

# Going Forth to Serve

N. ELDON TANNER

This is a glorious sight indeed. I received a letter just last week from an individual who asked, “Why do the General Authorities have to be so hard-faced?” I do not know how to answer him.

Following general conference, where I was speaking, someone called my secretary and asked, “Does President Tanner ever smile?” Well, I feel like smiling, but it is hard for me.

But it is a glorious sight to see all you people assembled here in this student center, and to know that you realize that the glory of God is intelligence, and that you are here to increase your knowledge and understanding so that you can go forth to serve the Lord and your fellowmen. President Kimball has asked me to bring his greetings and his blessings to you people assembled here today—in fact, wherever I go he asks me to do that. But he most particularly loves the youth of the Church, is interested in them, and expects much from them.

It has been my privilege, as President Oaks has just said, to serve as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church, and it has been interesting to me to note how each had a special message to emphasize. Early in my association with President David O. McKay, he said to me: “Wherever you go, President Tanner, remind those people to remember who they are and

then to act accordingly.” I am not going to take time to tell you who you are, because you know who you are: Spirit children of God belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ. And how important that is!

I have given this message many times, and I cannot think of a better one than to remember who you are and then, knowing who you are, to act accordingly wherever you are; to remember that you have an individual responsibility to live so that you influence the lives of others for good and help to strengthen them.

Just after he became President of the Church, Joseph Fielding Smith gave this message to the press—and it became his clarion call to the Church: “We are living in the Saturday evening of time, and we must prepare ourselves for the second coming of Christ and help the world by teaching the restored gospel, which is the plan of life and salvation.”

President Harold B. Lee, when asked at a press conference what his message would be

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*N. Eldon Tanner was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 30 January 1979.*

to his people and to the world, said simply: “Keep the commandments.” It is a tremendous thing to consider the impact this message would have if all the people in the world would just keep the commandments. We would then be prepared for the Second Coming, and for salvation and exaltation.

We are all aware of President Kimball’s oft-repeated instruction to “lengthen our stride.” (I do not think that he really felt it would become a slogan when he said it, but it is being used all over the Church, throughout the world.) He leads the way for all of us. Someone asked me the other day, “What is your greatest responsibility?” and I said, “Trying to keep up with the President.” He is very anxious to see that the gospel is taken to all the world—every nation, kindred, tongue, and people—and that temples are built so that we may perform the saving ordinances for those who have gone before us. While much of the world is at war, the way is opening in more and more new areas where our twenty-seven thousand missionaries can share the gospel message with the world.

It is awesome to me as I contemplate the influence another twenty-seven thousand of you students as you leave this University are now having and will have on the affairs of the Church, governments, industry, business, economics, and the moral and social aspects of life throughout the world. Your influence is bound to be felt, for good or bad, regardless of where you are or what you are doing. Set out with a determination that you will make your influence positive and good. People are looking to and keeping an eye on members of the Church more than they ever have before in our history.

The other day I read some statements written by the sports columnist of the *Tucson Citizen Sports*. I should like to share them with you:

*It happens every time I visit that beautiful campus at Brigham Young University. I walk away feeling that I have just brushed up against cleanliness.*

*In Provo last Saturday I sat on BYU’s sidelines directly in front of the studentbody section. It’s easy to exude good sportsmanship when your team is shellacking the opponent; but you get the feeling that win or lose BYU students have class; and that they are the best-groomed students on any campus in this area. When you walk the campus at BYU with snow-capped mountains in the background and the fresh, clean, wholesome kids walking back and forth along the beautifully manicured grounds it is gratifying to know that at least one university in this part of the country is teaching its students that it only costs a little more to go first-class. [Regus McCollie, *Tucson Citizen Sports*, December 1977]*

The other day your newspaper editor received this letter regarding Brigham Young University; I should also like to read it.

