



Righteous Living in Perilous Times

*Through our faithfulness to the gospel,
we can find safety from the perils of our day
and be a positive influence in the world.*

From the Life of George Albert Smith

George Albert Smith's service as a General Authority spanned most of the first half of the 20th century. During this period the world saw many devastating and tumultuous events, including the Great Depression and two world wars. These calamities, together with what he considered a general moral decline in society, led President Smith to say more than once, "This world is in a critical condition."¹ He saw in world events the fulfillment of prophecies about the last days, and he was convinced that the only hope for peace in the world was obedience to God's laws. At the height of World War I, he warned, "War will not cease and the strife in this world will not end until the children of men repent of their sins and turn to God and serve him and keep his commandments."²

In the midst of these difficult times, President Smith found that many people had become discouraged. He reported, "It has been my privilege to be in different parts of [the United States] and it is rare that one finds those who are not exceedingly pessimistic, because of conditions over which we seem to have no control."³ While he acknowledged that war, natural disasters, and spiritual danger are part of living in the latter days, President Smith taught the Saints that they can escape much of the distress of these perilous times by living the gospel and resisting temptation.

He also found optimism in his belief that righteous Latter-day Saints could have a powerful influence on the world around them.



"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"
(John 14:27).

He taught that the Saints should not merely accept the condition of the world but should remain active in their communities and strive to make their influence felt, in spite of any opposition they might face. “We are all under the obligation of making this world a happier place for our having lived in it,” he said.⁴

Sister Belle S. Spafford, general president of the Relief Society, shared an experience in which President Smith taught her this principle. Shortly after being called to her position, Sister Spafford was notified of a meeting to be held in New York City by the National Council of Women. The Relief Society had been a member of that council for many years, but recently several other members of the council had been antagonistic toward the Church and had embarrassed Latter-day Saint delegates at its meetings. Because of this, Sister Spafford and her counselors felt that the Relief Society should terminate its membership in the council, and they drafted a recommendation expressing their views. Sister Spafford later recounted:

“By appointment one morning, I went alone to see President George Albert Smith, taking the recommendation with me, together with a list of the reasons why the recommendation was being made. The President carefully read the typed material. Then he inquired, ‘Isn’t this the organization which the sisters joined before the turn of the century?’

“I said, ‘Yes, sir.’

“He said, ‘Am I then to understand that you now wish to terminate that membership?’

“I said, ‘Yes, sir.’ Then I added, ‘You know, President Smith, we don’t get anything from the Council.’

“The President looked at me with surprise. He said, ‘Sister Spafford, do you always think in terms of what you get? Don’t you think it is well at times to think in terms of what you have to give? I believe,’ he continued, ‘that Mormon women have something to give to the women of the world, and that they may also learn from them. Rather than have you terminate your membership, I suggest that you take several of your ablest board members and go back to this meeting.’

“Then he said with emphasis, ‘Make your influence felt.’”⁵

Sister Spafford obeyed this counsel and was later appointed to leadership positions in the National Council of Women, eventually being elected its president. [See suggestion 1 on page 264.]

Teachings of George Albert Smith

Serious difficulties have been predicted for the latter days.

We have been told that in the last days serious difficulties would arise. . . . We have not only been warned by the scriptures that were given in the days of the Savior and prior to his time, and those that were given after him, but in our own day and age the Lord has spoken and the revelations of our Heavenly Father are found in the Doctrine and Covenants. If we will read these revelations we will learn that the experiences through which we are passing were predicted. . . .

. . . The daily press brings to us accounts of disasters that are everywhere—the sea being tempestuous and loss of life upon it, earthquakes, great tornadoes, such as we have been told would occur in the last days—and it does seem to me, brethren and sisters, if men are thinking seriously, if they are reading the scriptures, they must know that the happenings that the Lord said would occur in the last days are occurring. The fig tree surely is putting forth its leaves [see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–39], and those who are thoughtful must know that the summer is nigh, that those things that the Lord has predicted as preceding his second coming are now coming to pass.⁶

We are not out of the woods. This world is in for a housecleaning unless the sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father repent of their sins and turn to him. And that means the Latter-day Saints, or the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, along with all the rest, but we, first of all, ought to be setting the example.⁷ [See suggestion 2 on page 264.]

The only way to peace is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is only one remedy for the universal distress—a panacea for the sickness of the world. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ; the

perfect law of life and liberty, which has been restored again in fulfilment of the Scriptures.⁸

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27.)

These are reassuring words from the Prince of Peace to his faithful followers. Surely there is nothing men need more than the blessings of peace and happiness and hearts free from fear. And these are offered [to] all of us if we will but be partakers of them.

