



Spencer W. Kimball

Man of Action

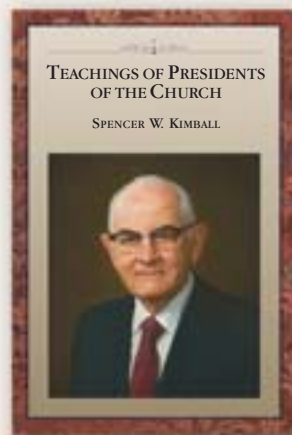
*President Kimball lived what he taught:
“It is not so much what we know that is important,
as what we do and what we are.”*

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In 1981 Elder Robert D. Hales, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, said of President Spencer W. Kimball, “He is a man of action, demonstrated by the simple sign on his desk that says, ‘Do It.’”¹

As twelfth President of the Church, from December 1973 to November 1985, this “man of action” encouraged Latter-day Saints to avoid complacency and to reach for ever-greater levels of gospel performance. “We must lengthen our stride,” he said.² He further counseled: “Let us remember that it is not so much what we know that is important, as what we do and what we are. The Master’s plan is a program of doing, of living, not merely knowing. Knowledge itself is not the end. It is how we righteously live and apply that knowledge in our own lives and how we apply it to help others that describes our character.”³

Throughout his life, President Kimball showed his commitment to living the gospel. His teachings, in turn, offer practical as well as inspiring counsel that can help each of us live the gospel more fully. The following examples are taken from *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball*, which is the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society curriculum for 2007 in 26 languages, including English Braille.



Prayer

One of the most trying experiences in Spencer W. Kimball’s life was losing his mother, who died when he was 11 years old. He recalled that the news “came as a thunderbolt. I ran from the house out in the backyard to be alone in my deluge of tears. Out of sight and sound, away from everybody, I sobbed and sobbed. . . . My eleven-year-old heart seemed to burst.”

Even at this young age, however, Spencer knew of the comfort and peace that prayer could bring. During this time of sorrow, a family friend wrote, “My children wept with [my wife and me] as we heard of the prayers of little Spencer and how the loss of his mother weighed so heavily upon his little heart and yet how bravely he battled with his grief and sought comfort from the only source.”⁴

Of prayer, President Kimball taught: “Prayer is such a privilege—not only to speak to our Father in Heaven, but also to receive love and inspiration from him. At the end of our prayers, we need to do some intense listening—even for several minutes. We have prayed for counsel and help. Now we must ‘be still, and know that [he is] God.’ (Ps. 46:10.)”⁵

“Learning the language of prayer is a joyous, lifetime



Above: President Kimball had a lifelong love of scripture study.

Below: The Andrew and Olive Kimball family, 1897. Two-year-old Spencer is on his father's lap.

Opposite page: Young Spencer around the time of his marriage to Camilla Eyring (lower photograph).

experience. Sometimes ideas flood our mind as we listen after our prayers. Sometimes feelings press upon us. A spirit of calmness assures us that all will be well. But always, if we have been honest and earnest, we will experience a good feeling—a feeling of warmth for our Father in Heaven and a sense of his love for us. It has sorrowed me that some of us have not learned the meaning of that calm, spiritual warmth, for it is a witness to us that our prayers have been heard. And since our Father in Heaven loves us with more love than we have even for ourselves, it means that we can trust in his goodness, we can trust in him; it means that if we continue praying and living as we should, our Father's hand will guide and bless us.”⁶

Scripture Study

As a boy of 14, Spencer Kimball heard a sermon in which the speaker asked who in the congregation had read the entire Bible. Only a few raised their hands. Not being one of those few, Spencer keenly felt the need to read the sacred book from cover to cover,

which he began doing that very night by the light of a coal-oil lamp. In about a year he completed his goal of reading all of the Bible, an accomplishment that contributed to his lifelong love of scripture study.⁷

President Kimball often taught of scripture study. “I ask us all to honestly evaluate our performance in scripture study. It is a common thing to have a few passages of scripture at our disposal, floating in our minds, as it were, and thus to have the illusion that we know a great deal about the gospel. In this sense, having a little knowledge can be a problem indeed. I am convinced that each of us, at some time in our lives, must discover the scriptures for ourselves—and not just discover them once, but rediscover them again and again.”⁸

“I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns. I find myself loving more intensely those whom I



must love with all my heart and mind and strength, and loving them more, I find it easier to abide their counsel.”⁹

Reverence

During a visit to a Church meetinghouse, President Kimball noticed some paper towels on a restroom floor. He threw them away and then cleaned the sink. A local leader was so impressed by this example of care and respect that he subsequently taught others to show more reverence for Church buildings and other sacred things.¹⁰

President Kimball taught:

