

We Were the Greatest Generation

L. TOM PERRY

It is always an overwhelming feeling as I stand and look at this beautiful and handsome group of young adults. It is even more unsettling to realize there are tens of thousands of you gathered in congregations throughout the world.

You Are the Future of the Church

As the years rapidly speed by, you will look back on this time as one of the most exciting periods of your life. I have great trust and confidence in the young adults of the Church. One of the most pronounced revelations I ever received came as I was preparing to preside over the Europe Central Area.

During a sleepless night I had an impression that the young adults were the future of the Church in Europe and I needed to focus on them. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding periods of my long ministry. Some very satisfying results have occurred during the last few years as we have listened to your ideas and concerns.

Together we have learned how to help you bring friends in large numbers to worship with you. I have seen the fervent spiritual power of the young adults of the Church. I know your capacity. I have seen how you strengthen each

other and bring friends to a knowledge of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

You are young, and I am old. There are many years which separate you and me. When I was your age, I used a slide rule to make calculations in my accounting class. I'll give you a demonstration of how this works. I speak at the rate of 140 words per minute when I'm giving a talk. If I move the slide rule over to the number of words I'm speaking, I notice how long the talk will be. For me this is much faster than a modern calculating device. But in order to keep up with your modern bright minds, for almost all calculations I have had to stay abreast of the modern tools of this day.

In order to keep pace with you, I have been required to make many changes to be close to the latest technology. I have learned how to use a comptometer, a 1401 punch card and a 360 disk storage computer, a laptop, a PalmPilot, a Blackberry, an iPod, an iPhone, and now I have an iPad. Add to those Facebook, Twitter, blogs,

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and YouTube. Think of what it is like for an 88-year-old man to try to keep up with you!

What a trial it is for my generation to try to live with and watch what you are developing. But we have one advantage over you. We have been through all of the changes. We have gained experience through knowledge of some of the basic fundamentals which are still of great value as a foundation on which to build. You can only read about them. I want to talk to you about some of these basic fundamentals which must never be discarded or tossed aside.

Make Yours the Greatest Generation

A few years ago a well-known author described some of the men and women of my day as “the greatest generation.” The author, Tom Brokaw, explained:

These men and women came of age in the Great Depression, when economic despair hovered over the land like a plague. They had watched their parents lose their businesses, their farms, their jobs, their hopes. They had learned to accept a future that played out one day at a time. Then, just as there was a glimmer of economic recovery, war exploded across Europe and Asia. . . . This generation was summoned to the parade ground and told to train for war. They left their ranches . . . , their jobs on the main street . . . , they gave up their place on the assembly lines . . . and in the ranks of Wall Street, they quit school or went from cap and gown directly into uniform. . . .

They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting, often hand to hand, in the most primitive conditions possible. . . . They were in the air every day, in skies filled with terror, and they went to sea on hostile waters far removed from the shores of their homeland. . . .

When the war was over, the men and women who had been involved . . . joined in joyous and

short-lived celebrations, then immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted. They were mature beyond their years, tempered by what they had been through, disciplined by their . . . training and sacrifices. They married in record numbers and gave birth to another . . . generation. . . . They stayed true to their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith.¹

When I was your age, I was looking forward to the same things you desire today. We were anticipating romance, education, professions, and marriage. Instead, we were called to serve and sent to the four corners of the earth to engage in a terrible war to protect our basic rights to enjoy the liberty to think, act, assemble, and govern safeguarded by the rule of law. Our service was not just for ourselves—it was to be our contribution for the generations that would follow after us. We went forward willingly. It took great courage.

Although I do not claim the title just for myself, I am one of the remaining survivors of “the greatest generation.” As I look to the future—and as I look at your future—I pray that you will step forward and assume your responsibilities to preserve the noble heritage of our past. I pray that in a future day you will be known as “the greatest generation.”

Your war will be very different. I am fully aware that your challenges will be much greater than ours. We knew who our enemy was on the battlefield. They were shooting at us! The enemy today is much more sinister. He does not always confront us in battle head-on. Instead, he hides in almost every device known to man. His plan is to plant an evil idea here and an evil thought there, to lead us away from the virtues taught us by our glorious history. With his clever plan he has devised ways to weaken our Christian faith.

Tonight I would like to talk to you about the weakening foundation of Christian faith throughout the world.

Strengthen Faith in the Savior

You have a role in helping our Father in Heaven's children return to their Christian foundations by developing faith in the Savior and His ways.

*Pope Benedict XVI lamented [over] the weakening of [the] churches in Europe, Australia and the [United States. He said:] "There's no longer evidence for a need of God, even less of Christ. . . . The so-called traditional churches look like they are dying."*²

We have moved away from traditional worship. More people say they are spiritual rather than religious—if a teaching fits their lifestyle, they will accept it, and it will become part of their faith. If it does not, they will develop their own man-made faith. Faith and spirituality are now viewed as consumer products. Materialism has taken over and replaced God. Our voices must be heard in opposition to these dangerous trends which are designed to destroy the faith of mankind.

