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PROPHETIC PRINCIPLES OF *FAITHFULNESS*

More than 20 years ago, I completed my service as a mission president in South America. My wife, Rhonda, and I have seen great triumph as well as heartbreaking tragedy in the lives of our missionaries during those intervening 20 years.

The majority of our missionaries are happily sealed in the temple, raising righteous children and sending them on missions, and serving faithfully in Church auxiliary and priesthood callings. Some, however, are less active, some have been married and divorced, and some have been excommunicated from the Church.

What has made the difference in the lives of our former missionaries? What might some of them have done differently to avoid personal tragedy? What about you? Where will you be in 20 years? What decisions and commitments do you need to make now and in the future to help you remain faithful?

I suggest 10 principles that will help you.

1 CONTINUALLY NOURISH YOUR TESTIMONY

The Spirit-filled experiences of a mission establish a foundation of faith that can bless you throughout your life. That foundation of faith can be diminished only through neglect or sin.

Recently I interviewed a returned missionary who is less active and claimed to have lost his faith. I asked him if he was praying and studying the

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Book of Mormon, as he did when he was a missionary. He said he wasn't because he had lost his faith in Joseph Smith.

I felt prompted to ask him this question: "Are you into pornography?" He answered yes. I told him it was no wonder he had lost his testimony.

I explained that a testimony is nothing more or less than the Holy Ghost bearing witness to our soul of the truthfulness of the gospel and of the restored Church. When we fail to pray and study the scriptures, the influence of the Spirit in our life is weakened, lowering our resistance to temptation. When we sin and become unclean, we lose the companionship of the Holy Ghost altogether. Without the ongoing witness of the Spirit, we can easily begin to think we don't have a testimony and maybe never did.

Our testimony needs to be continually nourished. That nourishment comes from personal prayer, daily scripture study—particularly the Book of Mormon—and serving in the Church throughout our life.



2 FOLLOW THE COUNSEL OF LIVING PROPHETS & APOSTLES

I am going to review prophetic counsel that can help you have a happy marriage, a faithful family, and a successful life. I refer to “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” I am going to share some important parts of that proclamation, which was issued by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1995. We sustain these Brethren as prophets, seers, and revelators. They are the spokesmen for God to His children on earth.

On the day the Church was organized, God spoke regarding His prophet, saying, “For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.” Then the Lord promises temporal blessings and eternal blessings when we follow the counsel of prophets: “For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (D&C 21:5–6).

What a blessing in these difficult times.



3 BE SEALED IN THE TEMPLE AND KEEP YOUR COVENANTS

The prophets, seers, and revelators “proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” They add: “The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”¹

The most important decision you make in life “is to marry the right person, in the right place, by the right authority”² and then to keep your temple covenants. There is no exaltation without a temple sealing.

To qualify for exaltation, couples must enter into “the new and everlasting covenant, and it [must be] sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed”—the prophet. If we keep our temple covenants, we will “inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths . . . and glory in all things, . . . which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19; see also verse 7).

A temple sealing contains the promise of eternal blessings in the next life and increases the likelihood of a happy marriage in this life. As a consecrated son or daughter of God, you have covenanted to come to earth at this time to build up God’s kingdom. That kingdom-building includes your own temple marriage.

4 PARTNER WITH GOD IN BRINGING HIS SPIRIT CHILDREN TO EARTH

The family proclamation states: “The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”

Families today are smaller than they were a generation ago—even LDS families. We can always find reasons to justify delaying or limiting the number of children we have. For example, “We need to graduate first” or “We need to get a better job so we can have more money” or “Why take all the fun out of marriage by having kids?”

You’ve been blessed with a testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. You have the blessings of eternity to offer to your children. Don’t get hung up on the thought that you must provide all things temporal. The greatest gift you have to offer to your children is access to all things spiritual in the kingdom of God.

When you prayerfully counsel with your spouse about having children, remember that you are the youth of the noble birthright. Please don’t leave God out of your deliberations. Share that right to birth with as many spirit sons and daughters as God is prepared to send to your home. After all, these were His children long before they will be yours.

With faith in God and His prophetic word, go forward without excuse or hesitation and create your own eternal family.

5 DO NOT INDULGE IN PORNOGRAPHY OR OTHER IMMORAL BEHAVIOR

The proclamation continues, “Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”

Complete fidelity means being physically faithful as well as emotionally faithful to your spouse. Pornography and online relationships are examples of emotional infidelity. When a spouse engages in pornography, he or she violates a sacred trust of the most intimate nature. The innocent spouse feels betrayed. Confidence and trust in the marriage deteriorate. The harvest of adultery is sown in the seedbed of pornography.

