

## *Prophetic Priorities and Dedicated Disciples*

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I wish to begin today by expressing to you my witness that God is our Eternal Father, that He lives, that we are His children, and that He loves us. His great love was manifest when He sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth to atone for our sins and to teach and exemplify for each of us the things we should do in order to qualify and be worthy to return back into God's presence. I bear you my testimony that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is our Savior and He is our Redeemer. He lives and He loves us and He knows each of us individually by our names. I love Him, and I know each of you do too. I also wish to bear my testimony that President Thomas S. Monson is God's prophet on the earth today. I know this through my personal experience in incorporating his counsel into my life and also because of the powerful witness that comes into my heart from the Holy Ghost each time I am in his presence or hear him speak. Today I express my commitment to him and my resolve and desire to assist him in his heavy responsibilities. I desire to serve as he does, with all my heart, might, mind, and strength.

Today we stand at the beginning of a brand-new year—part of an epic journey here in mortality. As we approach this clean, fresh page of our lives, unmarred and unspoiled, we

have before us a new opportunity to rally the best within us. Everything that has gone before has prepared you for this moment in time. And I might hasten to testify to you that this is indeed a magnificent moment. It is yours. And set before you is the opportunity of a lifetime to become a force for good in the world. As a modern-day prophet of God foretold, "Make no mistake about it—this is a marked generation." He further said:

*There has never been more expected of the faithful in such a short period of time than there is of us. . . .*

*Each day the forces of evil and the forces of good enlist new recruits. Each day we personally make many decisions showing the cause we support. The final outcome is certain—the forces of righteousness will win. But what remains to be seen is **where** each of us personally, now and in the future, will stand in this battle—and **how tall** we will stand. Will we be true to our last days and fulfill our foreordained missions?<sup>1</sup>*

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*Elaine S. Dalton was the Young Women general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 15 January 2013.*

When the gospel was restored to the earth through the instrumentality of a young teenage boy named Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery recorded these words: “These were days never to be forgotten.”<sup>2</sup> He then went on to describe—in some of the most beautiful language I have ever read—his experiences with the Prophet Joseph Smith as they translated the sacred records that are the Book of Mormon. I feel a deep sense of gratitude today for those young men—for their faithfulness, for their obedience and commitment, and for the purity of their lives. They were exceptional! And because they went forward undaunted to do what the Lord had revealed and commanded them to do in answer to their sincere prayers and questions, today we have another testament of Jesus Christ: the Book of Mormon—a true and precious record that was written for me and for you to help us become the leaders we have been reserved and prepared to become in these latter days. These are your days, and I am confident that you will also make them “days never to be forgotten.”

To those who listen carefully, the Lord regularly prompts us to act. Never before has there been more opportunity than now. I believe the Lord is calling to each of us to become dedicated disciples. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said that in order to become a dedicated disciple, “it is not enough merely to speak of Jesus Christ or proclaim that we are His disciples. It is not enough to surround ourselves with symbols of our religion. Discipleship is not a spectator sport.”<sup>3</sup>

The movie *Chariots of Fire* is the moving story of Eric Liddell, the gold medal winner in the 400-meter track event in the 1924 Paris Olympics. Liddell was not only a gifted athlete who held to his convictions, but he lived out his faith to the very end as a Christian missionary in China. He was such an incredible athlete that his goal was to get to the 1924 Olympics in France and run in his

best race—the 100-meter race. He trained hard to get in top shape, and his country of Scotland was sure that he would win a gold medal for them. There was just one problem. The heat to decide who would make the Olympics was on a Sunday, and Liddell would not run on Sunday. Due to this conflict he chose not to run in the 100-meter race. Instead he qualified for the 200- and 400-meter races because those heats were not held on Sunday, but no one expected him to come close to winning. Just prior to the start of the 400-meter race, he was given a piece of paper on which was written words from 1 Samuel 2:30: “Them that honour me, I will honour.” Liddell ran with that piece of paper in his hand and held onto this promise tightly. And, to everyone’s surprise, he won the gold medal and broke a world record.<sup>4</sup> Listen to what his character in the film *Chariots of Fire* said after winning a previous race:

*You came to see a race today. To see someone win. It happened to be me. But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. It’s hard. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape—especially if you’ve got a bet on it. But how long does that last? You go home. Maybe your dinner’s burnt. Maybe you haven’t got a job. So who am I to say, “Believe, have faith,” in the face of life’s realities? I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way. And where does the power come from to see the race to its end? From within.*<sup>5</sup>