“Often, before and after meetings, members of the Church cluster in the chapel to exchange greetings. Some seeming irreverence is due innocently to the fact that we are a friendly people and that the Sabbath is a convenient time to visit, to fellowship, and to meet new people. Parents should set an example for their families by doing their visiting in the foyers or other areas outside of the chapel before or after meetings. After a meeting, parents can help to carry the spirit of the service into the home by discussing at home a thought, a musical number, or some other positive aspect of the meeting with their children.”¹¹

“We must remember that reverence is not a somber, temporary behavior that we adopt on Sunday. True reverence involves happiness, as well as love, respect, gratitude, and godly fear. It is a virtue that should be part of our way of life. In fact, Latter-day Saints should be the most reverent people in all the earth.”¹²

Devotion to the Savior

In the late 1940s, Elder Spencer W. Kimball, an Apostle since 1943, suffered a series of heart attacks. During the convalescence that followed, he stayed with friends in New Mexico. A Church magazine article later recounted an incident that occurred while he was there:

“One morning during this recuperative period, Elder Kimball’s bed was discovered empty. Thinking that he had taken a morning stroll and would be back in time for breakfast, his attendants went about their duties. But when he hadn’t returned by 10:00 A.M., they began to

worry. A search began.

“He was finally discovered several miles away under a pine tree. His Bible lay next to him, opened to the last chapter of St. John. His eyes were closed, and when the search party came up to him he remained as still as when they first caught sight of him.

“Their frightened voices aroused him, however, and when he lifted his head they could see traces of tears on his cheeks. To their questions, he answered, ‘[Five] years ago today I was called to be an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I just wanted to spend the day with Him whose witness I am.’”¹³

As a special witness of Christ, President Kimball bore testimony as he taught of the Savior:

“Oh, I love the Lord Jesus Christ,” he said. “I hope that I can show to him and manifest my sincerity and devotion. I want to live close to him. I want to be like him, and I pray that the Lord will help all of us that we may so be as he said to his Nephite disciples, ‘Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be?’ and he answered his own question by saying, ‘Even as I am.’ (3 Nephi 27:27.)”¹⁴

“When we think of the great sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and the sufferings he endured for us, we would be ingrates if we did not appreciate it so far as our power made it possible. He suffered and died for us, yet if we do not repent, all his anguish and pain on our account are futile.”¹⁵

“The more we understand what really happened in the life of Jesus of Nazareth in Gethsemane and on Calvary, the better able we will be to understand the importance of sacrifice and selflessness in our lives.”¹⁶



Serving Others

Stranded in an airport because of bad weather, a young mother and her two-year-old daughter had been waiting in long lines for hours trying to get a flight home. The child was tired and fussy, but the mother, who was pregnant and at risk of miscarriage, did not pick her up. A doctor had advised the mother to avoid lifting the two-year-old unless absolutely necessary. The woman overheard disapproving comments from people around her as she used her foot to slide her crying daughter along in the line. Nobody offered to help. But then, the woman later recalled, “someone came towards us and with a kindly smile said, ‘Is there something I could do to help you?’ With a grateful sigh I accepted his offer. He lifted my sobbing little daughter from the cold floor and lovingly held her to him while he patted her gently on the back. He asked if she could chew a piece of gum. When she was settled down, he carried her with him and said something kindly to the others in the line ahead of me, about how I needed their help. They seemed to agree and then he went up to the ticket counter [at the front of the line] and made arrangements with the clerk for me to be put on a flight leaving shortly. He walked with us to a bench, where we chatted a moment, until he was assured that I would be fine. He went on his way. About a

week later I saw a picture of Apostle Spencer W. Kimball and recognized him as the stranger in the airport.”¹⁷

With his many examples of service to others demonstrating commitment to this principle, President Kimball taught:

“God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through

another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom. The people of the Church need each other’s strength, support, and leadership in a community of believers as an enclave of disciples. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read about how important it is to ‘. . . succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.’ (D&C 81:5.) So often, our acts of service consist of simple encouragement or of giving mundane help with mundane tasks, but what glorious consequences can flow from mundane acts and from small but deliberate deeds!”¹⁸

“Service to others deepens and sweetens this life while we are preparing to live in a better world. It is by serving that we learn how to serve. When we are engaged in the service of our fellowmen, not only do our deeds assist them, but we put our own problems in a fresher perspective. When we concern ourselves more with others, there is less time to be concerned with ourselves! In the midst of the miracle of serving, there is the promise of Jesus that by losing ourselves, we find ourselves! [See Matthew 10:39.]

