

In His Steps

EZRA TAFT BENSON

My beloved associates—members and friends of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

Sister Benson and I are honored to be in your midst tonight. I pray that the spirit of the Lord will be with us and that I might be an instrument in the Lord's hands to bless and edify you.

For nearly six thousand years, God has held you in reserve to make your appearance in the final days before the Second Coming of the Lord. Every previous gospel dispensation has drifted into apostasy, but ours will not. True, there will be some individuals who will fall away; but the kingdom of God will remain intact to welcome the return of its head—even Jesus Christ. While our generation will be comparable in wickedness to the days of Noah, when the Lord cleansed the earth by flood, there is a major difference this time. It is that God has saved for the final inning some of his strongest children, who will help bear off the Kingdom triumphantly. And that is where you come in, for you are the generation that must be prepared to meet your God.

All through the ages the prophets have looked down through the corridors of time to our day. Billions of the deceased and those yet to be born have their eyes on us. Make no mistake

about it—you are a marked generation. There has never been more expected of the faithful in such a short period of time as there is of us. Never before on the face of this earth have the forces of evil and the forces of good been as well organized. Now is the great day of the devil's power, with the greatest mass murderers of all time living among us. But now is also the great day of the Lord's power, with the greatest number ever of priesthood holders on the earth. And the showdown is fast approaching.

Each day the forces of evil and the forces of good pick up new recruits. Each day we personally make many decisions that show where our support will go. The final outcome is certain—the forces of righteousness will finally win. What remains to be seen is where each of us personally, now and in the future, will stand in this fight—and how tall we will stand. Will we be true to our last-days, foreordained mission?

Ezra Taft Benson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 4 March 1979.

Great battles can make great heroes, but heroes will make great battle. You will never have a better opportunity to be a greater hero in a more crucial battle than in the battle you will face today and in the immediate future. Be warned that some of the greatest battles you will face will be fought within the silent chambers of your own soul. David's battles in the field against the foe were not as critical as David's battles in the palace against a lustful eye. We will each find our own battlefield. The tactics that the enemy will use against us will vary from time to time; he will feel after our weak spots. We must be alert to the devil's devious designs, to the subtle sins and clever compromises as well as the obvious offenses.

Fortunately for us, we have the privilege of fighting under the Lord's banner. While the devil hates us and seeks to make all men miserable like unto himself (see 2 Nephi 2:27), the Lord instead loves us and seeks for us the fullness of joy which He possesses.

Christ lived on the earth and was subject to all manner of temptation, but He won every battle. He is the most successful warrior that ever walked the earth, and He wants to help us win every battle, be it personal or public. When we fall short, His atonement will cover for us on certain conditions.

Jesus knows that His kingdom will triumph, and He wants you to triumph with it, too. He knows in advance every strategy the enemy will use against you and the Kingdom. He knows your weaknesses and He knows your strengths. By revelation, personal to you, you may discover some of these strengths and weaknesses through a careful and prayerful study of your patriarchal blessing. Through proper prayer you can ask him to reveal to you your weaknesses so that you can amend your life. In the Book of Mormon in Ether, chapter 12, verse 27, the Lord says the following:

If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. . . . If they humble themselves before me,

and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

God can reveal to you your talents and your strengths so that you will know upon what you can build. Be assured that in all your righteous endeavors you can say, as Paul said in Philippians, chapter 4, verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." And also be assured, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 13, that no temptation will befall you but what is common to man and that God will, with each temptation, provide a way to escape.

We follow a perfect leader—not just one who tells us to do what he thinks we should do, but the only one who can say that we should be as He is in everything. In the Book of Mormon, in 3 Nephi, chapter 27, verse 27, the Lord asked the question, "What manner of men ought ye to be?" And then He answered by saying, "Verily I say unto you, even as I am."

What manner of man was Jesus when He was your age—when He was growing into manhood, when He was personally preparing Himself during those thirty years for His three-year public ministry? Turning to the book of Luke in the New Testament, chapter 2, verse 52, we read these words: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

Here, then, are the four great areas where Jesus grew in personal preparation. Your first thirty years cover the time in your life when most of you will be serving missions, getting your education, dating, getting married, establishing homes, and finding and beginning a career. If we, then, are to follow in His footsteps, we should increase in those same four areas in which He increased. In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 93, verse 13, it states that Jesus "received not of the fullness at first, but continued from grace to grace [not from sin to grace, but from grace to grace] until he

received a fullness." We too should move "from grace to grace" "in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." Let us consider these four areas.

