must be awakened. Surely there is some good reason why he doesn't answer you, and I think volume is the answer. Cry louder." The fun thing is that the next line reads, "They cried louder." They were taking advice from *any* source by noon. "And [they] cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them" (1 Kings 18:28). You can tell they were really concerned. They weren't just running into the altar now; this was serious business.

"And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice" (1 Kings 18:29)—probably six o'clock at night. They may have gone as long as twelve hours, and Elijah hadn't even had his chance yet. The priests had gotten nowhere. There sat that bullock and no fire. "There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me" (1 Kings 18:29–30). The time was nearly gone. If there was to be a sacrifice it would have to be very soon. Elijah would have no time to do any of their chants, to march around the altar, or to cut himself.

And all the people came near unto him [Elijah]. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.

And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:

And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.

And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.

And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time.

And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. [1 Kings 18:30–35]

And now with this sacrifice soaked, saturated, drenched—wood, bullock, stone, and sand—it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near" (1 Kings 18:36). I declare to you that that line is *explicitly* used. This crowd had just seen 450 cheap imitations. They had heard all kinds of prayers and all kinds of strange incantations. And now here came this thin little man who had been away for three years. The record describes him in the word of God as "Elijah *the prophet*" (emphasis added). That's exactly what he was. And he knelt down and said:

Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

Hear me, o Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God. [1 Kings 18:36–39]

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. . . . I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:21–22). I think we all need a little fire of the Lord to fall into our lives. I think we do, in fact, fall prey to the very kind of idol worship which Joseph describes in Ezekiel 14 and D&C section one—the very kind of idol worship which has beset the priests of Baal and their groves. Elijah asked, "How long will it go on? Will it go on forever and ever and ever? Will not Israel ever, ever cease to follow those false gods which have attracted and lured

and offered their enticements since time began? How long? O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how long?"

Benefits from Modern Conferences

This weekend the Lord goes on record one more time with the truth. Are you wondering whether you should go on a mission or not? I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts you hear an answer this weekend. Do you think you ought to get a year's supply or prepare your families? I'd be willing to bet that you hear something about that this weekend. Are you worried about prayer? Are you worried about charity? Are you uncertain about the Book of Mormon? I'll bet you will hear about all of those this weekend. Somewhere, sometime, those testimonies are going to be borne, because they always have and they always will, because, like Elijah, President Spencer W. Kimball and his associates will go before us and declare that they are indeed prophets, seers, and revelators in the only true and living church on the face of the earth. That says something about the power of the prophet. That is what these young missionary men and women on this side of the hall are going to say to the world. And if we can say it well enough, if we can believe it and honor it enough, I believe we'll get a chance to tell the world why we know that Jesus is the Christ and what that means in our day, in a living church in 1976.

I suggested earlier that there are other kinds of conferences besides general conferences. I wish I had time to talk about them. I believe with all my heart that sacrament meeting is a conference, made more available than once in six months.

I suggest that family home evening is a conference, both now as students and when you have your own families. I wish I could tell you about the experience that Pat and I had while we were in graduate school, which (short of this last 130 days) was the busiest time I've ever had in my life. We made a couple of promises to ourselves then: first, that we would continue to

"date" each other, even without any money or without any time; second, that even with two little children, both small enough not to know if we didn't, we would never miss a family home evening. Someday maybe I can tell you what those promises have meant in our lives.

I wish we could take time to talk about what kinds of conferences you can have with each other, one on one. A marvelous, touching, beautiful story was told to me just the other day about a girl that I had tried to reach and could not, that her mother had tried to reach and could not, that her bishop had tried to reach and could not, that her stake president had tried to reach and could not. Nobody could reach her—except her girlfriend, who took her by the collar, shook her, started to cry, and said, "Don't you see? Don't you see what you're doing to me? You break my heart!" She sobbed. She just shook, and she shook her friend. That girl, when nobody (it appeared) on the face of this earth could touch her, is in the Church. With the help of her bishop, she is on the way to repentance in as dramatic and as beautiful and as glowing a way as I have ever seen in my life. I could not reach her; her mother could not reach her; her bishop could not reach her; but a friend reached her and literally grabbed her and shook her and said, "You're breaking my heart!" That's one kind of a conference worth having. I invite you to hold it—maybe less dramatically, but to talk about "the welfare of your souls" and to "see that there is no iniquity among you." It might not hurt to read again Moroni 6, sometime when you're alone in your apartment.