We must do more than just watch the race: we must take part in it. Believe! Have faith! Discipleship is not a spectator sport. “And where does the power come from to see the race to its end? From within.” I think the Lord is saying, “Let’s move forward. Let’s build the kingdom. Hasten my work.” Those who have

been prepared and reserved for this moment in time are here on the earth. You are here! The Lord knows what lies ahead, and this is just the beginning of your life's race and the many mighty miracles that will occur as He hastens His work! The Lord has said, "I will hasten my work in its time."<sup>6</sup> And now is the time! To hasten means to be quick to do something, to move forward quickly, to accelerate, to hurry and not delay. Several years ago President Boyd K. Packer said, "My young friends in the Church, I bear witness that this is the day of hastening, and as I speak to you about opportunity and obligation, I stress the word 'obligation.'"<sup>7</sup>

In the Pearl of Great Price we have a record of Abraham written by his own hand. He described the decadent society in which he was living and his difficulty in standing alone, because even his parents had departed from the ways of the Lord. He recorded that it got so bad that it was necessary for him to flee his home because his father had offered him up to the priest as a human sacrifice to their gods. He recorded:

*And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness.<sup>8</sup>*

The desire of his heart was to be a follower of righteousness—which is, simply, a disciple. And the Lord, through His prophet, is calling you to determine to be an even "greater follower of righteousness." A disciple of Christ is a follower of Jesus who lives as He taught and exemplified. As we learn in Doctrine and Covenants 41:5, "He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple."

Thus, as dedicated disciples we must act and make prophetic priorities our priorities. In order to do this we will need to be riveted on the words of the current prophets, seers, and revelators. Some of those prophetic priorities include (1) missionary work, (2) teaching and learning for youth, and (3) temple and family history work.

### **Missionary Work**

A few months ago we listened in general conference as President Thomas S. Monson announced the lowering of the age at which both young men and young women may serve missions. From my perspective on the stand in the LDS Conference Center, I watched as young men gasped, young women raised from their seats and started texting their bishops, and mothers started crying—already missing their sons and daughters. Since then, the response has been overwhelming as both young men and young women have responded to the feelings in their hearts and started their preparations to serve missions. I loved the tweets, the chatter on the Internet, and the pictures you posted about what this would mean in your personal lives.

Now, if missionary work is one of the prophetic priorities, shouldn't it be one of our priorities in the coming year? Many here today are contemplating serving a mission. Many of you have already served missions. For the young men, this is a priesthood responsibility for which you should be and are preparing. For young women, this is a wonderful opportunity, but not an obligation. But do we need a formal call to serve a mission? After you return from your mission, has your identity as one of the Lord's missionaries changed? Can we, as dedicated disciples, follow a prophet of God and help to hasten the Lord's work by continuing to do our part to flood the earth with righteousness?

Clayton M. Christensen, a Harvard business professor and well-known expert

on innovation and growth, decided to call himself on a mission and to simply become an “everyday missionary”<sup>9</sup> by talking about the things he believes and about the gospel to anyone with whom he comes in contact and with anyone who will listen. He is not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is a dedicated disciple. As we follow a prophet of God, could each of us determine to become an everyday missionary?

### **Teaching and Learning for Youth**

Prior to the last general conference, a First Presidency letter was sent to priesthood leaders announcing new teaching and learning resources for youth to be implemented starting this month. The focus of this new resource is to build faith, testimony, and conversion in the Savior. This will hasten personal spiritual progress. This new way of learning will give all who participate an added edge because they will know how to learn by study and also by faith. What you and I will observe in the coming days will be a wave of articulate advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ—filled with the Spirit and deeply converted—going forth into all the world. This new way to learn will prepare youth for missionary work, for marriage, and for parenthood. This is not just for youth but for *you!* Get on [lds.org](http://lds.org) and become familiar with and practice these same principles. Apply the doctrine in your daily decisions and work to become a dedicated disciple of our Savior.

### **Temple and Family History Work**

Another prophetic priority was announced by the First Presidency in a letter dated October 8, 2012, that encouraged youth and adults to do their own family history work and to take their own family names to the temple. You may recall in the October 2011 general conference, prior to this letter, that Elder David A. Bednar invited the youth (including each of you) to become engaged in family history and temple

work for their own ancestors.<sup>10</sup> Following that invitation, Elder Richard G. Scott urged again for each of us to be worthy to enter the temples and do the work of turning “the hearts of the children to the fathers.”<sup>11</sup>

Also, one year ago a revised *For the Strength of Youth* booklet was issued to help not just youth but you—all of us—understand the standards of the gospel. Living these standards enables each of us to be worthy to enter the temple and to do this work. A new limited-use recommend has also been made available, making it possible for anyone who is worthy to go to the temple and do baptisms for the dead. The hand of the Lord has brought all these things together in a most miraculous way.