When the gospel was restored to earth in this dispensation, the Lord repeated what he has said so many times in the Old and New Testaments, that the price of peace and happiness is righteousness. Notwithstanding this knowledge, there are many who appear to think that we can obtain happiness in some other way, but we should all know by this time that there is no other way. And yet by his cunning craftiness Satan has persuaded the majority of mankind from walking in the way that will insure happiness, and he is still busy. The adversary of righteousness never sleeps.

But by following the teachings of the Lord, by turning unto him and repenting of sin, by going about doing good, we may have peace and happiness and prosperity. If mankind will love one another, the hatred and the unkindness that have existed so much in the world will pass away.⁹

In these days of uncertainty when men are running to and fro seeking for some new plan by which peace may be brought into the world, know this: that the only way to peace for this world is the pathway of the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no other. . . . To possess a knowledge of the truth is worth all the wealth of the world, to know that we are on the safe highway when we are in the pathway of duty as defined by our Heavenly Father, and to know that we can continue there if we will, regardless of the influences and inducements that may be offered by those who have not been appointed to be our leaders, is a blessing that is priceless.¹⁰

We live in a day when the scripture is being fulfilled among the nations wherein the Lord said through one of his prophets, that in the latter-day, “. . . the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and

the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” (Isaiah 29:14.) With all the wisdom of the world, no group thus far has been able to point the way for peace with the certainty that it is the way. We . . . are fortunate to know that there is a way for peace that alone will produce results, and that way is to keep the commandments of God as revealed to the children of men anciently and in our day. If that way were followed, all the problems that are so serious in the world could be solved, and peace would come to this unhappy earth.¹¹

Though the world may be filled with distress, and the heavens gather blackness, and the vivid lightnings flash, and the earth quake from center to circumference, if we know that God lives, and our lives are righteous, we will be happy, there will be peace unspeakable because we know our Father approves [of] our lives.¹² [See suggestion 3 on page 264.]

**We need have no fear if we do what
the Lord has asked us to do.**

We need have no fear if we do what the Lord has asked us to do. This is His world. All men and women are subject to Him. All the powers of evil will be controlled for the sake of His people, if they will honor Him and keep His commandments.¹³

If we have the confidence of our Heavenly Father, if we have His love, if we are worthy of His blessings, all the armies of the world cannot destroy us, cannot break down our faith, and cannot overcome the Church that is named for the Son of God.

Read in the nineteenth chapter of II Kings how Sennacherib the Assyrian king sought to overthrow Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the king who represented Israel pleaded with the Lord for deliverance while Sennacherib mocked him, saying, “Don’t think that your prayers to your God can help you. Every place that I have been and taken already, they have been praying. You are helpless,” and the next morning a large part of the Assyrian army was found dead upon the ground, and Jerusalem had been preserved by the Lord. [See 2 Kings 19:10–20, 35.] He is our strength, . . . your Father and mine,

the Father of all; if we will only be worthy He will preserve us as He did Helaman's sons [see Alma 57:24–27], and as He preserved Daniel from the lions [see Daniel 6], and the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace [see Daniel 3], and six hundred thousand of the descendants of Abraham when he brought them out from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and drowned Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea [see Exodus 14:21–30]. He is the God of this universe. He is the Father of us all. He is all-powerful and He promises us protection if we will live worthy of it.¹⁴

No matter whether the clouds may gather, no matter how the war drums may beat, no matter what conditions may arise in the world, here in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wherever we are honoring and keeping the commandments of God, there will be protection from the powers of evil, and men and women will be permitted to live upon the earth until their lives are finished in honor and glory if they will keep the commandments of our Heavenly Father.¹⁵ [See suggestion 4 on page 264.]

**Our homes can be peaceful, holy places
even in the midst of calamities.**

I think that with the distress everywhere, with the prediction that the Lord made in the first Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, that “peace should be taken from the earth,” [D&C 1:35] we must feel that that time has come. Surely we ought to take stock of ourselves, and our homes should be the abiding place of prayer and gratitude and thanksgiving. Husbands should be kind to their wives, and wives considerate of their husbands. Parents should hold the love of their children by their righteous living. Our homes would then not only be the abiding place of prayer and thanksgiving, but would be the place where our Father could bestow His choicest blessings, because of our worthiness.¹⁶

I pray that our homes may be sanctified by the righteousness of our lives, that the adversary may have no power to come there and destroy the children of our homes or those who dwell under our roofs. If we will honor God and keep his commandments, our



*“Make your homes the abiding place of the spirit of the Lord;
let them be holy places.”*

homes will be sacred, the adversary will have no influence, and we will live in happiness and peace until the winding-up scene in mortality and we go to receive our reward in immortality.¹⁷

Conform your lives to the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ and when calamities threaten you will feel the support of his all powerful arm. Make your homes the abiding place of the spirit of the Lord; let them be holy places, where the adversary cannot come; listen to the still small voice prompting you to works of righteousness. It is my prayer for one and all that you be not swerved from the path that leads to the knowledge and power of God, the heritage of the faithful, even life everlasting.¹⁸

I pray that in our hearts and in our homes there may abide that spirit of love, of patience, of kindness, of charity, of helpfulness that enriches our lives and that makes the world brighter and better because of it.¹⁹ [See suggestion 5 on page 264.]

