

# *The Voice of the Spirit*

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**I**t is a pleasure to be with all of you special young people this evening. I feel deeply my responsibility to teach you sacred things. I appreciate the fact that as I teach you, I am standing on holy ground. I am well aware that the world in which you live will be vastly different from the one I have known. Values have changed. Basic decency and respect for good things are eroding. A moral blackness is settling in. You are in many ways the hope of the future, and I remind you that valuable diamonds shine better against a dark background.

For you outstanding young men and women there is a scriptural text found in the Doctrine and Covenants: “Give ear to the voice of the living God” (D&C 50:1). The voice of the Spirit is universally available to all. The Lord said, “The Spirit enlighteneth every man [and every woman] . . . that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit” (D&C 84:46). He further says that “everyone that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father” (D&C 84:47). Some people are seeking to find the abundant life. Paul made it clear that it is “the Spirit [that] giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). Indeed, the Savior said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

You may ask, then, What are the fruits of the Spirit? Paul answered this by saying they are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23). The joy we seek is not a temporary emotional high, but a habitual inner joy learned from long experience and trust in God. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Rectitude is a perpetual victory, celebrated not by cries of joy, but by serenity, which is joy fixed or habitual” (“Character,” *Essays: Second Series* [1844]).

Lehi’s teaching to his firstborn son in the wilderness, Jacob, declares: “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). To achieve this great objective, we must “give ear to the voice of the living God” (D&C 50:1).

I wish to testify as a living witness that joy comes through listening to the Spirit, for I have experienced it. Those who live the gospel learn to live “after the manner of happiness,” as did the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 5:27). All over the

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world, in the many countries where the Church is established, members could add their testimonies to mine. Abundant evidence verifies the promise of peace, hope, love, and joy as gifts of the Spirit. Our voices join in a united petition for all of God’s children to partake of these gifts also.

But we hear other voices. Paul said, “There are . . . so many kinds of voices in the world” (1 Corinthians 14:10) that compete with the voice of the Spirit. We have come here to hear just one voice. I have humbly prayed that I will speak by the power of the Holy Ghost so that my message may be carried into your hearts by that same power (see 2 Nephi 33:1). Imagine, however, what would happen if all of a sudden a heckler in the back of this hall started to yell obscenities; another on my left began to contend with him; another on my right began to debate with his neighbor; someone in the center turned on a recording of some loud music. Soon a chorus of raucous, rival voices would smother my voice, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to deliver a spiritual message to you.

Such is the situation in the world. The Spirit’s voice is ever present, but it is calm. Said Isaiah, “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32:17). The adversary tries to smother this voice with a multitude of loud, persistent, persuasive, and appealing voices:

Murmuring voices that conjure up perceived injustices.

Whining voices that abhor challenge and work.

Seductive voices offering sensual enticements.

Soothing voices that lull us into carnal security.

Intellectual voices that profess sophistication and superiority.

Proud voices that rely on the arm of flesh.

Flattering voices that puff us up with pride.

Cynical voices that destroy hope.

Entertaining voices that promote pleasure seeking.

Commercial voices that tempt us to “spend money for that which is of no worth” and/or “labor for that which cannot satisfy” (2 Nephi 9:51).

Delirious voices that spawn the desire for a “high.” I refer not to a drug- or alcohol-induced high, but to the pursuit of dangerous, death-defying experiences for nothing more than a thrill.

Life, even our own, is so precious that we are accountable to the Lord for it, and we should not trifle with it. Once gone, it cannot be called back. There are so many manifestations of this that I will not enumerate them for fear of giving someone an idea. “The knowledge of sin tempteth to its commission” (see *GD*, p. 373).

In your generation you will be barraged by multitudes of voices telling you how to live, how to gratify your passions, how to have it all. You will have up to five hundred television channels at your fingertips. There will be all sorts of software, interactive computer modems, databases, and bulletin boards; there will be desktop publishing, satellite receivers, and communications networks that will suffocate you with information. Local cable news networks will cover only local news. Everyone will be under more scrutiny. There will be fewer places of refuge and serenity. You will be bombarded with evil and wickedness like no other generation. As I contemplate this prospect, I am reminded of T. S. Eliot’s words, “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” (*The Rock* [1934], I).

Without question some will be deceived and will endure lives of heartbreak and sadness. Others will enjoy the promise recorded by Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their inward parts” (Jeremiah 31:33). In some ways it will be harder to be faithful in your day, perhaps in

some ways even more challenging than pulling a handcart across the plains. When someone died in the wilderness of frontier America, their physical remains were buried and the handcarts continued west, but the mourning survivors had hope for their loved one's eternal soul. However, when someone dies spiritually in the wilderness of sin, hope may be replaced by dread and fear for the loved one's eternal welfare.

Many in your generation have been conditioned by the world to want it all and to want it now. Many do not want to save or work. Such self-centered, impatient desires make you susceptible to temptation. The Book of Mormon identifies four categories of enticements that Satan appeals to (see 1 Nephi 22:23):

Gain

Power of the flesh

Popularity

Seeking the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world

Satan's tactic is to "turn their hearts away from the truth, that they become blinded and understand not the things which are prepared for them" (D&C 78:10). He creates a smoke screen that obscures our vision and diverts our attention.

