

We Believe in You!

JAMES E. FAUST

My dear young friends, I speak to you as one who stands on the edge of eternity. From that perspective, I see you as the choicest spirits ever placed on the earth. The promises in your generation's patriarchal blessings, if you are faithful, seem to exceed the promises in Sister Faust's blessing and in mine. You know better than I the challenges of living in the world today. The "Teenagers' Bill of Rights" declares: "Please support us by believing in us rather than fearing for us" (Lia Gay, Jamie Yellin, and others, in Jack Canfield, *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul: 101 Stories of Life, Love and Learning* [Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, 1997], p. 307). I want you to know that I believe in you. I believe you can be in the world but not of the world.

In the world there are many things of value to discover and much more to live for and hope for; however, as you move forward, you should be careful not to get too close to the Devil's Throat. As a young man I served a mission to Brazil. It was a marvelous experience. I have returned many times since then in my Church assignments. One of the wonders of the world in that great country is Iguacu Falls. In the flood season, the volume of water spilling over the brink is the largest in the world. Every few minutes, millions of gallons

of water cascade into the chasm below. One part of the falls, where the deluge is the heaviest, is called the Devil's Throat. Large rocks are situated just before the water rushes down into the Devil's Throat. Some of the braver Brazilians used to take passengers in canoes to stand on those rocks and look down into the Devil's Throat. The water above the falls is usually calm and slow-moving and the atmosphere tranquil. Except for the roar of the water below, there was no way to anticipate the danger that lay just a few feet beyond. A sudden, unexpected current could have taken the canoe into the rushing waters, over the cliff, and down into the Devil's Throat. While standing on a rock, a loss of footing or vertigo would have the same effect.

Spiritually, a Devil's Throat is concealed beneath the deceptively calm tranquility of our lives and the world in which we live. Each of you has to have the strength and integrity not to get too close to the Devil's Throat. Bravado

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in the face of certain death, physical or spiritual, is foolhardy.

At this time in your lives you sometimes challenge things, such as parents' authority, society, values, religion. When I was a lawyer I had a client who was a very successful contractor. But he challenged things. For instance, he argued that the earth is flat. I really think he knew it is round, but he would challenge it. By that time in my life I had traveled around the world. In World War II, I was assigned over a period of time to go west from San Francisco to Cairo and West Africa, and later to Brazil, and then home. But I knew the earth was round before I circled the globe.

You will do well not to challenge some things in life. This is particularly so with the commandments of God. I am very grateful for the principle of repentance, for we all make mistakes. But it is far better to make the right choice in the first place. This can be applied to marriage. Too many marriages fail, but it really is much better to get it right the first time. Recently Sister Marjorie Hinckley spoke on the subject of marriage to a large audience in Houston, Texas. Recalling the early days of her marriage to President Hinckley, she said, "Early on I realized it would be better if we worked harder to get used to each other than constantly try to change each other" ("President, Sister Hinckley Share Counsel," in *Church News*, 26 September 1998, p. 4).

The song in *The Sound of Music* says, "Let's start at the very beginning." If we are to understand the purpose of our lives, the beginning is indeed a very good place to start. Each of you is a son or daughter of God. We are created in His image and likeness. What does that do for us? It raises us up so we can live above the ugly and sordid things all around us. It does not mean that temptation is eliminated, but rather that the Lord gives us strength to overcome all things. This is one of the reasons why we believe in you.

I. You Can Be Honest

We believe in you because we know you can be honest. Recently, a local television channel ran the story of a 10-year-old boy named Josh Bowers from West Jordan, Utah. He found a wallet that had \$530 in it. Josh didn't hesitate. He picked it up and took it to his mother. The wallet belonged to a mother of four, and the \$530 was rent money she couldn't live without.

Josh had some compelling reasons to keep the money. His father had recently been disabled on the job, so his family is living on Social Security. Then there were all the things Josh could have bought with the money. What he really wanted, as he said, was a new bike. But he knew the money was not his and that someone needed that money. The relieved young mother gave Josh \$40 for returning the wallet and the money. Josh planned to use some of the money to get his old bike tire fixed. But a viewer, on hearing the story, had Josh pick out a brand-new bike "to reward him for being an honest guy." Interestingly, the donor of the bike wanted to remain anonymous, but he said: "Josh set an example that everybody should follow, and he looks happy" ("Honest Boy Returns Lost Wallet and Money," KUTV, 8 and 10 September 1998, 10:00 p.m.).

We may not all get a shiny new bicycle as a reward for our honesty, but a feeling of goodness will shine within us for doing what we know is honest and true. Ultimately, we will receive an eternal reward.

II. We Recognize Your Potential

We believe in you because we recognize your strength and capacity. As a boy working on a farm, I learned that all kinds of devices can give you power to do things you cannot accomplish with your own strength. In those days we had to move big boulders by hand. We would get a long pole and put the strong end of the pole under the rock we wanted to move. Then, resting the pole on a smaller rock close by the big rock, we would pull down on

the small end of the pole, which would cause the big rock to move. The longer the pole, the more leverage and the easier it was to move the big rock.

