



By Elder
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Of the Seventy

Be Strong AND OF A Good Courage

“The head of the presidential guard has announced that we are going to have a big party because our performance was so great!” shouted one of the guards.

I should have been happy, but as soon as I heard the news, I started to pray. I knew that our celebration would become a drinking party. I was spiritually strong enough not to drink, but I did not want my fellow guards to have a hard time because of me.

Military duty is mandatory for all South Korean young men, so I joined the army right after I finished my full-time mission. I was assigned to the presidential guard. My fellow guardsmen knew that I would never drink any alcoholic beverage because I was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When the party was announced, they started to become nervous because they would be in trouble if I did not drink when our commanding officer gave the order to do so at the party.

There was a tradition that at celebrations the commander would stand before each guard, one at a time, and fill the guard’s glass with liquor. Then the guard would hold up the glass and say, “Thank you, sir!” and drink the liquor at once.

In military life, disobeying any order from a senior officer is insubordination and can cause big trouble not only for the person disobeying but also for the members of his corps. In the worst case, insubordination could even result in being sent to jail, and this made my fellow guards nervous.

The day of the party arrived, and we 10 guards sat around the table. Each had an empty glass in front of him. I was sitting in the third chair. Our commander entered and filled the first glass. The guard held up his glass and said, “Thank you, sir!” Then he drank.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL S. PARKER

Our commander moved to the second guard and did the same. Then it was my turn. I was ready to keep the Word of Wisdom, and I kept praying in my heart for the sake of my fellow guards. When our commanding officer filled my glass, with a loud voice I said, “Thank you, sir!” Then I was going to say I was sorry and could not drink.

At that moment, his secretary entered and said, “Sir, you have a phone call.” Our commander turned to him and said, “I’m busy.”

I was still holding the glass when the secretary added, “Sir, it’s the president.” Our commander replied, “Oh, OK,” and then he immediately left.

Suddenly the second guard switched his empty glass with mine and quickly drank the liquor. Soon afterward our commander returned, saw my empty glass, and said, “Oh, you finished already!” Then he moved to the fourth guard. Everyone took a deep breath and relaxed.

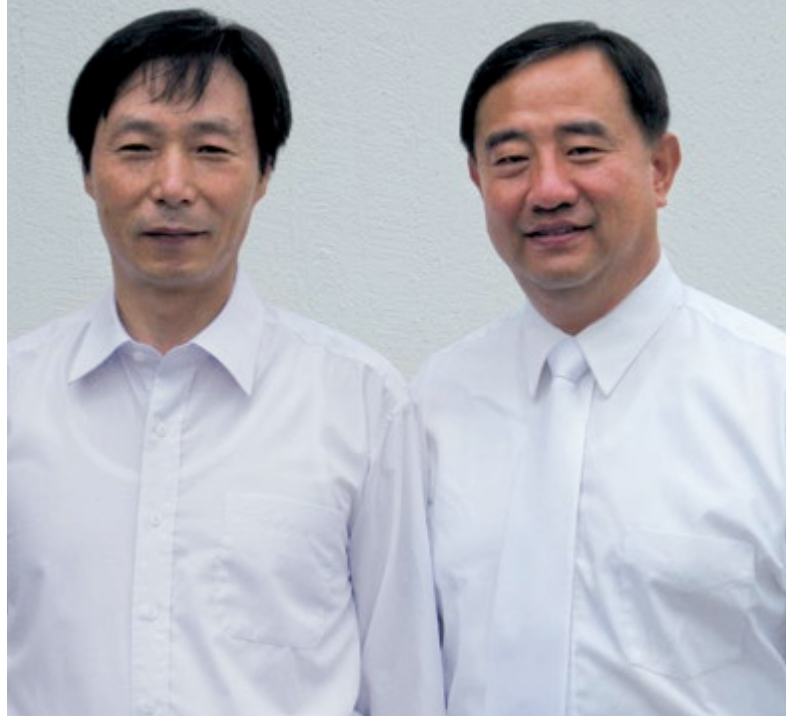
Thirty-five years later, long after I had finished my military duty, I received a phone call from a branch president of the Church in South Korea. He asked me if I remembered a Mr. Park from my military service.

“Of course I do,” I answered. I had served with Mr. Park, and he had respected my beliefs and had often protected me in difficult situations.

