




**By Elder
Quentin L. Cook**
Of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) often related an account that occurred while he was a missionary serving in Scotland. He was feeling homesick after being in the mission for just a short time and spent a few hours sightseeing at nearby Stirling Castle. When he and his companion returned from visiting the castle, they passed a building where the stone above the door had a carved inscription of a quotation, usually attributed to Shakespeare, that read, “What-E'er Thou Art, Act Well Thy Part.”

Recalling this experience, President McKay explained: “I said to myself, or the Spirit within me, ‘You are a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. More than





Be righteous. Build a family. Find an appropriate way to provide. Serve as called. Prepare to meet God.

that, you are here as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. You accepted the responsibility as a representative of the Church.’ Then I thought [about] what we had done that forenoon. We had been sightseeing; we had gained historical instruction and information, it is true, and I was thrilled with it. . . . However, that was not missionary work. . . . I accepted the message given to me on that stone, and from that moment we tried to do our part as missionaries in Scotland.”¹

This message was so important and had such an impact on him that President McKay used it as inspiration for the rest of his life. He determined that whatever responsibility he had, he would do his very best.

Avoid Acting out of Character

In view of the enormous potential for good that you of the Church’s younger generation possess, what are my concerns for your future? What counsel can I give you? First, you will face great pressure to act out of character—even to wear a mask—and become someone who doesn’t really reflect who you are or who you want to be.

In early Church history, the Prophet Joseph, Emma, and their 11-month-old twins, Joseph and Julia, were in Hiram, Ohio, at the John and Alice Johnson home. Both of the children were suffering from measles. Joseph and his little son were sleeping on a trundle bed near the front door.

During the night a group of men with black-painted faces burst through the door and dragged the Prophet outside, where they beat him and threw tar on him and Sidney Rigdon.

The most tragic part of this mobbing was that little Joseph was exposed to the night

PHOTOGRAPH OF ELDER QUENTIN L. COOK BY CRAIG DIMOND; PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY SCOTT DAVIS

air and caught a severe cold when his father was dragged away. As a result, he died a few days later.²

Those who participated in the Martyrdom of the Prophet and his brother Hyrum also painted their faces to hide their true identities.³

In our day, when being anonymous is easier than ever, there are important principles involved in not wearing a mask and in being “true to the faith . . . for which martyrs have perished.”⁴



Elder L. Tom Perry acted well his part while stationed in Japan.

One of your greatest protections against making bad choices is not to put on any mask of anonymity. If you ever find yourself wanting to do so, please know it is a serious sign of danger and one of the adversary’s tools to get you to do something you should not do.

It is common today to hide one’s identity when writing hateful, vitriolic, bigoted communications anonymously online. Some refer to it as *flaming*.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

“Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God” (1 Corinthians 15:33–34).

It is clear that evil communications are not just a matter of bad manners. If practiced by Latter-day Saints, they can adversely affect those who do not have knowledge of God or a testimony of the Savior.

Any use of the Internet to bully, destroy a reputation, or place a person in a bad light is reprehensible. What we are seeing in society is that when people wear the mask of anonymity, they are more likely to engage in this kind of conduct, which is so destructive of civil discourse. It also violates the basic principles the Savior taught.

The Savior explained that He had not come to condemn the world but to save the world. He then described what condemnation means:

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

“But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19–21; see also verses 17–18).