We have progressed from poles to power machinery. Today you have computers with the Internet and e-mail to increase and expand your capacity. But you will need to gain certain skills to keep up with modern technology. For example, when I was in college we wrote papers by hand, but now they are expected to be typed, usually on a computer. Computers even have a spellchecker! With the development of power machinery, the rise in technology, and better health habits, the world is getting more competitive. A few years ago an ACT score in the twenties could secure a scholarship, but now a score in the thirties is required. Similarly, a 3.5 GPA used to be worth an academic scholarship, but a higher GPA is needed today. Records in sports are now higher; this pushes achievement levels higher in that area as well.

So to achieve your potential, you will not only have to work hard, but you will also have to work smart to employ all the leverage you can. As I visit our universities from time to time, I am impressed by our young people who are working early and late at menial jobs to help them stay in school. An education will give you great leverage, which is why you must get all of the education you can.

The greatest leverage for good, however, is on the spiritual level. This will come as you use your spiritual gifts to enhance your natural gifts and abilities. This spiritual leverage can be diminished or even destroyed if you get too close to the Devil's Throat. For example, I warn you against the dangers that lurk in the Internet, movies, and books which lead away from your destiny. Daily study of the scriptures is an excellent way to keep your spirituality safe from the Devil's Throat.

III. People Are Noticing Your Integrity

We believe in you because of your integrity. We not only know of your integrity, but people around the world are taking notice. A businesswoman based in Salt Lake City called a company in Virginia. After completing the business transaction, the owner asked her where she was from. On learning that it was Utah, he said, "What part of Utah?" I quote her account of what happened next:

"Salt Lake City," I responded.

"Salt Lake City? Well, you must be a Mormon," he stated matter-of-factly.

"Yes, I am," I said.

"I have two girls who work for me who are Mormons," he continued. "They're the best employees I've ever had. Those two girls are only seniors in high school, but they keep my store cleaner than any of my other employees, and they treat my customers great. They're really polite and pretty . . . you know, the 'all-American' type."

He said, "Those two girls are amazing. Would you believe that they get up at 5:00 A.M. every morning and . . ."

"Go to seminary!" I inserted.

"Well, I don't know what it's called," he continued. "But it's some type of religious training. Then they go to school all day, and come work for me until 8:00 P.M. I don't know how they do all of the things they do, but I'm sure impressed."

"Would you believe that Mormon youth all over the world are going to early-morning seminary, five days a week?" I asked.

*"Well, that's one thing I have to say for your church," he said. "You're sure raising your children right. They're the best." [Annette Larsen Proulx, "I'm Impressed," *New Era*, July 1998, p. 49]*

And you are the best. That is why we believe in you! As President Gordon B. Hinckley frequently says: "It all comes down to personal integrity." Integrity is the value we set on ourselves. It is the fulfillment of the duty we owe ourselves. Complete and constant

integrity is a great law of human conduct. Self-respect and dignity as sons and daughters of God should both advance your gifts and talents and act as a restraining influence.

Honorable men and women will personally commit to certain self-imposed expectations. They need no outside check or control. They are honorable in their inner core. Integrity is the light that shines from a disciplined conscience. It is the strength of duty within us. Moses gave the following counsel: “If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth” (Numbers 30:2).

Last year I read the account of a young man by the name of Logan Johnson. He was delivering pizza in North Dallas, Texas, when he

spotted a car rolling into a pond. He ran to the water and plunged in. Johnson pulled open a rear door. As the car sank, he dragged the driver—the Rev. John Kershaw, 65, who had lost consciousness while driving—over the back seat and to the shore.

At that point, Logan Johnson’s own life was floundering. He had dropped out of high school, had family troubles and had been put on antidepressants. But saving a life gave Johnson a new outlook on his own life. He returned to school, enrolled in the Marine Reserves and now plans to go to college.

*“You can’t explain how it feels to save someone’s life,” Johnson said. “I value my friends, family, school, everything, a lot more than I did.” [Lyric Wallwork Winik, “I Just Reacted—I Don’t Know How,” *Parade Magazine*, 2 June 1996, p. 6]*

The article points out that many such rescuers say they felt a strong moral conviction to help. That is something that comes from within, that spark of divinity that begins with the light of Christ and develops day by day and deed by deed into qualities of character based on the absolutes in life. Some things should never be done; some lines should never be crossed; vows should never be broken; some

words should never be spoken; some thoughts should never be entertained. Membership in the Church requires that we measure up to certain standards. It isn’t easy. It demands much of us.

IV. You Choose Morality

We believe in you because you choose to be chaste. The Lord gave us our bodies and along with them our passions. He does not expect us to stifle our passions, but rather to bridle them (see Alma 38:12), which means to channel them so that they can be used for the purposes He intended. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated in the October 1998 general conference:

Human intimacy is reserved for a married couple because it is the ultimate symbol of total union. . . .

