



Safety in Counsel

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The Savior has always been the protector of those who would accept His protection. He has said more than once, “How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not” (3 Nephi 10:5; see also, for example, Matthew 23:37; D&C 29:2).

The Lord expressed the same lament in our own dispensation after describing the many ways in which He calls us to safety: “How oft have I called upon you by the mouth of my servants, and by the ministering of angels, and by mine own voice, and by the voice of thunders, and by the voice of lightnings, and by the voice of tempests, and by the voice of earthquakes, and great hailstorms, and by the voice of famines and pestilences of every kind, and by the great sound of a trump, and by the voice of judgment, and by the voice of mercy all the day long, and by the voice of glory and honor and the riches of eternal life, and would have saved you with an everlasting salvation, but ye would not!” (D&C 43:25).

There seems to be no end to the Savior’s desire to lead us to safety, and there is constancy in the way He shows us the path. He calls by more than one means so that it will

reach those willing to accept it. Those means always include sending the message by the mouths of His prophets whenever people have qualified to have the prophets of God among them. Those authorized servants are always charged with warning the people, telling them the way to safety.

A Prophet’s Warning

When tensions ran high in northern Missouri in the fall of 1838, the Prophet Joseph Smith called for all the Latter-day Saints to gather to Far West for protection. Many were on isolated farms or in scattered settlements. He specifically counseled Jacob Haun, founder of a small settlement called Haun’s Mill. A record of that time includes this: “Brother Joseph had sent word by Haun, who owned the mill, to inform the brethren who were living there to leave and come to Far West, but Mr. Haun did not deliver the message.”¹ Later, the Prophet Joseph recorded in his history: “Up to this day God had given me wisdom to save the people who took counsel. None had ever been killed who abode by my counsel.”² Then the Prophet recorded the sad truth that innocent lives could have been saved at Haun’s Mill had his counsel been received and followed.



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In our own time we have been warned with counsel on where to find safety from sin and from sorrow. One of the keys to recognizing those warnings is that they are repeated. For instance, more than once in general conferences, you have heard our prophet say that he would quote a preceding prophet and would therefore be a second witness and sometimes even a third. Each of us old enough to listen heard President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) give counsel on the importance of a mother in the home and then heard President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) quote him, and we have heard President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) quote them both.³

The Apostle Paul wrote, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1). One of the ways we may know that the warning is from the Lord is that the law of witnesses, authorized witnesses, has been invoked. When the words of prophets seem repetitive, that should rivet our attention and fill our hearts with gratitude to live in such a blessed time.

Looking for the path to safety in the counsel of prophets makes sense to those with strong faith. When a prophet speaks, those with little faith may think that they hear only a wise man giving good advice. Then if his counsel seems comfortable and reasonable, squaring with what they want to do, they take it. If it does not, they either consider it faulty advice or they see their circumstances as justifying their being an exception to the counsel. Those without faith may think that they hear only men seeking to exert influence for some selfish motive. They may mock and deride, as did a man named Korihor, with these words recorded in the Book of Mormon: “And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges” (Alma 30:27).

Korihor was arguing, as men and women have falsely argued from the beginning of time, that to take counsel from the servants of God is to surrender God-given rights

of independence. But the argument is false because it misrepresents reality. When we reject the counsel that comes from God, we do not choose to be independent of outside influence. We choose another influence. We reject the protection of a perfectly loving, all-powerful, all-knowing Father in Heaven, whose whole purpose, as that of His Beloved Son, is to give us eternal life, to give us all that He has, and to bring us home again in families to the arms of His love. In rejecting His counsel, we choose the influence of another power, whose purpose is to make us miserable and whose motive is hatred. We have moral agency as a gift of God. Rather than the right to choose to be free of influence, it is the inalienable right to submit ourselves to whichever of those powers we choose.

Standing on Safe Ground

Another fallacy is to believe that the choice to accept or not accept the counsel of prophets is no more than deciding whether to accept good advice and gain its benefits or to stay where we are. But the choice not to take prophetic counsel changes the very ground upon which we stand. That ground becomes more dangerous. The failure to take prophetic counsel lessens our power to take inspired counsel in the future. The best time to have decided to help Noah build the ark was the first time he asked. Each time he asked after that, each failure to respond would have lessened sensitivity to the Spirit. And so each time his request would have seemed more foolish, until the rain came. And then it was too late.

Every time in my life when I have chosen to delay following inspired counsel or decided that I was an exception, I came to know that I had put myself in harm’s way. Every time that I have listened to the counsel of prophets, felt it confirmed in prayer, and then followed it, I have found that I moved toward safety. Along the path, I have found that the way had been prepared for me and the rough places made smooth. God led me to safety along a path that was prepared with loving care, sometimes prepared long before.

The account at the beginning of the Book of Mormon is of a prophet of God, Lehi. He was also the leader of a



family. He was warned by God to take those he loved to safety. Lehi's experience is a type of what happens as God gives counsel through His servants. Of Lehi's family, only those who had faith and who themselves received confirming revelation saw both the danger and the way to safety. For those without faith, the move into the wilderness seemed not only foolish but dangerous. Like all prophets, Lehi, to his dying day, tried to show his family where safety would lie for them.

He knew that the Savior holds responsible those to whom He delegates priesthood keys. With those keys comes the power to give counsel that will show us the way to safety. Those with keys are responsible to warn even when their counsel might not be followed.