I share some feelings from a man who had been sealed in the temple but lost his family because of pornography and an online relationship with a woman. In sorrow he writes: “I did not heed the words given to me in my patriarchal blessing, which stated that Satan would have no power in my life except that which I would give him. I gave him plenty, and slowly and surely he took it and used that power to destroy my life with my wife and my children. I loved them with all my heart and still do and always will, but that love was not enough to defeat the power I willingly gave Satan in my life to destroy it. The Church’s teachings provided [us] a way to return as a family sealed for time and all eternity to our Heavenly Father, would I have but listened and heeded them, but in the end I did not.”

What a tragedy.





6 TEACH AND LIVE THE GOSPEL IN YOUR HOME

The proclamation teaches us things we must do to be happy in our homes. “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”

When my wife and I were a young married couple, we tried repeatedly to establish a firm habit of reading the scriptures together every day as a family. When our oldest child was about seven years old, we finally made it a daily habit. Reading first thing in the morning, we continued faithfully from that time forward. Once the habit was established with the other children, the younger children were eager to participate as they became old enough. Often we had to read before 6:00 a.m. because of early-morning seminary.

Young married couples are in a position to start their own righteous family traditions—holding daily family scripture study, having family prayer, and preparing their children for missions and temple marriage.

7 HONOR THE ROLES OF FATHER AND MOTHER IN RAISING CHILDREN

The proclamation also shares some important counsel about raising children: “Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as *equal partners*.”

Sometimes one parent may feel that he or she is better qualified to raise and discipline the children. The prophets of this dispensation have taught repeatedly that husbands and wives form a partnership in marriage, that all decisions relative to the family should be made jointly and harmoniously.

Equal partners are to be equal partners. Counsel together and pray together. Be guided by the Spirit to know the most effective way to raise your children together. Their eternal destiny will be affected by your decisions.

8 USE YOUR MORAL AGENCY TO CHOOSE TO FOLLOW THE SAVIOR

The decision as to where you will be in 20 years or 20 centuries is entirely up to you. You’re free to choose; however, eternal consequences flow from your choices. Because of the Savior’s Atonement, men “are redeemed from the fall [and] they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to *act for themselves* and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

“Wherefore, men are . . . free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power

of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:26–27; emphasis added).

Satan hates you because of who you are and what you represent. He wants to make you miserable, as he is. Jesus Christ loves you. He paid the price for your sins. He gave His life for you. He invites you to follow Him and repent, if necessary. As you choose to follow the Savior, you will have “joy in this life and eternal life in the world to come.”³

9 DEVELOP FAITH TO ENDURE TO THE END

Faith comes as you are converted unto the Lord. The prophet Nephi taught: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20).

President Thomas S. Monson recently said in general conference, “The future is as bright as your faith.”⁴ That includes faith to endure and overcome all obstacles, including offenses, betrayals, and disappointments. Your faith to endure will determine your destiny, even your eternal destiny.



10 SUBMIT YOUR WILL TO THE WILL OF GOD

I pray that God has touched your soul with a desire to do better and be better and to follow the counsel of our living prophets. I hope that you have felt a desire to strengthen your commitment to become all that God has foreordained you to be.

“Brethren [and sisters], shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, . . . and on, on to the victory! . . . Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” (D&C 128:22, 24).

What might that offering be that you individually can give to God? It is that one gift He would never require of you. It is the offering of your will to submit to His will. It is to lay your agency on the altar of personal sacrifice.

One of the *Lectures on Faith*, prepared by the early Brethren in this dispensation, states: “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.”⁵

Your agency is the one thing that is truly yours that you can give as an offering to God. By volunteering your will to His will, you will become like Him.

I conclude with my witness of the Savior. To the degree that you exercise faith in Jesus Christ, submit your will to God’s will, follow the counsel of His prophets, and obey the promptings of the Spirit, you will be faithful, happy, and successful. ■

From a devotional address, “Where Will You Be in 20 Years?” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on May 15, 2012. For the full address, go to web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129; emphasis added.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, “Agency or Inspiration?” *New Era*, Jan. 1975, 38.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Caesar, Circus, or Christ?* Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Oct. 26, 1965), 8; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Capacity,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 16.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Be of Good Cheer,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 92.
5. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 69.