

By Elder  
Randall K. Bennett  
Of the Seventy



# Follow THE PROPHET

I met the angel who would become my wife at an institute party the second night I was home from my mission. Although Shelley and I grew up in Canada several hundred miles apart and had never met before, we got to know each other well over the following months. When I had proposed three times and been turned down because she was committed to serving a mission, she finally accepted my proposal after I promised her that we would serve missions together after raising a family. She accepted an engagement ring on December 22, 1976.

But in the days that followed, both of us felt unsettled—not about marrying each other but about the ring. Let me explain.


## A Decision to Follow the Prophet

In the weeks leading up to our engagement, Shelley and I had spent significant time talking about how we wanted to raise our family and what we wanted our marriage to be like. One of the things at the center of that discussion was our determination to always follow the prophet.

Two months before we were engaged, we listened to lots of talks at the October 1976 general conference reinforcing the principles of self-reliance. This was a topic that

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) and others had been consistently teaching for several years. Both Shelley and I had grown up knowing the importance of growing a garden, having a supply of food, and being generally prepared. But in that general conference, the theme of preparation seemed especially prevalent. Some speakers made reference to the Teton Dam flood that had occurred in June. Among them was Barbara B. Smith (1922–2010), the Relief Society general president, who emphasized the importance of self-reliance—specifically, acquiring a year’s supply of food, as was counseled at the time.<sup>1</sup> President Kimball, in the closing session of the conference, reminded Latter-day Saints of the scripture in Luke 6:46, where the Savior says, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” President Kimball then exhorted the Saints to let the messages of conference follow them into their “homes and . . . future lives.”<sup>2</sup>

After our engagement, as Shelley and I contemplated the beginning of our marriage and family life, these messages were ringing in our ears. Unbeknownst to each other, both of us were thinking about how to start home storage for our family. To obey the counsel of



*An engagement ring usually represents a commitment. But for my wife and me, not having an engagement ring represented our commitment to the Lord and His prophets.*

that time, we needed to start acquiring a year's supply of food. But how were we supposed to do it? We were students—and would be for years to come—and didn't have a lot of money. The Holy Ghost gave both of us, separately, the same answer: we needed to sell the engagement ring.

But how was I supposed to ask Shelley to do that? I had *just given* her the ring. What would she think about my asking her to sell it so we could buy some oats and flour and rice? Meanwhile, she was worrying too. What would I think, she wondered, if she were to approach me about selling the ring I had picked out for her? Would it hurt my feelings?

But the prompting each of us had felt was too strong to ignore, and the more each of us thought about it, the more glaring that diamond ring became. When Shelley raised the subject a few days after Christmas, I was relieved that she had arrived at the same conclusion I had. In many ways, it was a tremendous confirmation to both of us about the choice of whom we were going to marry. To know that our priorities and values were in sync with the other's and with the prophet of God was tremendously reassuring. I was so grateful for her willingness to make such a sacrifice to follow the prophet.

Please don't misunderstand me and

please don't sell your rings! Buying or wearing an engagement ring isn't wrong. In fact, our married children all have lovely and appropriate rings. There are many ways we can follow the prophets and apostles and apply their counsel to our personal lives. But because the Spirit had directed *us* to follow the prophet by selling our engagement ring, in our case the choice was between keeping the ring and following the prophet. This helped us establish two patterns in our home from the very beginning: following the prophet and following the personal, spiritual promptings we received.

### Responses to Our Decision

The jewelry store where I had purchased the ring was closed for about a week following Christmas, but at the first opportunity after it reopened, I went to talk to the jeweler. I fully expected him to refuse to offer me a refund; after all, the ring had been worn and was considered used. I prepared myself for this reaction and expected to have to sell the ring secondhand at a significant loss. But to my amazement, the jeweler's heart was softened. I walked out with cash in hand—and my mouth hanging open in astonishment at how the Lord had opened the way for us to be obedient.

Not everyone received our decision so well. When our friends—including those who were members of the Church—learned what we had done and saw the small leather band I'd fashioned for Shelley to wear, they

told us we were crazy. Other women Shelley's age couldn't believe she'd been willing to do what she had done. Very few were encouraging or supportive.

Shelley was strong and knew that she would be OK no matter what people thought; she had confidence in knowing that she was following the prophet. And that was more important than anything else. But the Lord provided us with a tender mercy in the form of two friends who helped us feel that we weren't alone.