*Your behavior at the UTEP basketball game at the Marriott Center prompted this letter. First my credentials: I graduated from BYU (I know all the words to the “Cougar Fight Song”), and all of my children have attended BYU. I have been observing the student section sine the days of the Springville gym. You have always supported your teams, win or lose, in a grand manner.*

*Now for the lecture: Our home is in University of Utah territory, and we have always been proud that “our” student body didn’t act like the Utes. Last night I was appalled at the booing, shouting, etc., that I observed coming from your side of the arena. I know President Oaks, who sits a few rows in front of us, was embarrassed too. I thought I was watching the wrong student body. Only the colors were different.*

*Please give my words some serious thought before the BYU-Utah game, or our neighbors will never let us live it down. You’re the greatest kids on earth—act like it. [L. Tucker, letter to editor, *Daily Universe*, 17 January 1979]*

I am sure there have been just a few exhibitions of bad sportsmanship by loyal BYU fans,

as there are at most sporting events, but let us at BYU always maintain dignity even in our exuberance and keep the Tucson sportswriter's words in mind: "You get the feeling that win or lose BYU students have class; and that they are the best-groomed students on any campus in this area."

There are some who rebel at the standards required at BYU, but it is those standards which keep BYU from becoming just another university of students beset with morals problems and lack of reverence for God and country, and in general displaying many of the symptoms that are the source of much of the world's unrest today.

I like what a lad wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Daily Universe*. I hope you will keep his words in mind as you contemplate the reasons for his choosing to attend BYU. He wrote as follows from Minnesota:

*As someone not in attendance at BYU, I had a chance to read the text of President Kimball's speech published in the September 13<sup>th</sup> Daily Universe.*

*I am a person taking instruction in the Mormon faith. I hope to attend BYU in the future. I chose BYU as opposed to Harvard, Yale, and others because I believe it is special. The school and its people are special because standards are adhered to, not arbitrary standards set up by whim or caprice, but standards set down by a "living prophet of God." Those four words jump out from the printed page.*

*When I am a student there I will covenant to keep these standards, not under force but with free will and happiness. Students at BYU are considered "different" because of these standards. That difference is not one of disrespect, but one reflecting that they are indeed a "chosen" people, something for which they can be eternally proud, and something no one else can claim. I look forward to being able to make that claim.*

*These are some reflections of a person looking in.* [T. Ray Lippert, letter to the editor, *Daily Universe*, 4 October 1978]

He recognizes that Brigham Young University is outstanding and different. How fortunate you are to be able to attend this University with an outstanding president and faculty; where the gospel is taught; where the President of the Church, a prophet of God, is chairman of the Board of Trustees; and which rates so highly in all academic fields!

It is not my intent, I am sure you understand, to make you feel puffed up or boastful by citing these examples, but to help you realize who you are so that you may act accordingly. Do not ever let it be said that you are the one who is responsible for bringing disgrace or discredit to the University, or the one who causes disillusionment of the good reports about Brigham Young University because of *your* bad example.

As I think of the potential of twenty-five thousand or more of you leaving this University, as I said before, and spreading yourselves throughout the world, I cannot help but be aware of the leavening influence you can be in so many different ways; and I am assuming that you are all going to be an influence for *good* wherever you go.

In your alumni publication *Today*, there is usually a list of BYU alumni and what they are doing in their vocational pursuits. It is most impressive that there are so many who are leaders in their respective fields, and it is a credit to the University for having taught so well. Let me list just a few from the December issue:

*Dean Dennett, [class of] '53, was elected to the office of Superintendent of the Shasta County, California, schools. . . .*

*Kenneth G. Larsen, [class of] '53, was recently promoted to Colonel in the U.S. army, while serving as Chief of the Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Support Center at Fort Sheridan, Illinois . . .*

*Donald R. Bird, [class of] '57, was made vice-president of the administration . . . for Hydraulic*

*Research, a division of Textron, in Valencia, California . . .*

*Lois Cook Canning, [class of] '58, has completed her term of office as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Education Association . . .*

*Michael A. Toomey, [class of] '64, was appointed manufacturing manager of White Pigments, E.I. DuPont de Nemours and Co., Inc. He previously held positions [with this company] in . . . Australia and . . . Wilmington, Delaware.*

*Lorrain Cox Towles, [class of] '68, was elected president of the Richland College, Texas, faculty council for 1978-79. . . . She was selected as an Outstanding Young Woman of America of 1977. . . .*

*Thomas N. Tippets, [class of] '72, has been appointed Supervisor, Film Services, NBC-TV Network . . .*

*Phil Tollestrup, [class of] '72, has been appointed head basketball coach at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. . . .*

*John H. Wright, [class of] '74, works for Jacobsen Construction [Company], and is assistant superintendent in charge of construction on the Seattle temple. . . .*

*Lt. Richard M. Atwater, [class of] '75, was recently promoted to Captain in the U.S. Air Force. . . . He is presently serving as an intelligence officer at Headquarters Strategic Air Command . . . and working on developing the U.S. nuclear war plans. ["Alumni Today," *Brigham Young University Today* 32, no. 8 (December 1978): 24-28]*

These are just a few of those who have gone forth from this campus to serve in a variety of occupations throughout the world. You can and should decide today that you will serve with distinction and continue to bring honor to your alma mater and to the Church.