Keys are delegated down a line that passes from the prophet through those responsible for ever-smaller groups of members, closer and closer to families and to individuals. That is one of the ways by which the Lord makes a stake a place of safety. For instance, I have sat with my wife in a meeting of parents called by our bishop so that he could warn us of

spiritual dangers faced by our children. I heard more than the voice of my wise friend. I heard a servant of Jesus Christ, with keys, meeting his responsibility to warn and passing to us, the parents, the responsibility to act. When we honor the keys of that priesthood channel by listening and giving heed, we tie ourselves to a lifeline that will not fail us in any storm.

Our Heavenly Father loves us. He sent His Only Begotten Son to be our Savior. He knew that in mortality we would be in grave danger, the worst of it from the temptations of a terrible adversary. That is one of the reasons the Savior has provided priesthood keys, so that those with ears to hear and faith to obey could go to places of safety.

Having Listening Ears

Having listening ears requires humility. You remember the Lord's warning to Thomas B. Marsh. He was then the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The Lord knew that President Marsh and his Brethren of the Twelve would be tested. He gave counsel about taking counsel. The Lord said, "Be

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LEHI PREACHING IN JERUSALEM, BY DEL PARSON, © IRI

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thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers" (D&C 112:10).

The Lord added a warning that is applicable to any who follow a living prophet: "Exalt not yourselves; rebel not against my servant Joseph; for verily I say unto you, I am with him, and my hand shall be over him; and the keys which I have given unto him, and also to youward, shall not be taken from him till I come" (D&C 112:15).

God offers us counsel not just for our own safety but for the safety of His other children, whom we should love. There are few comforts so sweet as to know that we have been an instrument in the hands of God in leading someone else to safety. That blessing generally requires the faith to follow counsel when it is hard to do.

An example from Church history is that of Reddick Newton Allred. He was one of the rescue party sent out by President Brigham Young (1801–77) to bring in the Willie and Martin handcart companies. At the Sweetwater River near South Pass, Captain George Grant asked Reddick Allred to remain there with a few men and wagons and be ready to help

when the rescuers returned with the handcart pioneers.

The rescuers found the Willie company mired in the snow, freezing, starving, and dying. Some of the rescuers continued to search for the Martin company, while the others helped the Willie company make that heartrending pull up and over Rocky Ridge. Soon after they made camp, Reddick Allred and his men came to deliver essential assistance and supplies.

Allred then waited for Captain Grant to return with the Martin company. Week after week passed with no sign of them. As blizzards howled and the weather became life threatening, two of the men decided it was foolish to stay. They thought the Martin company had either wintered over somewhere or perished. They decided to return to the Salt Lake Valley and tried to persuade everyone else to do the same. Allred refused to budge. President Young had sent them out, and Captain Grant, Reddick Allred's priesthood leader, had told him to wait there.

Those who returned took several wagons, filled with needed supplies, and started back to the Salt Lake Valley. Even more tragic, they

turned back 77 wagons that were coming from the valley to help. Some of these wagons returned all the way to Big Mountain before messengers sent by President Young met them and turned them back around.

Finally, more than three weeks after Reddick Allred had assisted the Willie company, Captain Grant arrived with the Martin company. These pioneers were even more destitute and had suffered dozens of deaths. Captain Grant's rescue team was small and low on provisions—and still more than 200 miles (320 km) from the Salt Lake Valley. Once again, because Reddick Allred had stayed true to his assignment, even in the most trying circumstances, he was able to provide life-sustaining assistance and supplies.⁴

Reaching Out to Others

You will hear and read inspired counsel from prophets of God to reach out to new members of the Church. Those with the faith of Reddick Newton Allred will keep offering friendship even when it seems not to be needed or to have no effect. They will persist. When some new member reaches the point of spiritual exhaustion, members of faith will be there offering kind words and fellowship. They will then feel the same divine approval Brother Allred felt when he saw those handcart pioneers struggling toward him, knowing he could offer them safety because he had followed counsel when it was hard to do.

While the record does not prove it, I am confident that Brother Allred prayed while he waited. I am confident that his prayers were answered. He then knew that the counsel to stand fast was from God. We must pray to know that. I promise you such prayers of faith will be answered.

Sometimes we will receive counsel that we cannot understand or that seems not to apply to us, even after careful prayer and thought. Don't discard the counsel, but hold it close. If someone you trusted handed you what appeared to be nothing more than sand with the promise that it contained gold, you might wisely hold it in your hand awhile, shaking it gently. Every time I have done that with counsel from a prophet, after a time the gold flakes have begun to appear, and I have been grateful.

We are blessed to live in a time when the priesthood keys are on the earth. We are blessed to know where to look and how to listen for the voice that will fulfill the promise of the Lord that He will gather us to safety. I pray that we will have humble hearts, that we will listen, that we will pray, and that we will wait for the deliverance of the Lord that is sure to come as we are faithful. ■

NOTES

1. Philo Dibble, in "Early Scenes in Church History," *Four Faith Promoting Classics* (1968), 90.
2. *History of the Church*, 5:137.
3. See, for example, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (1982), 327; "To the Fathers in Israel," *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 49; "Women of the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 69.
4. See Rebecca Bartholomew and Leonard J. Arrington, *Rescue of the 1856 Handcart Companies* (1992), 29, 33–34.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Read the account of Reddick Allred's faithfulness. Ask family members what they might have done in that situation. Ask, How does following the prophet keep us safe? How might our own obedience affect the safety of others around us?
2. Ask the family how they can respond to a challenge on which the prophets have given counsel, such as dressing modestly or avoiding questionable material in the media. *For the Strength of Youth* (item no. 36550) offers counsel on many of today's challenges.
3. Read together the second paragraph under the heading "A Prophet's Warning." Ask family members to recall the most recent general conference. Invite them to share gospel principles they remember hearing more than one speaker mention. Bear testimony that we are blessed to live in a time when the Lord provides multiple witnesses for His words.