

Follow the King

MARION D. HANKS

I am happy to be with you. I couldn't refrain from drafting an elegant speech for you this morning, but I think I shall be able to resist reading it—or most of it—though I will try to extract from it some references to good literature, and to the best literature, as a base for what I wish to share.

What I would like to say is what I would wish my children to hear or have heard, or my grandchildren to hear when they are ready. It matters what we say and how we say it. One cannot be cavalier about thirty minutes, or twenty, or fifteen, of anybody's time.

I have thought this morning of a story about an old sea captain who was feared because of his tyrannical approach. He disapproved of almost everything, including his first mate. When the first mate came back from shore leave one night slightly inebriated, the captain entered into the daily ship's log: "This day the first mate returned to the ship drunk."

The first mate resented that but there was nothing he could do about it. However his day came. He was officer of the watch and the captain was ashore. When the captain returned to the ship that night, the first mate entered into the log: "This day the captain returned to the ship sober."

It matters what we say and how we say it!

Speaking of grandchildren, I was approached this weekend by a sweet lady who told me she was ninety years old. That relieved me a little because I was expecting her to say, as I regularly hear older people say now, "I have been listening to you since I was a little girl." That thought captivates me, and in some cases may be true. As long as BYU keeps replaying old tapes, galloping senescence may be withheld in a measure from current observation. In my case eternal youth has been perpetuated by the replaying of a speech or two given here so many years ago that I haven't the slightest idea what I said.

Another person approached me at a conference and said, "We used to love to hear you speak about your children. Why don't you start speaking about your grandchildren?" I will indulge her and myself, and share with you one simple report about two grandchildren.

Our oldest daughter and her husband and five children came to live with us for a few months because they suffered, the misfortune

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of having their house damaged by a fire. So, while it was being repaired, we had the marvelous blessing of getting to know the family a whole lot better. So much better that what may be one of the few triumphs of my life occurred at four o'clock one morning when a little boy came to me—not to his mother or father or grandmother, but to me—awakened me and said, “Gwandpa, I frowned up.” Somehow that had become apparent to me already!

I went with him to the bedroom where he and his brother had been sleeping and saw with marvel and amazement that this lad has the most significant propulsive capacity I have ever observed. After I had completely evacuated the room of most of its contents, reclothed and relocated two little boys who were staggering around sleepily after they had had a shower, and gone back to my own room marveling—after all that occurred, I lay in my bed chuckling. That was a great experience, full of good cheer and some laughter and appreciation.

Several days passed. Then, at the breakfast table one morning, the older boy, who had previously given his thanks and hugs, was sitting by his younger brother, who was still struggling with the rudiments of language. It was the latter who spoke. Between mouthfuls of cereal he said, “Gwandpa, I think you are the greatest man in the whole world.” I said, “Well, maybe not the greatest, Mark—certainly one of the best looking, but maybe not the greatest.” But he didn’t laugh. He said, “And the goodest.”

Do you know, somehow that little fellow came to feel and respond to something very important—that in serving and being served you really do learn to love each other, both she or he who serves and they who are served.

I commend that to you—the good cheer and the sense of delight in being able to help someone who really needs help, as they needed help that night. There are a lot of people who would prosper from learning what little Mark, the masterful philosopher, got out of that experience. He related it a bit over

generously to one who was involved, but the principle is real and good.

What Do You Wish For?

Let me share with you something I read recently. It was a note written by the mother of Steve Howe, reprinted in Sunday’s newspaper. You may know that he was a major league baseball pitcher of considerable skill and affluence and future who is now struggling to get back into baseball after having lost his place because of reputed drug use. His mother said:

It’s easy to place blame where there is no blame. We have five children and we have one cocaine addict. I would die for my kids. But I will not take the blame for his addiction, any more than his father should. You know what I think Steve’s problem is? Everything he ever said he wanted to do, he’s done. He’s any ordinary kid who got everything he ever wished for. All his dreams came true. And it wasn’t enough. [“Quotes,” Deseret News Magazine, 2 March 1986, p. 3]

I admire Mrs. Howe’s understanding of the principle of agency and her scripture-like attribution of accountability where accountability is due. I know nothing personally of these individuals and make only this comment: I cannot help wondering what Steve wished for and dreamed of in his quiet hours. I doubt he ever dreamed or wished to be in the position he is in. Does anyone ever really aim for failure or for self-destruction or the vitiation of potential?