President Heber J. Grant stated:

*If we are faithful in keeping the commandments of God His promises will be fulfilled to the very letter. . . . The trouble is, the adversary of men's souls blinds their minds. He throws dust, so to speak, in their eyes, and they are blinded with the things of this world. [GS, pp. 44–45]*

How are you possibly going to select what voices you will listen to and believe? The implications for you as individuals are staggering. To survive, you must:

First, exercise your moral agency wisely. Omni tells us how we can make the proper channel selections. "There is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord: and that

which is evil cometh from the devil" (Omni 1:25). Every moment demands that we choose, over and over again, between that which comes from the Lord and that which comes from the devil. As tiny drops of water shape a landscape, so our minute-by-minute choices shape our character. Living the eternal gospel every day may be harder than dying for the Church and the Lord.

Moroni also compares those things that "inviteth and enticeth to sin" and those that "inviteth and enticeth to do good continually" (Moroni 7:12–13). He gives the key for judging:

*Seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; . . .*

*Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ. [Moroni 7:18–19]*

You will not be able to travel through life on borrowed light. The light of life must be part of your very being. The voice you must learn to heed is the voice of the Spirit.

Second, you must have a purpose. Last December when we were in Israel with the Tabernacle Choir, the leaders of the choir, together with Brother Truman Madsen and I, were honored to have an interview with Mr. Shimon Peres, foreign secretary of Israel and former prime minister. He told us a story I shall never forget. He said that as a young boy he rode in a car from Tel Aviv to Haifa in the Holy Land with David Ben Gurion, the George Washington of the state of Israel. On the way up, without any explanation, Prime Minister Ben Gurion said, "Trotsky was no leader." He was referring to Leon Trotsky, one of the architects of the Russian Revolution. A little while later he added, "Trotsky was brilliant, but he was no leader because he had no purpose."

Everyone in life needs to have a purpose. As members of Christ’s church, we are to consider the end of our salvation (see D&C 46:7). Someone has said, “You must stand up for something or you will fall for everything.”

*And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you. [D&C 88:67]*

*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. [James 1:8]*

*Let the mind be concentrated, and it possesses almighty power. It is the agent of the Almighty clothed with mortal tabernacles, and we must learn to discipline it, and bring it to bear on one point. [Orson Hyde, JD 7:153]*

The more righteous part of the Nephites had to learn to focus attention in order to hear the voice.

*They heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, inso-much that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn. [3 Nephi 11:3]*

They heard the voice a second time; “they understood it not.” When they heard the voice the third time, they “did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came” (3 Nephi 11:4–5). If we are to hearken to the voice of the Spirit, we too must open our ears, turn the eye of faith to the source of the voice, and look steadfastly towards heaven.

Be aware that there are invisible hosts watching over you even as they did Elisha of old. The king of Syria sent hosts of warriors with chariots and horses to capture the prophet Elisha. They came by night and surrounded the city. Elisha’s servant, seeing the great hosts, became very frightened and said to Elisha,

*Alas, my master! how shall we do?*

*And [Elisha] answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*

*And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. [2 Kings 6: 15–17]*

My dear young friends, I believe that unseen spiritual hosts tend you as you seek to do the will of the Lord. Remember the words of Elisha: “They that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16).

Third, strengthen your testimony. Everyone in life needs to have spiritual goals. One way to learn of our life’s purpose is to have our patriarchal blessings. A choice young man recently received his patriarchal blessing. He was told in his blessing that many of his forebears who paid a terrible price for the gospel were present as the blessing was given. Your patriarchal blessing is one important way to learn of your life’s purpose.

If I were to ask you young people, “How is your testimony?” I suppose that many of you would say, “I don’t know.” But if I asked you some specific questions, the result would be different. For instance, if I asked you, “Do you believe that God lives and we are his children?” I think most of you would answer this question quickly and affirmatively.

And if I asked, “Do you believe and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer?” I think most of you would hasten to say yes.

And if I then asked, “Do you believe that Joseph Smith was the prophet of the Restoration?” I think most of you have a belief concerning this. Some of you would already be familiar with section 135 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which states that “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (verse 3).

If I were to ask you, “Do you believe the Book of Mormon is the word of God?” I think many of you already have acquired a testimony concerning the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Lastly, if I were to ask you, “Do you believe that President Benson and his counselors and the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are the prophets, seers, and revelators of our day?” I think most of you have formed a respect for the leaders of this Church.

Having answered these five questions in the affirmative, you already have a foundation of a testimony. As you acquire knowledge of the plan of salvation and learn why you are here and where you are going, your testimony will be strengthened. In addition, as you walk by faith you will have confirmed in your young hearts spiritual experiences that will strengthen your faith and testimony. You of this generation are a chosen generation.