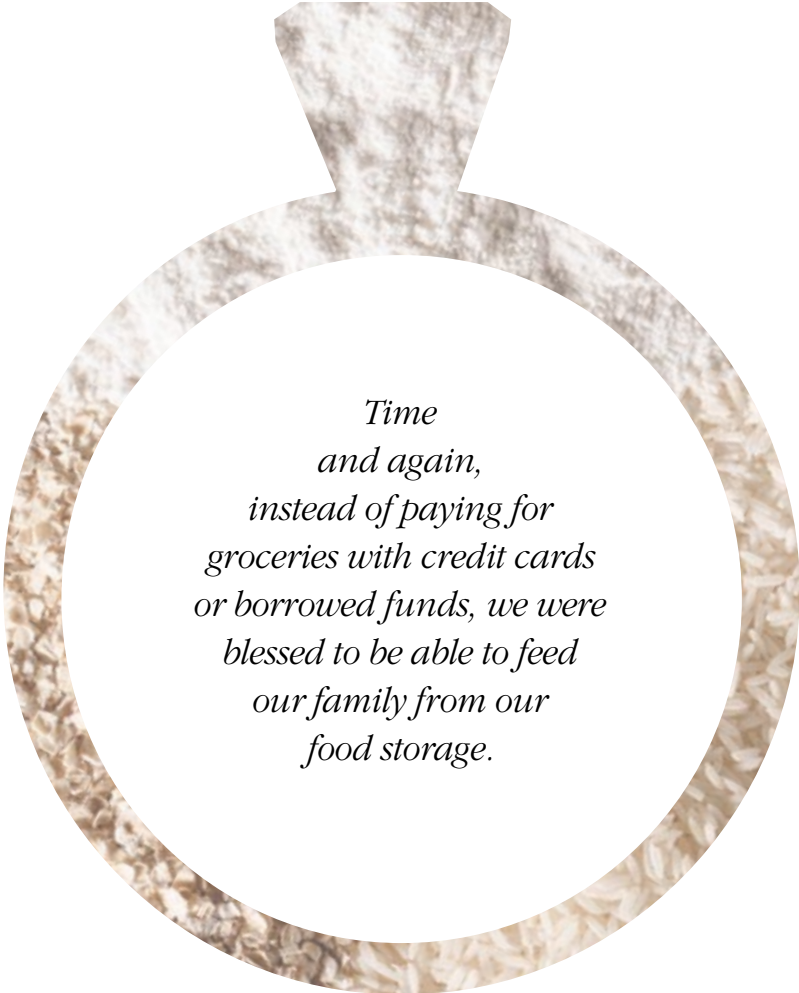
My friend Bob and I had introduced Fran to the Church in high school. All three of us later served missions, and after Fran returned from her mission, she and Bob became engaged. When they came to share their good news with Shelley and me, we learned that instead of buying an engagement ring, they had also decided to use the funds to buy food storage. It was interesting to all four of us that the Spirit had directed us to do similar things. Our commitment to following the Holy Ghost and the living prophet added a new dimension to our friendship, which has lasted more than 40 years.

### **Blessings from Obedience**

Shelley and I began buying basic foods for our home storage in January 1977 and continued to purchase bit by bit until we were married in April of that year. Prior to our wedding, we stored the food at my parents' home.

Shelley wore the leather band as a wedding ring for a long time while I finished undergraduate studies and then dental school. Over the course of pursuing education, our family moved many times. We became accustomed to lugging buckets of wheat from apartment to apartment, house to house, and city to city. Our friends started to avoid us every time we moved, but in later years, we felt profound gratitude for having followed the counsel of Church leaders.

When I graduated from dental school and began a dental practice, Shelley and I had two children and literally no funds. Gratefully, we were able to live on part of what we had



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acquired in food storage just before our marriage. Our obedience to prophetic counsel blessed our lives again more than a decade after we were married, when I had completed more schooling and was in an orthodontic residency. We were again out of money, and instead of paying for groceries with credit cards or borrowed funds, we were blessed to be able to feed our family (which now included four children) from our supply.

In the years since, we have been blessed in many other ways by heeding the prophetic word. We have learned not to question the validity of what the prophets and apostles teach or to wonder if it makes sense.

We have learned that by acting—and acting immediately—on their counsel, our lives are blessed.

### Learning to Listen to the Prophetic Word

Some might call our actions blind obedience. But we have the Lord's personal promise that the prophets will never lead us astray.<sup>3</sup> Knowing this helps us hear their voices as we would hear His own (see D&C 1:38).

We've also learned that living prophets typically *invite* us to do things; they don't often use words like *command* or *exhort*. Their way is kind and gentle, but that doesn't give us an excuse not to follow. When Shelley and I have taken invitations as commandments, we have always been blessed.

We have also learned to discern their direction by listening for such phrases as "I've been pondering . . ." or "Something that has been on my mind is . . ." or "I feel to tell you . . ." or "Let me offer some counsel about . . ." or "It would be my hope that . . ." These and similar phrases are clues to help us know what is on the minds and in the hearts of the Lord's anointed servants.

One other thing that helps us hear the Lord's voice as we listen to prophets and apostles is to pay especially close attention when they quote other prophets or apostles. The Lord has taught that He will establish His word by the mouth of two or three witnesses (see 2 Corinthians 13:1; D&C 6:28).

Because the message of self-reliance was repeated so many times in that general conference before we got engaged, my wife and I felt that the message was particularly pertinent for us at that time. We were inspired to follow that counsel in a visible way. However, following the prophet isn't always about outward displays of devotion; often our obedience manifests itself in smaller, more personal ways. Regardless of whether others know about our obedience or not, the Lord does. And He will bless us for our obedience and open ways to make it possible.

Today Shelley wears a traditional wedding band, but she has kept her leather one as a keepsake all these years. To us it is a symbol of our early decision to make always following the prophet's counsel an integral part of our family life. Now as we watch our children raise their children, we are grateful that faithfully following the Lord's prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, is part of their family life as well. To us this obedience is a wonderful legacy and is as tangible a token of covenant keeping as an engagement ring might have been. ■



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#### NOTES

1. See Barbara B. Smith, "She Is Not Afraid of the Snow for Her Household," *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 121–22.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, "A Program for Man," *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 110.
3. See Harold B. Lee, "The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, and Revelator" (address to seminary and institute of religion faculty, July 8, 1964), 13; Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, Oct. 1960, 78; *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (1946), 212–13.