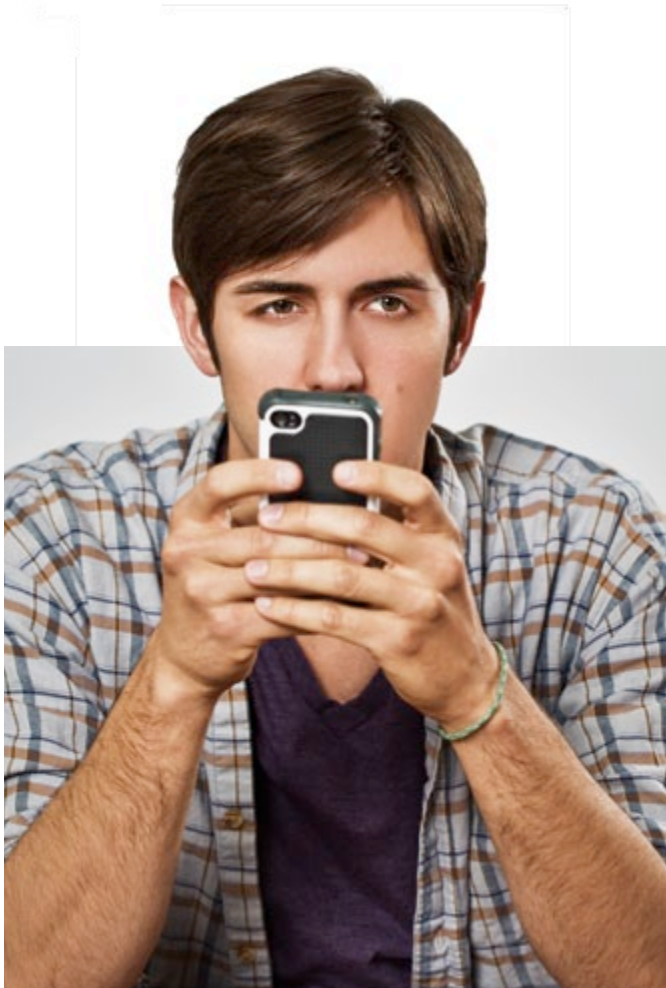
The righteous need not wear masks to hide their identity.

Act in Accordance with Your True Beliefs

You act in accordance with your true beliefs by spending your time on those things that will build and develop your character and help you become more Christlike. I hope none of you see life as primarily fun and games but rather as a time “to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32).

A wonderful example of acting your part and using time appropriately comes from the life of Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, when, as a marine, he was part of the occupying U.S. force in Japan at the end of World War II. Elder Perry shared this account when he recorded his special witness of the Savior.

“I was among the first wave of Marines to go ashore in Japan following the signing of the peace treaty following World War II. As we entered the devastated city of Nagasaki, it was one of the saddest experiences of my life. A large part of the city had been totally destroyed. Some



One of your greatest protections against making bad choices is not to put on any mask of anonymity.

of the dead had not yet been buried. As occupation troops, we set up headquarters and went to work.

“The situation was very bleak, and a few of us wanted to give more. We went to our division chaplain and requested permission to help rebuild the Christian churches. Because of government restrictions during the war, these churches had almost ceased to function. Their few buildings were badly damaged. A group of us volunteered to repair and replaster these chapels during our off-duty time so that they would be available for the holding of Christian services again.

“... We found the ministers who had been unable to serve during the war years and encouraged them to return to their pulpits. We had a tremendous experience with these people as they again experienced the freedom to practice their Christian beliefs.

“An event occurred as we were leaving Nagasaki to return home that I will always remember. As we were boarding the train that would take us to our ships to return home, we were teased by a lot of the other marines. They had their girlfriends with them and [were] saying good-bye to them. They laughed at us and indicated that we had missed the fun of being in Japan. We had just wasted our time laboring and plastering walls.

“Just as they were at the height of their teasing, up over a little rise near the train station came about 200 of these great Japanese Christians from the churches we had repaired, singing ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers.’ They came down and showered us with gifts. Then they all lined up along the railroad track. And as the train started down the tracks, we reached out and just touched their fingers as we left. We couldn’t speak; our emotions were too strong. But we were grateful that we could help in some small way in reestablishing Christianity in a nation after the war.”⁵

Please ponder and be proactive in choosing how you use your time. As you can see from Elder Perry’s example, I am not talking about wearing your religion on your sleeve or being superficially faithful. That can be embarrassing to you and the Church. I am talking about you becoming what you ought to be.

Set Appropriate Goals

My third counsel relates to some of the goals you should consider. At approximately the same time that Elder Perry was in Japan with the marines, President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, served in Japan with the air force at the end of World War II.