Prayer is perhaps the greatest conference of all. But that's a subject for another complete talk.

I was recently in Vavau, Tonga. It is a little island which is one and a half hours away from Nuku'alofa by plane and twenty-four hours away by boat. By boat it is the worst trip that can be made. (If you don't believe that, ask Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, who went there recently to organize a stake and could not get a plane.) When the area conference was

announced for Tonga, it was determined that only one boat would be available for the Saints from Vavau. The boat held 150 people. If you stuffed bodies into every possible corner of the ship, you could get close to three hundred people. *Eight hundred Tongans jammed onto that boat and stood up for twenty-four hours without sleep, without food, without drink, without anything—because they knew that a prophet of God was going to be in their islands and they were not going to miss him for anything in the world.*

Do you want to go to conference that badly? Do you care that the prophet of the Lord is speaking in the neighborhood? Do you care enough to flip on a television set, a radio, or to come to this building to watch a priesthood meeting? Eight hundred people stood up for twenty-four hours to get to conference, and they didn't think anything about it. "The President of the Church is here," they said. "That's our prophet, and we may not see him again soon." And they came.

The other story I want to tell you comes out of southern Utah. A man who'd been away from the Church for half a century came back to Utah and took a job as custodian of the local chapel, promising the bishop that he'd come to church and stop smoking. But he did neither. The bishop did not rebuke him, but he kept asking, "Do you remember the promise you made?"

The man said, "Yes, I remember, Bishop." The bishop would smile and shake hands and walk away, but the man did not come to church and he did not stop smoking. One night, inside the chapel when he was working late, he was overcome with the most terrifying, paralyzing fear he had ever experienced in his life. (I heard him say this with his own lips, though I do not know the man's name.) He said, "I have never been so fearful, so frightened, so petrified in my life. I've been afraid. I have been in dangerous, frightening circumstances, but there is nothing in this world with which I can compare or any way in

this world I can describe the experience I had that night. Every creak and crack and dark corner of the chapel terrified me, and I began to run." This was a grown man speaking, a grandfather. "I began to run from the building and fled to my home. But I was also just as terrified in my own home, and I could not control my emotions. I ran from my home and went to a shed behind my house. And for the first time in half a century I fell to my knees and I prayed. I said, 'O Lord, save me from whatever this is that terrifies me so.'" Quaking, trembling, perspiring on his knees in this shed out behind his home, he continued his prayer. He said, "I was lisping like a child the only prayers I knew, when there came into my heart the words of a song that I had not heard nor sung for that half century. I think I did not ever know the words, and I surely do not know them now. But I heard them with symphonic accompaniment and angelic choirs. I heard them, music and word, in that shed behind my home in the middle of that night." It's a hymn that you know, my young friends, and the opening line is "We thank thee, O God, for a prophet." The man said, "I stopped trembling, and I stopped crying, and I know I heard the angels sing. I've never missed a church meeting since that day. I've never smoked a cigarette, and I've tried to do everything I should have done for all those years. But I want you to know that I did not then, and I probably do not now know, the words to the hymn that I heard sung that night in a shed behind my home with a celestial symphony and an angelic choir." It was indeed a message to a world that's fearful and frightened and desperately in need.

"We thank thee, O God, for a prophet"—of whom I testify, Spencer W. Kimball, and who will give his testimony this weekend. To that I bear witness and of him I bear witness, and of the Church he leads I bear witness, and of the Son of God who leads him I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.