Again, I certainly do not judge or write off Steve Howe. I hope he comes back in lots of wonderful ways. But I simply emphasize what a wise man once said: “He who picks up one end of a stick picks up the other. He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to.” And I will add another wise line, that “Not failure, but low aim, is crime.”

I cannot fail to wonder whether anybody ever opened to Steve a sense of what can be because of who he is and to whom he belongs

and what is in him of potential and power and capacity. I wonder if he ever dreamed—really dreamed—of giving the kind of service I have watched many his age or younger (perhaps some sitting among you today) give in the barrios or the refugee camps of Asia. Such a dream would be worthy of his manhood and his capacity. It is a good thing to be capable of being a major leaguer, but there are some major objectives that are more important than baseball or basketball or any other sport.

Dreams and wishes and desires matter but they do not themselves take us to achievement. What we really want to accomplish, to do, to have, to be, will be achieved on the basis of our day-by-day effort. And the dream coming true will be the consequence of our putting to work the capacities we have to take advantage of the opportunities around us while they are yet there.

Today let me take a theme from great literature, the theme of a young hero who had ambitions, a dream, a desire, and whose example may be stimulating to some of you. I hope so.

Gareth's Quest

In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is the story of Gareth and Lynette. Gareth was "The last tall son of Lot and Bellicent," says the poem, a prince much loved by his mother who desired to protect him from the fate she feared, which was that he become like his father who was ill and had no will to live, and like his brothers who were at the Round Table but who had not the qualities nor character of Gareth. He too desired to be a knight, but he had nobler dreams also. His mother wanted him to stay at home and enjoy the estates and the opportunities of the influential and wealthy. She wanted him, she said, to "follow the deer." He answered:

*O mother,
How can you keep me tether'd to you? —Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—*

Else, wherefore born?

[Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*,
"Gareth and Lynette," lines 113–18]

Gareth, through trials and tests, demonstrated his faithfulness and his competence and courage in pursuit of those worthy dreams. He defined in effect not only whom he wanted to follow but his understanding of the path and where it led and what it required: "Live pure, speak true, right wrong."

I am not interested in the phrases as slogans but in the fact that they are descriptive of the life of the Lord, laid out by him through his teaching and example. He said that we must:

Hold up [our] light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do. [3 Nephi 18:24]

Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you. [3 Nephi 18:16]

Live Pure

So we speak of the *pure life*. What is it? Is it attainable, achievable, realistic? Is it only an idealistic slogan or is it in fact a manner of living and thinking invoked not only by a visionary poet but by many prophets inspired of God and exemplified by the Savior?

Think about it a moment. Obviously this is what God and Christ desire for us. So one seeking to live a pure life will ask herself or himself, "What does God mean in my life? Is my purpose, my honest purpose, really to know and to do his will? How do my convictions and commitments affect my thinking, speaking, and behavior?"

Jesus came, it is written, that he might have a feeling of our infirmities. He was tempted in all things like unto us but was sinless. Being reviled, he

reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously [that is, to God]. [1 Peter 2:23]

The pure life is ultimately the only life worth living and is ultimately realistic and attainable. In these marvelous scriptural records the Lord declares that he will raise up to himself a “pure people, that will serve me in righteousness” (D&C 100:16). A little earlier, recorded in that magnificent vision we now have in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, word is received of great and marvelous works, the mysteries of the kingdom, which the prophet and his companion were told not to write nor to utter.

Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood [these great and marvelous works and the so-called mysteries] by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him. [D&C 76:116]

Wonderful promises follow. Read from the book of Helaman how a group of people under intense pressures grew in living a pure life, and became something special in the midst of worldliness, pride, and persecution. How did they do that?

They did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. [Helaman 3:35]

Somehow through their own effort and God’s blessing they managed to become mature enough—mature in the pattern of the Savior and the Almighty—to yield their hearts. I don’t think they became fanatical or cheerless or hard to live with. They became cheerful and

gracious and filled with the Spirit. They became purer than they had been. They spoke the truth. And they righted the wrongs done to them or that they themselves were guilty of.

Dante wrote what Matthew Arnold called the greatest line in literature: “In His will is our peace” (*The Divine Comedy*, “Paradiso,” canto 3, line 85).

Purity has its highest expression in doing God’s will, in unselfishness, self-forgetfulness—attributes of God and Christ. The Almighty has taught us that we have nothing to glory in in worldly wisdom, or might, or riches.