It is so vitally important that each of us determine now to make the necessary adjustments and changes in our lives to be worthy always of a temple recommend. As you take your own family names to the temple, the Lord will amplify your ability to learn and to focus on the things that matter most. You will come forth from the temple armed with power, and His “angels [will be] round about you, to bear you up.”<sup>12</sup> Always with prophetic priorities come prophetic promises. Elder Bednar promised to those who would seek out their ancestors and do their work that “your testimony of and conversion to the Savior will become deep and abiding. . . . You will be protected against the intensifying influence of the adversary [and,] as you participate in and love this holy work, you will be safeguarded in your youth and throughout your lives.”<sup>13</sup> What would happen if each of us simply got on the Internet and found a few family names to take to the temple?

During the past several years I have been on the front row, so to speak, as I have watched these things unfold and come together. I have been an eyewitness to the arm of the Lord being revealed. None of these things has randomly happened. His hand is in this work, and He is hastening our preparation if we will

listen and act. I testify that we are led by a prophet of God and that the Lord is inspiring every announcement, every letter, and every talk. It is an amazing time. And it is a time when we, like Abraham, must determine to act and not be acted upon.

These events make it clear that the Lord is indeed hastening His work, and they send a very powerful message that God loves and trusts you, the rising generation. President Monson said, when speaking of you, “I think the youth today are stronger than they have ever been before in the history of the Church.”<sup>14</sup> I agree. You are amazing! You are not ordinary, and these are not ordinary times in which we live. You have been reserved and prepared to be on the earth at this time, and though the circumstances in which we live present many challenges, you can do it! You are, as the Savior stated, “children of the prophets . . . and . . . of the covenant.”<sup>15</sup> You are of the noble birthright of our Father Abraham. You are exceptional, and you are doing difficult but correct things in the midst of great opposition. Your actions and decisions now will bless future generations. Indeed, you are a pivotal generation.

### **Counsel for Dedicated Disciples**

As you witness these prophetic priorities unfolding and as you participate in many of them, I would like to give you some counsel similar to the counsel Paul gave to his young friend Timothy. Paul said, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”<sup>16</sup>

First, don’t let anyone tell you that you are too young. Paul told Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth.” Many times you will hear, “Well, come back when you have a little more experience.” Or, “Wait to decide that until you are a little older.” Or, “Delay marriage until you have a little more financial security and schooling.” But buying into that worldly

philosophy denies the knowledge you already have that you are not ordinary and that you have come here to go forward with faith and with the power of your youth and your unique perspective. Don’t let old paradigms become your parameters.

I am personally keenly aware that many of the blessings I am enjoying now in this life stem from decisions I made when I was between the ages of eighteen and thirty. This amazing man sitting with me here on the stand happens to be the best decision I made while here at BYU. To this day he still thinks he saw me first, but the fact is that I spotted him on campus, went to the administration building, found out his schedule, and just happened to be near some of his classes occasionally. I believe you might call that “stalking” today! But I called it flirting then. And I clearly remember sitting in a devotional similar to this having prayed about making the decision to marry or not marry this man. I was worried. I felt so young. That day the speaker spoke about how to make decisions. I can still vividly recall feeling that I was the only one in the entire devotional that morning, and I left with the formula for how to receive personal revelation—to know all things that I should or should not do. That formula is one that all of you are familiar with in sections 8 and 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants—but that day it was news to me. And, as you can see, I applied the formula, and the rest is history!

I don’t think either Steve or I realized or visualized what the future would hold then. We felt so young. We were so young! This Christmas I gave my husband a family portrait. As he opened it, it was one of those magic moments when heaven and earth come together. We looked at our eternal family and we sat in the living room and cried as we counted our blessings and as we thought about all those critical decisions along the path of life—made when we were young, following the guidance of the Spirit. So I invite you to

read Doctrine and Covenants sections 8 and 9, learn the pattern, follow the Spirit, and don't let anyone tell you that you are too young. "Let no man despise thy youth."

