

# *The Iron Rod—The Word of God*

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**I**t is a great pleasure for me today to welcome all of you delightful students to Brigham Young University. Whether you are just beginning your first semester or are returning to continue your education, the campus is more beautiful and exciting when you are here. My husband and I feel honored to be able to share our time with you at this wonderful institution. You bless so many here with your love of life and the goodness that emanates from you in the Marriott Center this morning. We desire that each of you has success and happiness in your lives, just as we wish the same for our children.

Speaking of our children, a few short weeks ago my husband was talking to our five-year-old grandson, Owen. Owen looked at my husband's hand and said, "Your hand looks old. How old are you?"

In reply to my husband's answer, Owen quickly asked, "Isn't that about 100?"

Owen was quickly assured by his grandfather that he had quite a few years to go until the 100-year-old birthday would occur.

Even though neither my husband nor I is a centenarian, we are old enough to have had years filled with joys, blessings, and successes as well as challenges, sorrows, and disappointments. My life has taken many different paths,

and as I have traveled them, my testimony of our Savior Jesus Christ has been strengthened daily. His words, as found in the scriptures, bring such guidance to my life and seem to become even more meaningful as I view today's world from the perspective of one who is, day by day, moving a little closer to 100.

Lately I have been drawn to the Book of Mormon, where Lehi tells his family, "Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Nephi 8:2). All of you are familiar with the prophet Lehi's marvelous vision, which he had as he journeyed with his family in the wilderness. This vision is often referred to as the vision of the tree of life and teaches us about the course we should follow through all the years of our lives.

In the narrative, Lehi was led by a heavenly messenger to a tree laden with fruit that was desirable to make one happy. As he traveled the path to this tree, he went through a dreary waste and spent hours in darkness. He eventually did partake of the fruit, which we know is representative of the love of God. It filled his

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*Sharon G. Samuelson, wife of BYU President Cecil O. Samuelson, delivered this devotional address on 8 September 2009.*

soul with great joy, and he was desirous that his family should partake of it also.

In his vision, Lehi beheld people seeking to come forward to partake of the fruit while clinging to a rod of iron on a strait and narrow path. The scriptures inform us that the iron rod is the word of God, or the gospel of Jesus Christ. As they pressed forward, however, a great mist of darkness, or temptation, arose. It was so dense that many became confused. They were unable to find their way and wandered onto strange roads. Large numbers of them did come forth from the mist of darkness, grasping the iron rod, until they did partake of the fruit of the tree.

On the other side of the river, Lehi saw a great and spacious building, or the pride of this world, and

*it was filled with people [or the so-called wisdom of the world], both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit. [1 Nephi 8:27]*

A considerable number of those who had tasted of the fruit became ashamed and turned from the happiness they had felt because of those who were mocking and scoffing them.

It is this aspect of Lehi's vision that has struck me so deeply in the last little while: individuals who had tasted of the fruit but still turned away from the word of God.

This dream was of great significance to Lehi and his family, and it has in no way diminished in its importance to you today. You are living in a world where mists of moral and spiritual darkness surround you and where the adversary is seeking the souls of men through all manner of iniquity. The conditions of your world today were foreseen by the prophets of old and have been and are of great concern to prophets of these the latter days.

Concerning Lehi's great vision, President Harold B. Lee said:

*If there is any one thing most needed in this time of tumult and frustration, when men and women and youth and young adults are desperately seeking for answers to the problems which afflict mankind, it is an "iron rod" as a safe guide along the straight path on the way to eternal life, amidst the strange and devious roadways that would eventually lead to destruction and to the ruin of all that is "virtuous, lovely, or of good report." ["The Iron Rod," Ensign, June 1971, 7]*

You live in a marvelous period of history when you are blessed to have the restored gospel in your lives. You have the word of God, or the iron rod, within your grasp at the present time, or you would not be with us today. Your lives are ahead of you as you search for happiness and eternal joy. In order to live with God once again, you cannot deviate from the strait and narrow path or lose your firm grip on the iron rod or you will be as those who were lost in Lehi's vision.