In 2004, I accompanied President Packer and others to Japan. He had an opportunity to retrace some of his steps and reflect on some of the experiences and decisions he



President Boyd K. Packer has been blessed for setting righteous goals.

made at that time. With his permission, I share some of his thoughts and feelings.

President Packer described experiences that occurred on an island off the coast of Okinawa. He considers this as his mount in the wilderness. His personal preparation and meeting with other members had deepened his belief in gospel teachings. What he yet lacked was confirmation—sure knowledge of that which he had already come to feel was true.

President Packer's biographer captures what happened: "Counter to the peace of confirmation he sought, he came face to face with the hell of war against the innocent. Seeking solitude and time to think, he climbed, one day,

to a rise above the ocean. There he found the gutted remains of a peasant cottage, its neglected sweet potato field nearby. And lying amid the dying plants he saw the corpses of a slaughtered mother and her two children. The sight filled him with a deep sadness mingled with the feelings of love for his own family and for all families."⁶

He subsequently went inside a makeshift bunker, where he contemplated, pondered, and prayed. President Packer, in looking back on this event, described what I would call a confirming spiritual experience. He felt inspired as to what he should do with his life. He, of course, had no idea that he would be called to the high and holy calling he now holds. His vision was that he wanted to be a teacher, emphasizing the teachings of the Savior. He made up his mind that he would live a righteous life.

It came to him in a rather profound way that he would have to find a righteous wife and that together they would raise a large family. This young soldier recognized that his career choice would provide modest compensation and that his sweet companion would need to share the same priorities and be willing to live without some material things. Sister Donna Packer was, and is, for President Packer, the perfect companion. They never had enough excess money, but they did not feel deprived in any way. They raised 10 children, and they sacrificed. They now have 60 grandchildren and more than 80 great-grandchildren.

I share this true account because too often our goals are based on what the world values. The essential elements are really quite simple for members who have received the saving ordinances: Be righteous. Build a family. Find an appropriate way to provide. Serve as called. Prepare to meet God.

The Savior taught that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Build Your Country and Community

In addition to personal attributes, qualities, and decisions, if you are to be the generation you need to be, you will build your country and the community where you live. Your generation will need to protect righteousness



The Judeo-Christian heritage we have inherited is not only precious but also essential to our Father in Heaven's plan. We need to preserve it for future generations.

and religious freedom. The Judeo-Christian heritage we have inherited is not only precious but also essential to our Father in Heaven's plan. We need to preserve it for future generations. We need to join with good people, including those of all faiths—especially those who feel accountable to God for their conduct. These are people who would understand the counsel that “what-e'er thou art, act well thy part.” The successful enhancement of Judeo-Christian values and religious freedom will mark your generation as the great generation it needs to be.

With the challenges that exist in the world today, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are particularly concerned that you participate appropriately in the political process in the country where you live. The Church is neutral in political contests and does not support candidates or parties. We do expect, however, that our members will be fully engaged in supporting the candidates and parties of their choice based on principles that will protect good government. Our doctrine is clear: those who are good, “honest . . . and wise . . . should be sought for diligently” (D&C 98:10).

We have great confidence in you. The leadership of the Church honestly believes that you can build the kingdom like no previous generation. You have not only our love and confidence but also our prayers and blessings. We know that the success of your generation is essential to the continued establishment of the Church and the growth of the kingdom. We pray that you will act well your part as you avoid wearing a mask, act in accordance with your true identity, set appropriate goals, and build your country and community. ■

From a Church Educational System fireside for young adults delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on March 4, 2012. For the full text in English, visit lds.org/broadcasts/archive/ces-devotionals/2012/01?lang=eng.

NOTES

1. David O. McKay, in Francis M. Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* (1986), 45.
2. See Mark L. Staker, “Remembering Hiram, Ohio,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2002, 32, 35.
3. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 24.
4. “True to the Faith,” *Hymns*, no. 254.
5. L. Tom Perry, in “Joy—for Us and Others—Comes by Following the Savior,” <http://lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/what-are-prophets-testimonies?lang=eng>.
6. Lucile C. Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (1995), 58–59.