



By Elder
Kevin W. Pearson
Of the Seventy

Do Not Leave the Savior

We live in tumultuous times. But the question is not how the Church will fare; rather, how will you and I fare?

Several years ago, I met a friend for lunch. We hadn't seen each other for many years. During my high school and early college days, he had been one of my closest friends. He was one of the strongest and most committed young men I knew.

We attended seminary together, played sports together, attended the university together, prepared for missions together, and left for missions a few months apart. After our missions, he married a talented and wonderful woman from my stake.

As the years passed, our lives took different courses. We moved to different cities and eventually lost touch with one another. I still remember how stunned I was to hear that he and his wife had left the Church. Of all those I knew in my youth, he was the last one I would ever have thought would leave the Church.

At lunch we reminisced over the friendship that had meant so much to both of us. We laughed again at some of the crazy experiences of our earlier days. We talked about our families and tried to close the gap of time.

Finally, I asked the obvious question: "Tim, what happened? You were so deeply converted and committed! Why did you leave the Church? What caused you to walk away from your temple covenants? Have you also left the Savior? We promised one another that we would be true and faithful to the end of our lives!"

"Kevin," he replied, "I simply see things differently now. My view of the Church and its teachings has changed. I don't hate the Church—I just don't need it anymore."

As we concluded our visit, I expressed my love and gratitude for a friendship I still value. Then, with deep feeling, I expressed my testimony: “Tim, I know these things are true. And you know they’re true too. You have always known. You’ve simply lost the clarity you once had. But you can regain the light and understanding of the Holy Ghost you once had. Please come back.”

We embraced as we said goodbye, and he whispered, “I admire your conviction and passion. But how can you be so sure?”

As I walked away, I reflected deeply on the choices we had made and on their impact on our lives and on the lives of our children and grandchildren.

My young friends, please don’t let what happened to my friend Tim happen to you. Are you as steadfast, immovable, and converted as you think you are? When you encounter the inevitable and necessary challenges of life, where will you turn for peace and understanding? When your life gets dark and dreary, will you still instinctively and consistently think to pray?¹

As criticism of the Church, its history, its leaders, and its teachings increases, where will you stand? As the beliefs and practices of an ever-darkening world collide with the principles of the restored gospel, what will you do?

“Will Ye Also Go Away?”

Some of Satan’s most effective weapons are distraction, deception, and spiritual desensitization. Each erodes faith, obscures vision, and skews perspective. Together they constitute the great challenge of our time. Satan uses them not simply to undermine Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, Church doctrine, and Church leaders but also to attack the Savior and the Father’s plan. It has always been so.

When the inevitable fury of temptations and tribulations approach Category 5 spiritual storm conditions, will you still trust God and cling to truth? The penetrating question of the Savior unto the Twelve is still in force today:



“Will ye also go away?”

“Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

“And we believe and are sure that thou are that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:67–69).

I am reminded of a powerful statement by President Heber C. Kimball (1801–68), First Counselor in the First Presidency. The Saints had safely arrived in the Salt Lake Valley and were quite pleased with themselves. Having overcome and endured so much, they were a bit prideful and overconfident. President Kimball stated:

“Let me say to you, that many of you will see the time when you will have all the trouble, trial and persecution that you can stand, and plenty of opportunities to show that you are true to God and his work. . . . To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves. . . . If you have not got the testimony, live right and call upon the Lord and cease not till you obtain it. If you do not you will not stand.

“ . . . The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can you stand?”²

We live in tumultuous times. But the question is not how the Church will fare; rather, how will you and I fare? “The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing.”³ Whether you and I progress with it is the only unknown.



How to Survive Spiritually

I suggest six essential things each of us must do to survive spiritually.

1 Love and obey God first. Loving and obeying God necessarily precedes loving and serving others. Sequence is important. Nephi taught, “For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3). Heavenly Father loves us and is always willing to give us understanding. We must, however, put Him first in our lives.

2 Hold personal prayer. Prayer is essential. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books [he might have added “blogs”], but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching.”⁴ You will never be unworthy to pray! If you want more answers, ask more questions. Constantly seek for and pray for the influence of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 10:5). This is the light the Father sends that brings understanding.

3 “Seek learning even by study and also by faith” (D&C 109:7). Learning is a divine duty. Agents seek learning; objects wait to be acted upon. Great leaders are great learners. The Church needs great leaders—women and men seeking greater light and knowledge, deeper understanding and conversion (see D&C 93:36). This requires commitment and dedication. You cannot find deep truths scrolling a wiki or searching the blogosphere. Remember, faith is kindled by hearing the testimony of those who have faith, not by hearing the doubts of those who have lost it.

4 Search the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon—every day! The Book of Mormon was expressly written to protect and preserve us as we navigate the conditions of our day. Regarding its power, Nephi testified of the rod of iron, “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” (1 Nephi 15:24). If you start to feel confused and lost, start again on page one, and immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon.



5 Focus on the big picture. You are part of the greatest movement on earth: the gathering of Israel and preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. You have an important role to play! You came to earth committed to being valiant in your testimony of the Savior. That is your divine identity. Focus on the big picture: Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness. It is the lens of truth. It is the context for all questions, issues, and concerns. “For the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13).



6 Above all else, trust in Jesus Christ. He is still “the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11; see also John 8:12). When you are encompassed and overwhelmed by doubt, difficulty, and temptation, trust Him. When life isn’t what you expected and those you trusted disappoint and betray you, continue to trust in Him completely. May you respond as Nephi of old in equally distressing times: “Nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. . . . O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever” (2 Nephi 4:19, 34).



Whatever you do, do not leave the Savior! Because of His Atonement, we are agents, free to act and not to be acted upon. Each of us will stand before Almighty God and account for the light and truth we have chosen.

I promise you that if you will follow these principles and cling to truth, your faith will never fail. May God bless you to always choose to look through the lens of truth by the power of the Holy Ghost. ■

From a devotional address, “The Lens of Truth,” delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on March 7, 2017. For the full address, go to web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTES

1. See “Did You Think to Pray?” *Hymns*, no. 140.
2. In Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (1945), 449–50.
3. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:540.
4. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:425.