Listed with the accomplishments of many of these alumni were their family status and their Church activity. I have always maintained that to be truly successful and happy one must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the other things will come (see Matthew 6:33). Never be ashamed of the gospel

of Jesus Christ. Do not hesitate to let people know what your standards are and be courageous enough to take a stand when necessary.

If I have not said enough already to convince you that living the standards of the Church will help you, let me read from two letters received from Washington by President Spencer W. Kimball a couple of months ago. One was from a senator's administrative assistant. This is what he said:

*I have been intending to write you for some time now, following a conversation I had about the problem of acquiring competent staff for Capitol Hill offices.*

*I told a senator—and I was quite serious about it—that in twelve years of running my senator's office, I had developed a great admiration for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We try very hard to hire as many natives of our own state as possible for office jobs, of course. But over the years, I have learned that virtually without exception, our most dedicated, hard-working employees have been members of your religion. It has happened so often that I know it isn't mere coincidence.*

*When I mentioned this fact at a meeting, other people from other Capitol offices indicated they had made the same discovery. So, I now have a rule-of-thumb which goes: All other things being equal, we will offer the job to the candidate who is a Mormon. Not knowing just who to thank for all of the good fortune we have had with members of your church over the years, I decided to convey the information to you [President Kimball]. I just hope you will continue to encourage young people with whom you are associated to consider careers on Capitol Hill, because we can sure use more of them out here.*

Then his senator, to whom he had shown the letter, wanted to add a few thoughts of his own, and he said:

*What he says is true. We have utilized members of the LDS Church in virtually every capacity in the*

*office, and I can't recall a time when the results weren't exceptionally good. Members of your church seem better prepared to accept the responsibilities of adult life, and their training usually puts them miles ahead of other job-seekers out here. But in the final analysis, I think the one quality which sets them apart is their dedication. For example, they never have to be told to work long hours—they usually recognize the need and do so. I, in turn, am very pleased that the reputation of our office is such that many young Mormons check in here as soon as they arrive in town. I think we have become sort of a home-away-from-home for them. That is flattering indeed, and I hope our long association with members of your religion continues in the years ahead.*

I can believe that offices sets an example for honesty and integrity that is all too lacking in some government offices today.

You young men and women not only have the opportunity but you have the great responsibility, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and as students of this great University, to go out and turn the world around. (I was going to say, "literally set the world on fire," but I suppose there is too much arson going on for me to say that.) I repeat: We must never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and we must never be ashamed of our principles and standards. We must be proud of our heritage and the fact that we belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, which was restored in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Nearly 150 years ago when he organized the Church under divine direction his name was ridiculed, and he was persecuted and finally killed as a martyr for the cause he espoused. Today, as recorded in a publication called *Forecast: 1979*, which quotes from a book ranking the most influential persons in history, Joseph Smith is recorded as probably the most influential religious leader in American history.

Although it was assumed that his death would mark the end of the Mormon religion,

the Church continued to flourish and, overcoming much adversity and great trials and tribulations, is still making tremendous growth and progress because it is the Church of Jesus Christ; and, according to the scriptures, the word of the Lord shall go forth by the mouths of his disciples and none shall stay them (see D&C 1:4–5).

We must all exert every effort to remain "true to the faith which our parents have cherished," and for which "martyrs have perished" (see *Hymns*, no. 157). You are the ones who now must prepare yourselves to carry on and be a light unto the world. I am so proud that we have people like you preparing to go out and take a stand. It is only through the gospel that the world can be saved, and it is only through those who know and understand and have the authority to teach the message that it can be taken to the world. This is your responsibility.