But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. [Jeremiah 9:24]

Purity in this world is not an established accomplishment but a continuing pursuit, a determined commitment. As we blunder or temporarily succumb, we regroup and do better. Self-mastery, self-control, self-command, and strength of will are expressions of desire and commitment to follow the Christ, to do the will of God. None is the product of wishing or of intellect, but of desire, of yielding our hearts to God—preparing us for the fuller entertainment in our lives of that Spirit which

giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. [D&C 84:46]

It must be known that in this quest for purity there is no denigration of the human body, of physical human needs, and of wholesome motivations. One of the glories of the gospel is the revelation that the body is a non-evil component of the eternal soul. “The spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15).

Only when the body is in eternal indissoluble combination with the spirit can a fullness of joy be experienced. For us there is no hostility between the spirit and the body. The earthly part needs the guiding blessing of the spiritual. The gratification of physical needs can be an act of sanctification. All things to the Lord are spiritual. He made heaven and earth. There is no capacity in man more godlike than the capacity to create.

To help us appreciate and seek the pure life there are masterful and marvelous instructions. One that I have loved best for years comes from Psalm 24, which in part reads:

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive [she shall receive] the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. [Psalm 24:3–5]

What a beautiful and sweet thing—what a lovely blessing to have available and before us and in our minds as a guide to help us achieve our desires. In this vision is implicit a rejection of that which is proud and unbecoming and mean-spirited in us, and a maturing into that which can be light and wholesomeness and decency and grace and goodness.

Live pure? Let me give you one example. I interviewed a young man in a mission once who was somebody special. He was a strong and successful missionary. He hadn't always done very well; in fact, he had done very poorly in early high school years. He had picked up a lot of very bad habits and muddied up his conscience and had departed far from the pure life. Then one night he and some of his friends in like condition attended a ward dance because they had heard that a new family had moved into the ward and that there were some pretty girls in the family. Our young

man was nominated by his giggling friends to go make the approach when they spotted the new girls. He did. He asked one of them to dance. She agreed and they began. Then he did something he reported to me long years later with a sense of shame. He said that he had made an immoral gesture toward her. She stopped on the dance floor, stepped back from him with hurt and anger and said, "Why did you do that?" He said, muttering, "To impress you, I guess." She said, "You did!" and left the floor.

His friends were highly amused, and they all left the dance—he seemingly unperturbed. He went home, and his friends went their ways. Secluded in his room he sat for a time pondering and trying to talk with someone he had neglected for a long time. The next day he knocked on the girl's door and apologized in sincerity. She said, "Do you hold the priesthood?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Do you know what that means? Does it mean anything to you? Why don't you honor it?" He said, "I will."

And from that hour—that moment of her facing him with a purity of conscience and courage and with righteous indignation—from that moment of speaking the truth, he understood. He said, "It took me a long time to get ready to come here. Even when I asked about a mission, I wasn't really ready though I had spent a long time in preparation. But when I was ready I told the bishop. I haven't had any time to waste as a missionary, Brother Hanks," he said, "or any money or any energy. I am here on the Lord's errand, and if I have done any good, that is why. "

Live pure. Speak true.

Speak True

Let me share some convictions about speaking true. There are diverse ways to speak true—sometimes in behavior, sometimes the look on our face, sometimes the radiation of our spirit, sometimes in spoken word. I know

a young lady and her companions who served helping refugees in Asia, never able to teach a single formal religious discussion because they were honest in keeping camp rules, even though others sometimes did not. After a time a man who had been very unsympathetic to any Mormon helping in the refugee camps, because he thought we were not really interested in anything but aggressive proselyting, wrote a letter, a letter of apology and commendation. I will read a sentence or two:

There is still a great deal of fear among other voluntary agencies that the Mormons are here to proselyte. Even if you don't talk about your religion, your values come across like a ton of bricks and that frightens people. You live what you believe. Therein may lie your problem—especially when it brings such inner strength, peace, and confidence as you girls radiate.

They were *speaking true* in the way they lived and served and blessed the lives of others. They truly followed Christ in doing good, unselfishly helping those who had desperate needs.

Emerson said, “I cannot find language of sufficient energy to convey my sense of the sacredness of private integrity.”

To Joseph Smith and his associates the Lord said, “Take upon you the name of Christ, and speak the truth in soberness” (D&C 18:21).

The same dangers that have beset men in every age—in Isaiah’s day and Ezekiel’s and Micah’s, and in the day of the Lord on the earth—are challenging us in this day. The prophets inveighed against lip-serving and eye-pleasing formalism and empty ritual at the expense of real love and real worship and real faith.