We can be a positive influence in the world.

I want to plead with you, . . . be as anchors in the community in which you live that others may be drawn to you and feel secure. Let your light so shine that others seeing your good works will have a desire in their hearts to be like you.²⁰

It is our duty to set the example; it is our duty to hold aloft the banner of truth. It is our duty to encourage our Father's other children to listen to his advice and counsel and so adjust things that wherever we are we will find the spirit of God burning in our souls and our influence will be for good.²¹

The Lord has not required something that is impossible. On the contrary, he has given us commandments and advice and counsel that it is possible for all of us to follow in this day and age in which we live. . . .

. . . Brethren and sisters, we ought to be faithful. The land that we live in should be sanctified by our lives of righteousness. . . . All that we need is to repent of our sins, turn from the error of our ways, cleanse our lives of impurity, and then to go about doing good. It does not require that we shall be set apart for that purpose. Every man, woman and child in the Church of Jesus Christ may go about doing good and receive the blessing that results therefrom. [See suggestion 6 on page 264.]

. . . Let us set our hands to the work that he has entrusted to our care, let us bless our Father's children wherever they may be, and our lives will be enriched and this world will be made happier. This is the mission that has been placed upon our shoulders. Our Heavenly Father will hold us responsible for the manner in which we fulfil it. God grant that in the humility of our souls we will go about with the desire in our hearts to do good to all people wherever they may be, and bring to them the joy that can only come through observing his laws and keeping his commandments. That peace may abide in our hearts and in our homes, that we may radiate sunshine and cheer wherever we may go, that we may prove to the world that we do know that God lives, by the lives that we lead, and receive his blessings therefor, I humbly pray.²²

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages v–vii.

1. Read the story about Belle S. Spafford receiving counsel from President Smith (pages 257–58). In what ways can you “make your influence felt”?
2. In the first section of teachings (page 258), President Smith tells of the difficulties that have been predicted to precede the Second Coming (see also 2 Timothy 3:1–7; D&C 45:26–35). Why do you think it is important to know that these difficulties were predicted in the scriptures?
3. Review the section that begins at the bottom of page 258. What are some of the problems in the world that could be solved by obedience to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ? How has the gospel brought peace to your personal life? to your family? to your relationships with others?
4. On pages 260–61 President Smith gives examples from the scriptures of the Lord protecting His people. In what ways has He protected you and your family? How does obedience help us overcome fear?
5. What are some of the dangers that threaten the spiritual safety of our homes today? What can we do to make our homes “holy places, where the adversary cannot come”? (For some ideas, review the section that begins on page 261.)
6. Read the first and fourth paragraphs on page 263. How are faithful Latter-day Saints like “anchors” in their communities? Why does “[cleansing] our lives of impurity” make us better able to “go about doing good”? Prayerfully consider what you should do to cleanse your own life of impurity.

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 54:13–17; Matthew 5:13–16; John 16:33; 2 Nephi 14:5–6; Doctrine and Covenants 87:6–8; 97:24–25; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22–23, 29–30

Teaching help: Consider inviting class members to read the headings in “Teachings of George Albert Smith” and select a section that is meaningful to them or their family. Invite them to study President Smith’s teachings in that section, including any corresponding questions at the end of the chapter. Then ask class members to share what they learned.

Notes

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1948, 162.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1918, 41.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1932, 41.
4. “Some Thoughts on War, and Sorrow, and Peace,” *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1945, 501.
5. Belle S. Spafford, *A Woman’s Reach* (1974), 96–97.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1932, 42–44.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1946, 153.
8. “New Year’s Greeting,” *Millennial Star*, Jan. 1, 1920, 2.
9. “‘At This Season,’” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1949, 801.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1937, 53.
11. In Conference Report, Apr. 1946, 4.
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 1915, 28.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 15.
14. In Conference Report, Apr. 1943, 92.
15. In Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 15.
16. In Conference Report, Apr. 1941, 27.
17. In Conference Report, Oct. 1946, 8.
18. “New Year’s Greeting,” *Millennial Star*, Jan. 6, 1921, 3.
19. In Conference Report, Oct. 1946, 7.
20. In Conference Report, Oct. 1945, 117–18.
21. In Conference Report, Oct. 1947, 166.
22. In Conference Report, Apr. 1932, 43–45.