The Lord loves and trusts the youth. He always has. He gave Joseph Smith the responsibility to open this dispensation, to translate the Book of Mormon, to hold the keys of the priesthood and the sealing power, and to receive prophetic witness and guidance. He was just fourteen. Through a prophet of God the Lord called Mormon when he was just ten to continue in his habit of being quick to observe and to prepare to keep the record when the time came. That record guides you and me today: the Book of Mormon. To Mary and Joseph, God entrusted His Only Begotten Son to be raised in virtue and holiness. They were young. Moroni led an army to defend family, religion, and God when he was about your age. And to Samuel was entrusted a kingdom because the Lord looked on his heart, not on his age. To 2,060 young men was given the responsibility to defend their parents' covenants. And the list goes on and on and on. So don't let anyone or anything convince you that you are too young. You must seize the day because these are your days, and if the adversary can get you to postpone or delay your progress or to freeze you in fear or to get you to wait because he has convinced you that you are too young, he wins. Your youth is your strategic advantage.

Second, "neglect not the gift that is in thee."<sup>17</sup> The gift that you received at baptism is one of your greatest assets. When hands were laid on your head and you were told to "receive the Holy Ghost," it was not a passive pronouncement. Rather, those words implied that you would do all in your power to be worthy of that constant companionship. The guidance of the Holy Ghost is critical to you for your successful mission here on the earth. Is it any wonder then that the great deceiver has manipulated media, the Internet, pop

stars, women's fashion—anything he can—to cause you to neglect "the gift that is in thee." We must value virtue, which is defined as chastity and moral purity.<sup>18</sup> Virtue is solidified as we form patterns of thought and behavior based on high moral standards. We have all been eyewitnesses to the consequences of a disregard for virtue in our society and in families. You have heard me talk about it before, but virtue is absolutely necessary because, as Mormon taught Moroni, it is "most dear and precious above all."<sup>19</sup> Why? Because the Holy Ghost simply does not dwell in "unholy temples"<sup>20</sup>—"which temple ye are."<sup>21</sup>

We must qualify to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost. This is difficult in a very noisy and polluted world, so that is precisely why the Lord gave us the sacrament so that we could each partake of the sacrament and become unspotted from the world. What blessings are available to us and what power we may have to be able to renew our covenants on a weekly basis and receive the promise that we will "always have his Spirit to be with [us]!"<sup>22</sup> Because you are members of the Church, you have an edge in the world—an added advantage that puts you ahead of the crowd. You have the right to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, and the roles of this third member of the Godhead are to teach, testify, warn, comfort, lead, guide, and purify, to name a few. Elder Bruce R. McConkie once said, "There is no price too high, . . . no struggle too severe, no sacrifice too great, if out of it all we receive and enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost."<sup>23</sup>

I am sure when we learned that we would be able to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost while here in mortality, we shouted for joy and confidently embraced our Father's plan because we knew that we would never be alone and that knowing what is right and wrong would be and is always possible. And we also knew that through the guidance of the Holy Ghost we would be magnified

and, because of the Savior and His infinite Atonement, we could do hard things. We knew we would be enabled and strengthened to do whatever we must do and to endure whatever we must endure to be victorious in fulfilling our divine missions. I believe we knew and understood perfectly that mortality would not be easy, but, if we proved faithful, we would be able to return once again to our heavenly home proven, pure, and sealed in eternal families.

Third, as the words of the hymn suggest, be “more fit for the kingdom.”<sup>24</sup> I heard about one young man who set a New Year’s goal to do one push-up on January 1st and then each day add one more push-up to his fitness routine. He envisioned that at the end of the year he would pound his chest and with his buff body and his strong arms complete his goal by doing 365 push-ups. He lasted until January 12th. So, set little, attainable goals. Establish and rely on the power of habit. Your spiritual fitness routine will look different than mine. But make it a routine.

My husband has a routine he does every single morning. First, he prays. Then it is off to the stationary bike, the elliptical trainer, and then the treadmill. I call him a “greenhouse runner” because he does all this inside. Nonetheless, on the bike he reads from the Book of Mormon, on the elliptical he studies a conference talk, and on the treadmill he memorizes things like scriptures, the family proclamation, “The Living Christ,” and even the Young Women theme! I am in awe at his discipline—he doesn’t have to decide daily what to do. He is relying on the power of habit. And those habits have ripple effects in the rest of his life and in the lives of our entire family. He is a disciplined, dedicated, discerning disciple.

Now, last, “cast not away [thy] confidence.”<sup>25</sup> Don’t get distracted, discouraged, or disqualified. The word *confidence* is composed of two Latin words: *con*, meaning “with,” and *fideo*, meaning “faith.” So you see, *confidence* means “with faith.” Faith is a powerful power

that can move mountains and call down miracles. You have exercised your faith up to this point, so keep on. Even if things do not go according to your plan, even if you think you are being delayed because of the actions or nonactions of others, press forward. Continue to draw close to the Lord. Cherish virtue. Stand firm and stand tall. You have been reserved to be here now on account of your exceeding faith in the premortal existence in our Heavenly Father’s plan.<sup>26</sup> Your life also has a plan, and, as you trust in the Lord, you will see that plan unfold in miraculous ways.