Jesus spoke strongly against much loud praying done for the sake of being heard by men, against fasting to be seen of men, against payments of tithes and offerings for the plaudits of men. In each case they have their

reward—the being seen and heard, the plaudits of men.

But this is not real worship or real service or real contribution—only self-centered and empty exhibitionism.

Real development, real growth, real understanding—the gaining of our lives—come only as we lose our lives in honest love for God, for his work, for his children, expressed in obedience to him and in unselfish interest in them and service to them.

Years ago I listened to a member of a stake presidency speak in stake conference about his teenage son who had cost his team a volleyball championship by volunteering to the referee that the ball had touched him before it went out of bounds. No one else knew, only he. Yet under that kind of pressure he had spoken the truth. His team lost, the medals and trophies went to the other team. Said the man at the pulpit: “I am not shedding a tear because our kids won or lost a volleyball match. I weep for joy that I have the honor to be the father of a teenage son who under that kind of pressure had the courage to say, ‘The ball touched me.’”
Speak true.

Right Wrong

What do we do about the wrongs of which we have been guilty? How do we respond to the wrongs done to us by others, by fate, disasters, war, injustice?

Jesus gave us the pattern to follow:

Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.
[1 Peter 2:21–24]

Paul added this counsel:

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.
[1 Peter 2:12]

In last weekend's newspaper was the story of an unidentified teacher who sent two hundred dollars to the school district in his area to pay for some paper, paper clips, and elastics appropriated to his own use over the years. Some of us wouldn't really give much thought to that, would we?

Why did he do what he did last week? Because he thought about it carefully enough and long enough. The minor monetary value of the paper clips and rubber bands doesn't seem important to him now. To be clean, to feel good, to merit his own self-respect, to be honest—these are the things that matter most to him now. It was vital to him that he correct the wrong. Likely no one else knew. *He knew*, and he has done what he could to regain and merit his own self-respect.

When Jesus had written on the ground at his confrontation with those who intended to stone to death the woman taken in adultery and who asked his views on the matter,

he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one. [John 8:7-9]

With her accusers gone, Jesus declared that neither would he condemn her, and bade her "go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). How significant that those who had zealously sought to inflict punishment on her were "convicted by

their own conscience" in the compassionate presence of he who had been sent not to condemn the world, "but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17)!

These seem to me to be the central principles that the Lord would like us to learn through his instruction and example. I pray that we do not fail to recognize them in the scriptural account, or to subordinate them to any other lesson or conclusion we may wish to add.

I have to share with you, as I finish, a letter received from a special human being you may know or perhaps will know because her story, I am told, is being published. I performed a wedding many years ago. A happy marriage followed, children came, and then one day came the announcement that he didn't want to be at home anymore; he had a male friend he would rather live with. On occasional holidays he was invited back home by this very unusual woman who taught her children that he was part of them, that there were many virtuous and lovely things about him, and that he had given them much. She could not justify the thing he had done or understand his problem. But she could help the children feel a sense of individual worth and value because there was much in them that came from the good in him. He came home to die of AIDS, attended compassionately in their own home among his own family. She wrote this:

Dear Brother Hanks:

I am writing now because I want to let you know that last Thursday [he] passed away here at my home, a victim of AIDS. He had not been well for a year, but in March he was diagnosed with the disease. He made every effort to maintain his strength, but it was not possible. No one recovers. He wanted to be here with us, and I wanted him to be here. I read Walt Whitman to him and played Beethoven for him and told him how much we all loved him and did what I could to make him as comfortable as possible. Last night the children and I and a few close friends

held a private memorial service for him here at my home. It was a wonderful event and we are all able to release him with love. The children will miss [him] a great deal. I will too. He gave a lot to all of us.

Somewhere there is a sense to this. I have been granted a great deal of strength to help me through it, and for that I am grateful.

Then she compliments her choice bishop and stake president and friends and others who have supported and sustained her.

I wake up some mornings remembering her words: “I read Walt Whitman to him and played Beethoven for him.” And sometimes I

say, “Lord, if today I can approach that kind of Christian quality I will be grateful.”

Follow the Christ. Live pure. Speak true. Right wrong. These are expressions of dreams and ambitions that are attainable and desirable and inevitable if one day we want to live the kind of creative, mature life our Father in Heaven and his son live. I bear testimony they do, and that I desire that quality of life, far as I am from it, for me. And, oh, how much I desire it for you and your children and my children and their children, for therein lies happiness—ultimate joy—here and hereafter. This I say in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.