Let us consider some of the specific areas where it is vital for us to take a stand for righteousness' sake. We must first be aware of the forces at work and the attacks they are making against the moral fiber of our civilization. First of all we must be aware of the antichristian element among us. There are those who want to take Christ out of Christmas, who would silence the singing of "Silent Night" and other religious hymns, who would keep from public display the nativity scene or prevent the presentation of religious pageants relating to the Savior. Determine now that you will speak out against these forces which are undermining the very principles upon which this nation was founded as a Christian nation, principles recognizing God as the Creator of the World and Christ as its Savior and establishing a constitution based on Christian principles.

While we are talking about our early settlers, I might mention an article I read at Thanksgiving time which referred to the observance of the first Thanksgiving when the Pilgrims were not merely praising God for seeing them through

that first year and their first harvest, but were celebrating their success in a society where everyone worked and contributed for the benefit of all. The article went on to compare that concept with the situation today where we have so many able-bodied men and women accepting government welfare with no attempt to work for their sustenance even when they are able. The author concluded that the Pilgrims would no doubt advocate workfare as opposed to welfare. From the very early days of the Church, its members have been encouraged to be honest, hard-working, self-reliant, thrifty, and eager to assist the less fortunate. This should be your attitude as you go out into the world.

There are so many moral issues at stake in today's society. I am sure you have already determined to keep yourself clean and pure and to avoid the temptations which will keep you from your goal of returning to live with your Father in Heaven where you will enjoy immortality and eternal life. You must not only keep yourselves morally clean, but you must use your influence to persuade others to so live that they may enjoy the blessings that come from obedience to God's commandments. Only as you do this can you be sure that you and your families can live in communities where you will not be subjected to the evils that come from immorality and obscenity.

I think I need not elaborate on what happens to individuals, to families, to communities, and to nations when the laws of God are violated. There is no happiness in sin, and the penalty is paid even by generations yet unborn. In fact, the greatest burden that one has to bear is the burden of sin. To be free of this burden and accomplish the goals we want to reach, we must be prepared to discipline ourselves and not rationalize.

Another area for attack is pornography. I need not tell you the influence for evil that obscenity and pornography exert on an individual and on a community. In a California newspaper a story recently appeared with this

headline: "Porno stays only as long as we allow it." This statement was made by a policeman at a businessmen's luncheon, and a list was given of those communities that had organized and were successful in closing up adult bookstores and pornographic newspaper stands, and another list of those who had done nothing and were still plagued with problems because of them.

Your own president, Dallin Oaks, has made this statement regarding pornography:

*Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food. The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions, bad food will only make you sick but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval system we call a brain. The brain won't vomit back filth. Once recorded it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life. [Dallin H. Oaks, "Challenges for the Year Ahead," speech given at Brigham Young University, 6 September 1973]*

I hope that none of you will ever hesitate to lead out in efforts to rid our society of these evils to which I have referred. Do not wait for others to take the initiative. You may feel that nothing can be accomplished by one or two persons, but that is where it all begins. I am reminded of a little poem, which reads:

*"Your task, to build a better world," God said.  
I answered, "How?"  
The world is such a large, vast place,  
So complicated now.  
And I so small and useless am  
There's nothing I can do."  
But God, in all his wisdom, said,  
"Just build a better you."  
[Anonymous]*

It all starts with one; and, as I have tried to emphasize, because of who you are it is your responsibility to help make this a better world. You have been chosen to come forth in this particular time and place, and there has never been a greater need for strong and righteous leadership than now. We must not allow Satan, through his cunning and deceitful methods, to be victorious in his attempts to persuade so many to follow him. He claims to be the god of this world; and as we view conditions today we are persuaded that we are moving rapidly in that direction.

We have been warned and forewarned regarding the evils of such immoral practices as homosexuality, lesbianism, premarital sex, and all other forms of impure, unnatural, and unholy practices. Nobody has been warned as we have. All these things are in direct violation of the laws of God and will lead to our downfall. I think you understand what I am saying; but for those of you who rationalize or feel that the definitions are not quite clear, let me pass on to you what President Joseph Fielding Smith said: "If there is any doubt in your mind, do not do it."

We must take a stand for freedom and love of country. Let us do everything in our power to preserve liberty, which is a God-given gift; but let us strive for peaceful ways to solve our problems. With all the strife and conflict and turmoil going on in the world today, there is nothing which could not be resolved through simply applying the Golden Rule and keeping the commandments of God. This is the message of the gospel that you will carry to the world, either through active service as missionaries or through example in your daily lives.