The Book of Mormon has warned us over and over again of replacing our trust in God with those things that do not last. Describing a time that many of the Nephites were drifting from their faith, the Book of Mormon states:

They grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to [the prophets'] words, to walk uprightly before God. [Alma 45:24]

My young friends, as you see the weakening of Christian faith in society, your own faith must become even more firm and more sure. Helaman declared:

Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirl-

wind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. [Helaman 5:12]

Nephi reminded us:

We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins . . .

[and] that life which is in Christ. . . .

. . . For the right way is to believe in Christ.

[2 Nephi 25:26–28]

Do we have a foundation to support such a claim?

The Symbols of Christ's Sacrifice Have Endured Through All Ages

The best recorded fact in all history is the account of the mission of our Lord and Savior to the earth. His mission was prophesied from the beginning of man's time on earth.

Let's just use one example. In Moses, chapter 5, we read:

And it came to pass that after I, the Lord God, had driven them out, that Adam began to till the earth, and to have dominion over all the beasts of the field, and to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, as I the Lord had commanded him. And Eve, also, his wife, did labor with him. . . .

And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence.

And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering

unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.
[Moses 5:1, 4–8]

Thus, sacrifices were instituted on the earth as a gospel ordinance, to be practiced and performed by the authority of the priesthood, typifying the coming sacrifice of the Son of Man, who would give His life for the sins of the world.

The form of the ordinance was always arranged to make specific the points of the Lord's sacrifice when He would come in the meridian of time. The offering of the Passover, for instance, was arranged so that a male lamb of the first year, without spot and blemish, was chosen as an offering. The blood was spilled, and care was taken that no bones would be broken—all symbolic of the manner of the Savior's death.

It is amazing to me that the offering of sacrifice continued through all ages from Adam even until the time of the Savior. Even though mankind went through many periods of apostasy, the hope that the Lord would atone for the sins of mankind through His Only Begotten Son and the hope that His atoning blood would make immortality possible stayed clearly in their minds.

The offering of sacrifices generally ended as a practice when the Savior came to earth. The sacrament was instituted to remind His followers that He had been to earth and had performed His earthly ministry. We read in Luke 22:12–20:

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

Once again I am amazed that this reminder, even through the dark periods of apostasy, was practiced in many forms and in many ways throughout generations until the time of the Restoration of the gospel, when the priesthood power was again on the earth to perform the sacred, saving ordinance.

Through all periods of recorded history we find the constant reminder of the mission of our Savior. He came to earth as one who had a dual citizenship—one of God and one of man. He could then perform His great ennobling sacrifice for all of us through His Atonement. Could there be any stronger proof that He is Jesus the Christ, the Savior of the world, than just following the doctrines over all periods of times? He has given us His gospel to guide and direct us during our earthly sojourn.

Show the World the Truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

President David O. McKay said:

The responsibility of showing to the world that the gospel of Jesus Christ will solve its problems rests upon the men who make the claim. . . . I believe . . . that every world problem may be solved by obedience to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . .

The solution of the great world problems is here in the Church of Jesus Christ. Ample provision is made not only for the needs of individuals, but also for the nation and groups of nations. . . . I grant that we may seem to be arrogating to ourselves superior wisdom, but we are not. It is simply the application of God's plan to the world problems. You who hold the priesthood have greater responsibility today, now that you live in this creative moment in

*the world's history, than ever the Church has had before. I repeat it. If we make the claim to hold the truth, it is obligatory upon every Latter-day Saint so to live, that when the people of the world come, in answer to the call, to test the fruit of the tree, they will find it wholesome and good.*³

The great message we carry to the world is that the gospel of our Lord and Savior has again been restored to the earth. His Church is again on the earth with the power and glory of the holy priesthood.

To those so ordained is given the power to act for Him as His agents to bring the doctrines, ordinances, principles, and powers to bind on earth as it will be done in the heavens. This is the Savior's Church. He directs the affairs of His Church through His chosen prophets. His prophets in turn teach the gospel to others and testify of Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer. This day and age is the dispensation of the fulness of times, which has been spoken of by the prophets from the beginning of time. It is the time of fulfillment of all that has been recorded to come forth, as has been spoken of by the Lord's prophets and has been recorded in the holy scriptures. It is not a new church but a restored church to the world in this day and age.

You are the generation the Lord has saved for this day. You came out of the waters of baptism with a covenant and a promise to the Lord to represent Him in helping people throw off their worldly ways and return to the blessings promised us if we would follow Him and live His gospel. You can help your Heavenly Father's children return to their Christian faith and develop a faith in Him and return to His ways.