As I admitted earlier, I am a little older than most of you here today and have been witness to and saddened by people who I believed were firmly grasping the iron rod but then chose to release their grasp and stray from that which they once valued in their lives. They have tasted of the fruit and for various reasons—and with an abundance of excuses—became ashamed and cast their eyes down and let go of the rod. Some once spoke of their strong testimonies of the teachings of the gospel but in the ensuing years have turned away from all that they believed in their past. There have been those too who relaxed their grasp of the rod and slipped from the path but repented and regained their hold of it. That is of great joy to those who love them as well as to the Lord.

I have seen some who have succumbed to the persuasions of others who sought to

destroy their faith and lead them away from the word of God and thus cause them to lose their grasp of the iron rod. The scriptures have a warning for those individuals who would seek to do such.

Christ warned, “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better . . . that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

There may be those in your lives who will attempt to do the same to you. Be strong and true to the word of God you believe to be true today.

While traveling on the path to the tree of life, there is no shortcut to reach it; there is just danger off the designated path chosen by Jesus Christ. I often am looking for a shorter or better way to reach a goal or accomplish something that I need to do in my life, but I try to make sure that this way does not affect my eternal salvation or put me in danger of losing something very precious. However, I am reminded of a time I decided to create my own shortcut to reach a destination.

Near my daughter’s home in Denver is a delightful cement and asphalt bike path and walkway. The path leads one through undeveloped as well as developed areas. When I visit there, I take my granddaughter in her stroller as I do my daily walks. The beginning of the path that leaves my daughter’s area is downhill for about eight to ten minutes of the walk. You know what that means: the last of the walk is uphill. After walking for 45 minutes or so, I always dread that last uphill climb—especially pushing a stroller.

When I first started walking this path, I noticed that just before the sidewalk begins its ascent back to my daughter’s street, there is a dirt path that is much shorter but steeper than the cement pathway. It would lead me to the street and thus cut out some of the uphill climb near the end. I figured a short uphill climb

would be better than a long one, even with its steepness.

Therefore, on one of my walks I decided to attempt it and began to push the stroller up the path. However, I failed to notice that on the dirt path there was also gravel. Halfway up, my feet began to slip on the rocks, and I found myself and the stroller going backward. I concluded that this was not a good thing, and I became concerned for the safety of my granddaughter as well as for myself. Luckily, grasping the stroller tightly, I was able to turn the stroller off the dirt path and head it back down to the safety of the sidewalk, even though I was running because of the decline. I never attempted that shortcut again.

My dear young brothers and sisters, there is no shortcut to eternal salvation. Snares, pitfalls, and mists of darkness will come into your lives. I’m sure you have experienced some already. You will run into difficulties, but if you hold very tightly to the iron rod of righteousness, you will receive blessings and protection from the Lord. You will face opposition, but you have the agency to make choices that will determine what happens to you both mortally and eternally.

If you study the Book of Mormon closely, you will notice that often God’s people have tended to believe their present state to be the right one, and although they know the teachings of the Savior, they slowly drift into the ways of the world. This is happening all around us today. However, there is a wonderful promise recorded in the Book of Mormon concerning the iron rod in your lives. It is found in 1 Nephi 15:24:

*And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.*

Thus it is so important that each of you cling tenaciously to the iron rod every day and in every aspect of your life.

You are at Brigham Young University to seek an education, and that is what you are encouraged to do by your families as well as by the leaders of the Church. The scriptures, however, also give you a warning in 2 Nephi 9:29, where Jacob says to those who think they are very smart and clever, “But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.”

The Lord loves you, and He does desire for you to succeed in the righteous secular aspects of your life, but not to the detriment of those things spiritual.

It is my prayer that you do not settle for less than what the Lord wants you to be and that your hands, when old and covered with wrinkles of age, will still be firmly grasping the iron rod. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.