The branch president gave me Mr. Park’s phone number, and I called him right away. As I spoke with him, Mr. Park told me that during our time together as presidential guards, he had seen a light emanating from me and had felt that he should help me. Afterward, whenever he had a hard time, he said he thought about me.

Mr. Park told me that he had two sons he wanted to be like me. He had even taken his sons to church at a Latter-day Saint chapel. One of them had been baptized, though Mr. Park had not. That son, however, was now less active. Mr. Park wanted my help and advice.

I went to see Mr. Park a week later. We had a nice visit, and I soon began to meet with his son and encourage him to return to the Church. He humbly accepted my counsel, became active, and served a full-time mission.



Thirty-five years after Mr. Park saw me exercise my faith while we were serving together in the military, I baptized him a member of the Church.

Through his letters home while serving a mission, he motivated his father and helped prepare him for baptism. On a summer day the year following our first visit, I baptized Mr. Park a member of the Church.

What a great miracle! Their lives had been changed because of the faith exercised by a young man 35 years before.

Avoiding Snares and Traps

In the Old Testament, Joshua taught the children of Israel about the snares and traps they would encounter while living in a wicked world:

“Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you” (Joshua 23:13).

For me, anticipating the trouble I could have caused my fellow guardsmen was a trap that could have tempted me to drink alcohol. However, I chose the right and was ready to obey the Word of Wisdom regardless of the consequences.

I learned from my experiences in the military that the Lord will bless and protect His children if we are “strong and of a good courage” (Joshua 1:6). For example, He

protected the Israelites when they crossed the River Jordan. But first, the priests who carried the ark of the covenant showed their faith and courage by stepping into the overflowing river. Only then did the Lord “cut off . . . the waters” and make the river “stand upon an heap” (see Joshua 3:13–17).

To “be strong and of a good courage,” we need to “cleave unto the Lord” (Joshua 1:6; 23:8). We cleave unto the Lord as we hold personal and family scripture study, personal and family prayer, and family home evening. We also cleave unto Him as we partake of the sacrament, magnify our callings, worship in the temple often, obey the commandments, and repent when we fall short. These practices allow the Holy Ghost to abide with us and help us recognize and avoid snares and traps.

“Beginning when we are very young, those responsible for our care set forth guidelines and rules to ensure our safety,” President Thomas S. Monson has said. “Life would be simpler for all of us if we would obey such rules completely. . . .

“Obedience is a hallmark of prophets; it has provided strength and knowledge to them throughout the ages. It is essential for us to realize that we, as well, are entitled to this source of strength and knowledge. It is readily available to each of us today as we obey God’s commandments.”¹

Moving Forward in Faith

Shortly after President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was called as a General Authority, he went to Elder Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) for counsel. President Packer recalled:

“He listened very carefully to my problem and suggested that I see President David O. McKay [1873–1970]. President McKay counseled me as to the direction I should go. I was very willing to be obedient but saw no way possible for me to do as he counseled me to do.

“I returned to Elder Lee and told him that I saw no way to move in the direction I was counseled to go.



COURAGE TO STAND FOR PRINCIPLE

“We will all face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us—all of us—have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God’s approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully but also as the determination to live decently.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Be Strong and of a Good Courage,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 69.

He said, ‘The trouble with you is you want to see the end from the beginning.’ I replied that I would like to see at least a step or two ahead. Then came the lesson of a lifetime: ‘You must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness; then the light will appear and show the way before you.’”²

As children of our Heavenly Father, we sometimes want to understand in detail the things that we must accept or accomplish in faith. However, we don’t need to understand all things. We just need to step forward as the Lord has asked us to do and as the priests of the Israelites did in entering the overflowing River Jordan. Although we cannot see or understand all things, the Lord will help us walk on dry ground if we are “strong and of a good courage.”

We will have the power to stand strong as we live by His words—seeking and following His guidance in the scriptures and from His servants. Yes, we live “in enemy territory,”³ but the enemy cannot conquer the Lord, our Savior, who was sent to help us and to save us.

I know we can be true disciples of Jesus Christ by “standing obedient and strong on the doctrine of our God.”⁴ As we exercise the courage to do so, we stand in holy places, no matter where we are. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Obedience Brings Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 89, 90.
2. Boyd K. Packer, “The Edge of the Light,” *BYU Today*, Mar. 1991, 22–23; see also *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual* (1996), 84.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “Counsel to Youth,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 16.
4. Robert D. Hales, “Stand Strong in Holy Places,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 51.