What You Can Do

You may ask, "What can I do?" Some months ago our stake president, speaking in sacrament meeting, suggested four things that we could do to bring others back to us:

First is daily prayer. I like this statement in the Bible Dictionary:

*As soon as we learn the true relationship in which we stand toward God (namely, God is our Father, and we are his children), then at once prayer becomes natural and instinctive on our part (Matt. 7:7–11). Many of the so-called difficulties about prayer arise from forgetting this relationship. Prayer is the act by which the will of the Father and the will of the child are brought into correspondence with each other. The object of prayer is not to change the will of God, but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant, but that are made conditional on our asking for them. Blessings require some work or effort on our part before we can obtain them. Prayer is a form of work, and is an appointed means for obtaining the highest of all blessings.*⁴

President Thomas S. Monson said:

To those within the sound of my voice who are struggling with challenges and difficulties large and small, prayer is the provider of spiritual strength. . . . Prayer is the means by which we approach our Father in Heaven, who loves us. Speak to Him in prayer and then listen for the answer. Miracles are wrought through prayer. . . .

*Remember to pray fervently.*⁵

Have your daily prayers, and help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to get on their knees and pray to God.

Second, daily scripture study. Could there be any stronger witness of Jesus Christ than the testimonies we find in the Book of Mormon? Of the 239 chapters, 233 mention the Savior. Isn't that amazing?

Be certain you have daily scripture study. Then help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to also study the scriptures daily.

Third, temple worthiness. Some of you have been to the temple; others have not. It is well to

understand what is required to obtain a temple recommend. We understand clearly the process by which we go to a judge in Israel and confirm to him our worthiness to hold a current temple recommend and then live by the standards required in holding that recommend.

Live in such a way that your righteous example will demonstrate how to live to be worthy of qualifying for temple blessings.

Fourth, daily acts of service. Remember the words of King Benjamin: “And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). The Lord literally answers our prayers through the service we give to others.

Be an example of Christlike service, and help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to get out and serve their fellowmen.

“Onward, Christian Soldiers”

When I was your age I had an experience that helped me understand the importance of service. Ten years ago the experience was told in the video *Special Witnesses of Christ*. I want to share it with you again tonight:

There was an experience in my life which has often reminded me of the joy resulting from asking the question “What would the Savior do in this situation?”

I was among the first wave of Marines to go ashore in Japan following the signing of the peace treaty following World War II. As we entered the devastated city of Nagasaki, it was one of the saddest experiences of my life. A large part of the city had been totally destroyed. Some of the dead had not yet been buried. As occupation troops, we set up headquarters and went to work.

The situation was very bleak, and a few of us wanted to give more. We went to our division chapel and requested permission to help rebuild the Christian churches. Because of government restric-

tions during the war, these churches had almost ceased to function. Their few buildings were badly damaged. A group of us volunteered to repair and replaster these chapels during our off-duty time so that they would be available for the holding of Christian services again.

We had no command of the language. All we could accomplish was the physical labor of repairing the buildings. We found the ministers who had been unable to serve during the war years and encouraged them to return to their pulpits. We had a tremendous experience with these people as they again experienced the freedom to practice their Christian beliefs.

An event occurred as we were leaving Nagasaki to return home that I will always remember. As we were boarding the train that would take us to our ships to return home, we were teased by a lot of the other Marines. They had their girlfriends with them saying good-bye to them. They laughed at us and indicated that we had missed the fun of being in Japan. We had just wasted our time laboring and plastering walls.

Just as they were at the height of their teasing, up over a little rise near the train station came about 200 of these great Japanese Christians from the churches we had repaired, singing “Onward, Christian Soldiers.” They came down and showered us with gifts. Then they all lined up along the railroad track. And as the train started down the tracks, we reached out and just touched their fingers as we left. We couldn’t speak; our emotions were too strong. But we were grateful that we could help in some small way in reestablishing Christianity in a nation after the war.⁶

Rise to a New Sense of Commitment

I know that God lives. I know that we are all His children and that He loves us. I know that He sent His Son to the world to be the atoning sacrifice for all mankind, and those who embrace His gospel and follow Him will enjoy eternal life, the greatest of all gifts of God. I know that He directed the Restoration of the gospel again here on the earth through the

ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I know that the only lasting joy and happiness we will ever find during our mortal experience will come by following the Savior, obeying His law, and keeping His commandments.

Tonight, my young friends, I challenge you to rise to a new sense of commitment. I challenge you to become “the greatest generation” by assisting our Father in Heaven’s children to return to their Christian faith and to the strong religious foundation that is so necessary to enjoy peace of mind and real happiness in this period of mortal probation.

May God bless you with the courage, the boldness, the enthusiasm, and the desire to again restore faith in the gospel of our Lord and Savior. He lives. This is my witness to you in His holy name. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), xix–xx.
2. Noelle Knox, “Religion Takes a Back Seat in Western Europe,” *USA Today*, 11 August 2005; http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2005-08-10-europe-religion-cover_x.htm.
3. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 5; emphasis in original.
4. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “prayer,” 752–53.
5. Thomas S. Monson, *CR*, April 2009, 68–69; or “Be Your Best Self,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 68–69.
6. L. Tom Perry, transcribed from *Special Witnesses of Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), DVD.