“Not only do we ‘find’ ourselves in terms of acknowledging divine guidance in our lives, but the more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our souls. We become more significant individuals as we serve others. We become more substantive as we serve others—indeed, it is easier to ‘find’ ourselves because there is so much more of us to find!”¹⁹

Sharing the Gospel

At a hotel restaurant in Quito, Ecuador, Elder Spencer W. Kimball of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was sitting with a group that included four missionaries. After ordering bread and milk, Elder Kimball asked the waiter if he had children. The waiter replied that he had a son. Elder Kimball then said, “Bread and milk will make him healthy, but he will be even healthier if you will feed him the food these young men have to give.” The waiter appeared unsure what to make of this statement. Then Elder Kimball indicated that the young men he referred to were missionaries and that





Left: President Kimball received the Medal of the City of Jerusalem from Mayor Teddy Kollek in 1979. Below: President Kimball with Carole Koizumi in the Japan Sapporo Mission Home. Opposite page, top: Elder Spencer W. Kimball, then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (seated left), President George Albert Smith (center), and others with members of the Navajo tribal council. Opposite page, bottom: President Kimball (second from left) and his wife (second from right) at the Church's Deseret Ranch in Florida.

they taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. The waiter said he would be interested in listening to their teaching.²⁰

Truly a man of action when it came to missionary work, President Kimball said:

“I feel the Lord has placed, in a very natural way within our circles of friends and acquaintances, many persons who are ready to enter into his Church. We ask that you prayerfully identify those persons and then ask the Lord’s assistance in helping you introduce them to the gospel.”²¹

“There is a spiritual adventure in doing missionary work, in giving referrals, in accompanying the missionaries as they give the discussions. It is exciting and rewarding. The hours, the effort, the wondering, all are worth it when even one soul expresses repentance and faith and a desire to be baptized.”²²

“Brethren and sisters, I wonder if we are doing all we can. Are we complacent in our assignment to teach the gospel to others? Are we prepared to lengthen our stride? To enlarge our vision?”²³

Love and Spirituality in the Family

President Kimball was a loving parent. His son Edward said: “My father was always very affectionate. I knew he loved me.” Edward remembered an occasion when both he and his father were in attendance at a solemn assembly in the Salt Lake Temple: “There were thousands of men there. As the meeting ended, [my father] spotted me where I was singing in a chorus. On his way out, he came over, embraced and kissed me.”²⁴

In testimony borne from the depth of his heart, President Kimball taught:

“How long has it been since you took your children, whatever their size, in your arms and told them that you love them and are glad that they can be yours forever?”²⁵

“God is our Father. He loves us. He spends much energy trying to train us, and we should follow His example and love intensely our own children and rear them in righteousness.”²⁶

“A true Latter-day Saint home is a haven against the storms and struggles of life. Spirituality is born and nurtured by daily





Above: President and Sister Kimball. Below: President Kimball with Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (top photograph), and with Gordon B. Hinckley, then counselor in the First Presidency (bottom photograph). Right: The Kimbells with five grandchildren, Christmas 1974.

prayer, scripture study, home gospel discussions and related activities, home evenings, family councils, working and playing together, serving each other, and sharing the gospel with those

around us. Spirituality is also nurtured in our actions of patience, kindness, and forgiveness toward each other and in our applying gospel principles in the family circle. Home is where we become experts and scholars in gospel righteousness, learning and living gospel truths together.”²⁷

“All That I Must Do”

President Kimball’s life and teachings remind us of the need to put gospel knowledge into action, and we find a further reminder of this emphasis in a small but significant change made to the beloved Primary song “I Am a Child of God” (*Hymns*, no. 301). As originally written in 1957, the song ended with these words:

“Teach me all that I must know to live with him someday.” Sometime later, Elder Kimball, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, suggested that one word be changed in that final line. Now the song ends, “Teach me all that I must *do* to live with him someday.”²⁸

These lyrics are a beautifully succinct summary of President Kimball’s life and teachings. By word and by example, he taught the things we must do to live with our Father in Heaven someday. If we will



follow such a course of gospel living—of doing all that we must do—we have this prophetic promise from President Kimball: “The treasure house of happiness is unlocked to those who live the gospel of Jesus Christ in its purity and simplicity. . . . The assurance of supreme happiness, the certainty of a successful life here and of exaltation and eternal life hereafter, come to those who plan to live their lives in complete harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ—and then consistently follow the course they have set.”²⁹ ■

NOTES

1. Quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), xxxv.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 262.
3. “Seek Learning, Even by Study and Also by Faith,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1983, 6.
4. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 11–13; see also Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball* (1977), 46.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 53.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 56–57.
7. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 59–60.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 62.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 67.
10. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 155.
11. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 162.
12. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 156.
13. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 23.
14. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 31.
15. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 29.
16. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 81.
17. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 79–80.
18. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 82.
19. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 85–86.
20. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 258.
21. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 262.
22. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 259.
23. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 261.
24. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 203.
25. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 212.
26. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 212.
27. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 210.
28. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 1.
29. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 6–7.