"Jesus Increased in Wisdom"

Wisdom could be considered the proper application of true knowledge. Not all knowledge has the same worth, nor are all truths equally valuable. The truths upon which our eternal salvation rests are the most crucial truths that we must learn. No man is truly educated unless he knows where he came from, why he is here, and where he can expect to go in the next life; unless he can adequately answer the question which Jesus posed: "What think ye of Christ?" The world cannot teach us these things as the Kingdom can. Therefore, the most essential knowledge for you to obtain is the saving knowledge within the gospel and the knowledge of its author—even Jesus Christ. In fact, that eternal life for which we should all be striving—which is the greatest gift that God can give and which is God's type of life, the life of the great Eternal One—that eternal life comes from knowing our Father in heaven and His Son, our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. As the scripture in John, chapter 17, verse 3, reads, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." We cannot know about God and Jesus without studying about them and then doing their will. This in turn will lead to additional revealed knowledge which, if obeyed, will eventually lead us to further truths. If we keep following this pattern, we will receive further light and joy that will eventually lead us into God's presence where we, with Him, will have a fullness.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 88, verse 118, we are admonished to "seek . . . out of the best books words of wisdom." Surely these books must first include the scriptures. Next, and alongside them, must be the words of the Presidents of the Church. In the Doctrine

and Covenants, section 21, verse 5, the Lord said of the President of the Church, "His word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth." These books make up what has been referred to as "the Lord's library"—namely the standard works and the various volumes that contain the words of the different Presidents of the Church. Of the latter volumes, that which would be of greatest importance to you would be the words of the current President of the Church, for his words are directed to our day and our needs.

The Lord has also given a special mantle to the apostles, and the significance of their words is pointed out in section 1, verse 14—the Lord's preface to the Doctrine and Covenants—where he says that those who will not "give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles shall be cut off from among the people." The writing of other General Authorities should be given consideration also.

While the gospel includes the more crucial saving truths contained within theology, it also includes truth in other branches of learning. The Lord encouraged the early missionaries in the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 79, to be instructed more perfectly in

things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms.

Today, with the abundance of books available, it is the mark of a truly educated man to know what not to read. "Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Feed only on the best. As John Wesley's mother counseled him: "Avoid whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, takes off

your relish for spiritual things, . . . increases the authority of the body over the mind.”

The fact that a book is old does not necessarily make it of value. The fact that an author wrote one good work does not necessarily mean that all his books are worthy of your time. Do not make your mind a dumping ground for other people’s garbage. It is harder to purge the mind of rotten reading than to purge the body of rotten food, and it is more damaging to the soul.

Most novels and pulp magazines are filled with a lot of rubbish, and most TV and a lot of radio programs are a waste of time, if not corruptors of morals or distorters of truth. The less newspapers have to say of value and of truth, the more pages they seem to take to say it. Usually a few minutes is more than sufficient to read a paper. One must select wisely a source of news; otherwise it would be better to be uninformed than misinformed. The subscribers of some mass magazines and newspapers are ever reading but seldom able to come to a knowledge of the truth in the areas of most vital concern.

As we approach the showdown, it will be increasingly valuable to have vocational skills—to be able to use our hands. The most essential temporal skills and knowledge are to be able to provide food, clothing, and shelter. Increasingly the Lord, through His servants, is trying to get us closer to the soil by raising our own produce.

Let us summarize. The most vital knowledge you can learn is the saving truths of the gospel—the truths that will make the difference in your eternal welfare. The most vital words that you can read are those of the Presidents of the Church—particularly the living prophet—and those of the apostles and prophets. God encourages learning in many areas, and vocational skills will have increasing importance. There is much reading material that is available that is either time-wasting or corrupting. The best yardstick to use in discerning the worth of true knowledge and

learning is to go first and foremost to the words of the Lord’s prophets.

“Jesus Increased in . . . Stature”

There is no question that the health of the body affects the spirit, or the Lord would never have revealed the Word of Wisdom. God has never given any temporal commandments—that which affects our stature affects our soul. There are at least four basic areas which make the difference in your health—in your growing in stature.