I believe that a great miracle is taking place right before our eyes. In these magnificent latter days you will see the “army [of the Lord] become very great.”<sup>27</sup> You will see the gospel preached in every nation. You will emerge from the temple accompanied by angels and “endowed with power from on high.”<sup>28</sup> This will enable you to navigate in increasingly turbulent times with a peaceful walk.<sup>29</sup>

Young women, you will be the ones who will provide the example of virtuous womanhood and motherhood. You will continue to be virtuous, lovely, praiseworthy, and of good report. You will also be the ones who will provide the example of family life in a time when families are under attack, being redefined, and disintegrating. You will understand your roles and your responsibilities and thus will see no need to lobby for rights.

Young men, you will be the ones who will know that priesthood power—the power to act for God on the earth—is to be accessed only through purity. And you will use that priesthood power to bless generations.

For each of you, the very purity and virtue of your lives will attract the gaze of all the world in these latter days, and, because of you, many will say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord’s house, and we will learn His ways and we will walk in His paths.”<sup>30</sup> You will be the ones who will help

establish Zion because you understand that Zion is the pure in heart.

In the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, France, hangs a painting I love by Eugène Burnand. It depicts two of the Lord's disciples—Peter and John—running in the light of a new day toward the Savior and the empty tomb.<sup>31</sup> A print of this painting hangs in our home as well as in the homes of each of our children. It is a tangible representation of our vision as a family—to be dedicated disciples who will always be found running toward the Savior.

We are being invited to take part in the greatest race there has ever been. Make prophetic priorities your priorities. Dedicate yourself to discipleship. Don't let anyone tell you that you are too young. Seek the Holy Ghost. Become more fit for the kingdom and go forward with confidence.

I want you to know that you are magnificent. You are making more progress than you think you are. Your trials, your challenges, and your triumphs are forging your character and destiny. Your virtue and purity is tangible. And today, as I gaze into your eyes and faces, I truly believe that one virtuous young woman or young man led by the Spirit can change the world!

Truly these are days never to be forgotten. As you run your personal best, as you run your personal race, may you never forget that "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."<sup>32</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "In His Steps," *Ensign*, September 1988, 2; emphasis in original; see also Ezra Taft Benson, "In His Steps," BYU fireside address, 4 March 1979.

2. JS—H 1:71, note.

3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Way of the Disciple," *Ensign*, May 2009, 76–77.

4. See Kristin Charles, "An Olympic Story: The Gold Medal Life of Eric Liddell," <http://ministry-to-children.com/an-olympic-story-the-gold-medal-life-of-eric-liddell>.

5. Ian Charleson as Eric Liddell, *Chariots of Fire* (1981).

6. D&C 88:73.

7. Boyd K. Packer, *CR*, April 1962, 118.

8. Abraham 1:2.

9. Clayton M. Christensen, *The Power of Everyday Missionaries: The What and How of Sharing the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012).

10. See David A. Bednar, "The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn," *Ensign*, November 2011, 24–27.

11. D&C 27:9; see also Richard G. Scott, "The Joy of Redeeming the Dead," *Ensign*, November 2012, 93–95.

12. D&C 84:88.

13. Bednar, "Hearts of the Children," 27.

14. William R. Walker quoting Thomas S. Monson in Sarah Jane Weaver, "Roundtable: 'Hastening the Work,'" *Church News*, 30 December 2012, 5.

15. 3 Nephi 20:25.

16. 1 Timothy 4:12.

17. 1 Timothy 4:14.

18. See D&C 121:45; see footnote 45b on the word *virtue*.

19. Moroni 9:9.

20. Mosiah 2:37.

21. 1 Corinthians 3:17.

22. D&C 20:77.

23. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 253; quoted in David M. McConkie, "Learning to Hear and Understand the Spirit," *Ensign*, February 2011, 41.

24. "More Holiness Give Me," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 131.

25. Hebrews 10:35.

26. See Alma 13.

27. D&C 105:31.

28. D&C 38:32; see also D&C 109:13.



29. See Moroni 7:4.

30. See Isaiah 2:3.

31. Eugène Burnand, *The Disciples Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre on the Morning of the Resurrection* (ca. 1898).

32. Isaiah 40:31.