You young women have a great destiny. As part of this destiny, you have a precious work to do. President Spencer W. Kimball has written: “It is a great blessing to be a woman in the Church today. The opposition against righteousness has never been greater, but the opportunities for fulfilling our highest potential have also never been greater” (G. Homer Durham, “Woman’s Responsibility to Learn,” *Woman* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979], p. 33). Women are so richly endowed with the spiritual gifts about which Paul spoke: faith, hope, and charity (see 1 Corinthians 13:13). Thus part of your destiny is to set the example of the sublime

womanly virtues, as the nurturers, teachers, and the refining influence so important for our families and the Church. Women are the enriching adornment of the race.

Learn and gain a testimony of the plan of salvation. “God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil” (Alma 12:32). Learn of your relationship to God. As you walk by faith you will have confirmed in your young hearts spiritual experiences that will strengthen your faith and testimony.

Fourth, search the scriptures, which are “the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:4). The Lord also said of his word, as found in the scriptures, “For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you, and by my power you can read them one to another; . . . Wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (D&C 18:35–36).

Fifth, gain a conviction of the divine calling of the Brethren and be willing to follow their counsel, such as the following.

Honor the priesthood. You of this generation are a chosen generation. You young men are part of a royal priesthood. You young men and women were, no doubt, chosen before the world was and reserved to come forward in this time. We love you. We have confidence in you. We know that you will be equal to the challenges that are placed before you to carry forward the work of the Lord as your parents and grandparents and forebears have done. We know it is hard. You live in a morally desensitizing environment, but you must always remember that someone is listening and watching. If you support and sustain the priesthood, it will be a great stabilizing influence in your lives.

Stay morally clean. You must believe that it is worth it in the end to be true and faithful. Worldly pleasures do not match up to heavenly

joy. It may not be “cool” to avoid certain things, or it might be “rad” to do other things, but it is better to be alone and to be right than to be eternally wrong. We counsel you to associate with those who can help you maintain your standards rather than tear them down. You must learn to be your own person and to live by your own standards. Even though you may have become somewhat desensitized or made some mistakes, you must not let Satan reduce your self-esteem to the point that you become discouraged. We urge you to carry and frequently read your “For the Strength of Youth” booklet and to listen to your parents and your leaders. As a chosen generation there is not a problem that you cannot handle with the help of the Lord. We counsel you not to grow up too fast. Do not miss the joy of being a righteous young adult. Enjoy your dating years. Have many friends. Have confidence in yourselves and in your future. You must learn to labor and you must learn to wait.

I warn you of a pervasive false doctrine. For want of a better name, I call it “premeditated repentance,” by which I mean consciously sinning with the forethought that afterwards repentance will permit the enjoyment of the full blessings of the gospel, such as temple marriage or a mission. In an increasingly wicked society, it is harder to toy with evil without becoming contaminated. This foolish doctrine was foreseen by Nephi.

*And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. [2 Nephi 28:8]*

Of all those who teach this doctrine, the Lord says, “The blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them” (2 Nephi 28:10).

Lastly, I do not know how the Lord will discipline your generation because of the general callousness and hardness of the hearts of so many in society. In biblical times the Lord sent fiery, flying serpents among the people. After they were bitten, the Lord prepared a way for them to be healed. As commanded by the Lord, Moses made a serpent of brass and put it on a pole. To be healed, those who were bitten had only to look upon the brass serpent (see Numbers 21:8–9). This was too simple for many, and “because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41).

I have suggested a simple solution for selecting the channel to which you will attune yourselves: Listen to and follow the voice of the Spirit. This is an ancient solution, even eternal, and may not be popular in a society that is always looking for something new.

This solution requires patience in a world that demands instant gratification.

This solution is quiet, peaceful, and subtle in a world enamored by that which is loud, incessant, fast paced, garish, and crude.

This solution requires you to be contemplative while your peers seek physical titillation.

This solution requires the prophets to “put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Peter 1:12). This may seem foolish in a time when it is not worth remembering much of the trivial tripe to which we are exposed.

This solution is one unified, consistent, age-old message in a world that quickly becomes bored in the absence of intensity, variety, and novelty.

This solution requires you to walk by faith in a world governed by sight (see 2 Corinthians 4:18, 5:7). You must see with the eye of faith eternal, unseen, spiritual verities, whereas the

masses of mankind depend solely on temporal things, which can be known only through the physical senses.

In short, this solution may not be popular, it may not get you gain, or worldly power. But “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Learn to ponder the things of the Spirit and to respond to its promptings; filter out the static generated by Satan. As you become attuned to the Spirit, “thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21).

Hearkening to the “voice of the living God” will give you “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (see D&C 50:1; 59:23). These are the greatest of all the gifts of God (see D&C 14:7).

I pray with Paul “unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man [and woman]; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May . . . know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:14–19).

I believe and testify that your spirits are special spirits and were reserved until this generation to stand strong against the evil winds that blow, and to stand straight and upright with the heavy burdens that will be placed upon you. I am confident you will be faithful and true to the great trust that is ahead of you. I say this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.