First: righteousness. Sin debilitates; it affects not only the soul but the body. The scriptures are replete with examples of the physical power that can attend the righteous. On the other hand, unrepented sin can diffuse energy and lead to both mental and physical sickness. Disease, fevers, and unexpected deaths are some of the things that have been directly related to disobedience. Jesus healed a man of a physical malady and then told him in John, chapter 5, verse 14, to “sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” Galahad said that his strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure.

Second: food. To a great extent we are physically what we eat. Most of us are acquainted with some of the prohibitions, such as no tea, coffee, tobacco, or alcohol. What need additional emphasis are the positive aspects—the need for vegetables, fruits, and grains, particularly wheat. In most cases, the closer these can be, when eaten, to their natural state—without overrefinement and processing—the healthier we will be. To a significant degree, we are an overfed and undernourished nation digging an early grave with our teeth, and lacking the energy that could be ours because we overindulge in junk foods. I am grateful to know that on this campus you can get apples from vending machines, that you have in your student center a fine salad bar, and that you produce an excellent loaf of natural whole-grain bread. Keep it up and keep progressing in that

direction. We need a generation of young people who, as Daniel, eat in a more healthy manner than to fare on the “king’s meat”—and whose countenances show it (see Daniel 1).

Third: exercise. The body needs the toning up that comes from exercise. Walking in the fresh air can be exhilarating and refreshing. Properly directed running can have some beneficial effects. Simple situps or sporting activity can be helpful.

Fourth: sleep. Adequate early rest is best. In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 88, verse 124, the Lord commands: “Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.” There are too many enticements to late evening activities. Not only can this weary the body, but a wearied body may be more susceptible to improper activities in the darkness and lateness of the night. Early to bed and early to rise is still good counsel, and a brief nap during the day can be recuperative.

“Jesus Increased . . . in Favor with God”

What are some of the things that would increase our favor with God? There are many, of course. The book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price, chapter 3, verse 25, states that one of the purposes of life is to be proved to see if we “will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us].” In short, we are to learn the will of the Lord and do it. We are to follow the model of Jesus Christ and be like Him. The essential question of life should be the same one that Paul asked in the book of Acts, chapter 9, verse 6, when he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me do?” God’s will for you can be determined from three sources: (1) the scriptures—particularly the Book of Mormon, of which the Prophet Joseph said, “a man would get nearer to god by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 4:461)—(2) inspired words from the Lord’s anointed—particularly

the presidents of the Church and especially the living one, along with the words of the apostles and prophets (local Church leaders are also entitled to give inspired direction for those over whom they preside)—and (3) the spirit of the Lord.

The world has the light of Christ to help guide it, but we are entitled to that great gift, the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the Holy Ghost to be fully operative we have to keep our channels clear of sin. The clearer our channels, the easier it is to receive God’s message to us; and the more of His messages we receive and put into action, the greater will be our joy. If our channels are not clear of sin, then we may think we have gotten inspiration on a matter when it is really “sin-spiration”—that is, promptings from the devil.

To the end of clearing our channels and keeping them clear, I would admonish all of you to read President Kimball’s book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*; and the sooner you can read it the greater blessing it will be for you. Other practices that would increase our favor with God would include daily scripture study, along with personal prayers morning, midday, and night. We also need to render service to our Father’s children through the family, the Church, and the country.

God has a timetable—a sequence or season for good things. A mission, when its time has arrived, takes priority over marriage and education. And when one is mature enough and has found the right company, then marriage should not be delayed for education. While all three—mission, marriage, and education—are essential, there is a proper order to follow.

We need more men and women of Christ who will always remember Him, who will keep His commandments which He has given them. The greatest yardstick of success is to see how much your daily walk can be like Christ’s—how closely you can walk each moment in His steps.

“Jesus Increased . . . in Favor with . . . Man”

The greatest roles you can take to bless your fellowmen are to be strong missionaries and to be strong patriarchs and matriarchs—to raise a righteous posterity who will be part of the solutions to the world’s problems and not part of the problems. You have probably heard that the greatest Church work you can perform will be within the walls of your own home. It is also true that no nation is stronger than its homes. For a man, there is no calling as high as that of a righteous patriarch, married in the house of the Lord, presiding over his children. Even the very Elohim has us address Him as “our Father who art in heaven.” For a woman there is no calling as high as that of a righteous mother, married in the House of the Lord, rearing a posterity.