Now, you cannot expect to leave here and go out and change the world unless you begin while here to prepare yourselves. You cannot cheat a little here and there, or be dishonest in your dealings, or practice a little immorality and then expect to go out into the world and

set that good example about which I have been talking. It shocks me to pick up a copy of your *Daily Universe* and read such headlines as these I recently saw: "Artifacts, Coins Stolen from Y," or "Phone Abuse Campus Problem." None of you, I am sure, would be guilty of these things—it must have been some strangers who were passing through town. Wherever we can correct such abuses, let us not be afraid to get involved. Let us keep this campus the best.

You have probably heard my story about an introduction made of me by the governor of Texas when I went there from Canada to speak to a group of oilmen. He knew that I had been a bishop, and in his introduction he referred to that and then said: "Any man who is worthy to be a bishop in the Mormon Church needs no other introduction as far as I am concerned." He was not trying to compliment me, but was paying a tribute to the Church because of a bishop or bishops he had known. Suppose just one of them had let him down; it would have made all the difference in his attitude toward the Church and its members. So often the Church is judged by someone through the acts of the only member he has known. How will you individually affect its reputation? Let us answer the question:

*What kind of church would this  
church be  
If everyone in it were just  
like me?*

What a wonderful thing it would be if everyone could say, "A graduate of Brigham Young University needs no other introduction as far as I am concerned," or "A missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints needs no other introduction as far as I am concerned"! That could be our reputation—you know it could. It is all up to you.

I heard of an employer who asked a young man, "If I hire you, can I depend on you?"

The response was: “Yes, sir. You can depend on me whether you hire me or not.”

Speaking of hiring, I refer to a recent newspaper column with a big headline: “Reasons to Hire Non-smokers.” Lest any of you do indulge or have been tempted, let me cite the reasons given: Less absenteeism, fewer illnesses, fewer chronic diseases leading to early disability, fewer work accidents, more productivity, better impression with the general public, less destructiveness of company property, less offense to fellow workers, less susceptibility to many occupational health hazards.

The Word of Wisdom was not given to us capriciously. There is more and more evidence every day about the ill effects of tobacco on those who smoke, nonsmokers in the presence of smokers, and even unborn children. It is not smart to smoke; it is folly. Read the Word of Wisdom carefully and live accordingly, so that the promise given can be fulfilled. This is it:

*And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;*

*And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasure;*

*And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.*

*And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. [D&C 89:18–21; emphasis added]*

I now call your attention to the phrase “walking in obedience to the commandments,” which we must do in addition to keeping the Word of Wisdom in order to receive the promise. Now is the time to determine to do this, and it will soon become automatic; your decisions will have been made, and when

moments of temptation come you already will have chosen to do right.

You will be honest tithe-payers, you will attend your meetings, you will accept and discharge with diligence the calls that come to you, you will have family and individual prayer regularly, you will study the scriptures and keep the commandments found therein, and as you do so the Lord will pour out so many blessings that you will not be able to contain them. What more could you ask?

We have talked at some length, and ordinarily I am a great believer in short speeches. I hope that you do not feel as one man did at a football banquet for Yale University where the coach, who was sometimes long-winded, was the speaker. He had decided to key his speech around the school’s name and took 15 minutes on “Y” for youth, more time for “A” on ability, then “L” for loyalty. Just as he started “E” for excellence someone was heard to say, “Thank goodness he isn’t the coach for Massachusetts Institute of Technology.”

Seriously, I like to come here because I love the young people of the Church, and I love Brigham Young University. I want the very best for all of you; and I know that, as you complete your work here and leave for your various fields of endeavor in various parts of the world, each of you has some particular mission to perform. We are counting on you—the Lord is counting on you. Do not let him down. Remember that you are his child; call on him and he will answer.

Some of you will someday be holding positions of leadership in the Church. One of you may one day stand at this pulpit, as I am honored to do today. May your testimony be as mine, that I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God lives, and that Jesus Christ is his Son, the Savior of the world. He gave his life for us that we might be resurrected to immortality and eternal life. I testify that Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God and his mouth-piece on the earth today, as was Joseph Smith



through whom the gospel was restored. This is the Church of Jesus Christ; and as you so live and show your love for him, he will bless you and keep you, which is my prayer for you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.