*. . . If you persist in pursuing physical satisfaction without the sanction of heaven, you run the terrible risk of such spiritual, psychic damage that you may undermine both your longing for physical intimacy and your ability to give wholehearted devotion to a later, truer love. [“Personal Purity,” *Ensign*, November 1998, pp. 76–77; emphasis in original]*

Again, let me reassure you, we do believe in you. If you make up your mind well in advance you can avoid the moral pitfalls that may occur when you are not expecting them.

Lisa, a high school sophomore, tells about the time the quarterback of the football team asked her to the homecoming dance.

“I couldn’t believe my luck,” she said. “One of the most high-profile guys in the school had asked me to the most prestigious dance of the year.”

Her enthusiasm dampened, though, when after the dance her date started driving down a lonely road she realized led to Lover’s Lane. Quarterback or no quarterback, she had decided long ago that “parking” was something she would not do.

To avoid embarrassment, she began talking about how this particular road reminded her of a friend’s experience. The police had caught her friend

and a date parking up there, and had taken them to the police station.

*“Of course, anyone who is silly enough to park deserves what they get,” she laughed. Without speaking, her date turned the car around, and a few minutes later they were sitting in her living room eating pie with her parents. [JeaNette Goates Smith, “Dating: Give Me a Brake,” *New Era*, June 1993, p. 10]*

It is so important to make decisions early about correct dating habits so that you can say, “I don’t know who I’ll marry yet, but I certainly know where” (Jody Hazelbaker, “Bride in the Mirror,” *New Era*, August 1997, p. 49).

It is also important to keep our minds clean and pure. While Elder Dallin H. Oaks was serving as president of Brigham Young University, he gave some excellent counsel regarding what we take into our minds:

*We are surrounded by the promotional literature of illicit sexual relations, on the printed page and on the screen. For your own good, avoid it. Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food. The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions bad food will only make you sick but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval system we call a brain. The brain won’t vomit back filth. Once recorded, it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life. [“Things They’re Saying,” *New Era*, February 1974, p. 18]*

King Benjamin gave a powerful warning to the people of his day:

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye

have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. [Mosiah 4:30]

I was in Weiser, Idaho, for a regional conference recently. While there I learned that young people in that area are memorizing the proclamation on the family issued by the First Presidency.

V. Accountability Is Fundamental

Another important fundamental is accountability, as President Hinckley stated in his interview on *Larry King Live*: “Let me say that I still believe that right is right, and wrong is wrong. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. These aren’t suggestions, these are commandments” (CNN transcript).

It then follows that we are accountable for what we do—first to ourselves, then to our parents, and, most important, to God. We all carry a trust. We must ask ourselves, “What is success?” Is it achievement? Is it fame? Is it position? Is it dominion? The prophet Micah defined it very simply: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

You may ask, “Is it worth the struggle and the challenge to live gospel principles?” So much around us is wrong and wicked that some of you might say: “It’s too hard. Why try? We can’t make it.” Sister Sheri L. Dew, second counselor in the general Relief Society, told us in the recent general Relief Society meeting about encountering this attitude in a meeting

*where the speaker seemed preoccupied with how hard it is to live the gospel. By the end of the meeting, I was [weary]. He had made living the gospel seem like a sentence to life on the rock pile. It’s not living the gospel that’s hard. It’s life that’s hard. [“We Are Not Alone,” *Ensign*, November 1998, p. 94; emphasis in original]*

I am optimistic for you. Life presents great challenges and difficulties, but now is the most exciting time in the history of the world in which to live. There are greater opportunities to build the kingdom of God than ever before. There are more places to serve missions than ever before. You really can't visualize the great blessings that await you. They are wonderful and exciting. Each of us is endowed with unique gifts, talents, and attributes. You can make a difference. You must make a difference. You are, as the Savior said, the light of the world.

We all face furious winds of evil and tides of the sordid not unlike the situation faced by the Jaredites as they traveled to the promised land. They were tossed upon the waves of the sea and "many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind" (Ether 6:6). But they were protected because "when they were buried in the deep there was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish" (Ether 6:7). In our time there are vessels that

protect against these terrible spiritual tempests, and they are our temples, homes, quorums, wards, and stakes.

VI. You Are Children of Great Promise

In closing I want to again emphasize that you are children of great promise. You have received the covenants of the Lord with His people. Be careful not to get too close to the Devil's Throat. He would like to devour you. You must use the leverage of both technology and of the Spirit of God to reach your potential. You must strive diligently to do this. We want to support you by believing in you rather than fearing for you. Though you may have ordinary ability and intelligence, by perseverance and hard work you can find happiness beyond your dreams and expectations. This will come about as you keep the commandments of the Lord.

I wish to invoke a blessing upon each of you. I pray that the Lord will watch over you and keep you safe. I pray that the Lord will strengthen you in heart and soul to go forward in faith and courage. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.