Someone has said that happy is the man who has found his worship, his wife, and his work, and loves all three. Do you realize that during your comparatively young years, you will probably be making three of the most momentous decisions of your life? You will be deciding on the role of the Church or worship in your life, selecting a wife or husband, and—particularly for you men—choosing your life’s work.

All of you can know, if you do not know already, that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church. All you need to do to gain this knowledge is to carefully read the Book of Mormon and then do what is stated in Moroni, chapter 10, verse 4:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

If the Book of Mormon is true—which I testify that it is—then Joseph Smith was a prophet. If

Joseph Smith was a prophet, then the church he established, as an instrument in God’s hands, is true—even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If the Church is true, then there stands at the head of the Church today a prophet of God.

In addition to finding your worship, you will need to find your wife or husband. This will require careful and prayerful consideration. It would be well to mingle with many good people to have a better understanding of others. If you desire a fine companion, then you should be on a high and wholesome level. One of the best yardsticks for knowing whether a certain person may be best for you is to ask yourself what kind of an influence this person has on you. In their presence do you wish you were better than you are—do you think some of your noblest thoughts—are you encouraged to goodly deeds? If this is so, then that person could be worthy of greater consideration. But if being in their company makes you tend in the opposite direction, you had best leave them.

Young women, you are not required to lower your standards to get a husband. Keep yourselves attractive, maintain high standards, place yourselves in a position to meet worthy men, and be engaged in constructive work. Then, if you are married later than sooner—if you even have to wait until the next life to get a choice man—God will make up the difference to you. Time is numbered only to man. God has your eternal perspective in mind.

And now, so far as your work is concerned: It is divinely ordained what a woman should do, but a man must seek out his work. The divine work of women involves companionship, home-making, and motherhood. It is well if skills in these three areas can first be learned in the parents’ home and then be supplemented at school if the need or desire presents itself. The first priority for a woman is to prepare herself for her divine and eternal mission, whether she is married soon or late. It is folly to neglect that preparation for education in unrelated fields

just to prepare temporarily to earn money. Women, when you are married it is the husband's role to provide, not yours. Do not sacrifice your preparation for an eternally ordained mission for the temporary expediency of money-making skills that you may or may not use. I do not think it needs to be an "either/or" choice; but if it does, then choose the divine mission preparation. Some women are well prepared for their mission and want to acquire additional skills in other areas; and that is fine, if they so desire. It is simply a case of putting first things first. To paraphrase the Lord, when He was speaking of those who obeyed the lesser law and neglected the weightier matters: these ye might do, but do not leave the other undone (see Matthew 23:23). Some women acquire money-making skills in areas closely related to their divine missions, and the advantages of that approach are plain.

Brethren, it is your role to be the leader in the home. While the wife may be considered the heart of the home, you are the head. You are the provider, and it takes the edge off your manliness when you have the mother of your children also be a provider. What will you choose for a career? What will your work be? It has been said that no one is born into this world whose work is not born with him or her. We bring from our preexistent state various talents and abilities. We strive to find the right wife, and it is our responsibility to strive to find where we can make a contribution to our fellowman—an area where we have some interest and abilities and where we can, at the same time, provide for our own.

I am glad Beethoven found his way into music, Rembrandt into art, Michelangelo into sculpturing, and President David O. McKay

into teaching. To find your proper niche and do well at it can bless you, yours, and your fellowmen. If you need help finding your career, it is available: (1) Ponder and pray about it; (2) study closely your patriarchal blessing; (3) consider what you do well; (4) take some vocational and interest tests; and (5) get acquainted with various professions to see what is available.

I understand that you have a fine career counseling center here at BYU with a diversified program that offers help through classes, testing, seminars, a library, and so on. I hope that if you feel the need you will take advantage of these opportunities. How true it is—happy is the man who has found his worship, his wife, and his work, and loves them all.

The world is gradually beating a path to our door to see how we do things. Stick by your righteous guns and you will bless your fellowman. Be right, and then be easy to live with, if possible—but in that order.

My beloved brothers and sisters, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man," and so can you. You are a royal generation. The heavenly grandstands are cheering you on. We are fast coming to the close of this game. The opposition is real and is scoring. But we have scored, we are scoring, and we will score in the future. The Lord is our coach and manager. His team will win, and we can be a valiant part of it if we so desire. Rise up, O youth of Zion! You hardly realize the great divine potential that lies within you. May you all follow your leader, Jesus Christ, and increase mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially, I pray for all of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen