

Keep the Chain Unbroken

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

My dear young friends, it is a great honor to be with you this morning. How very much I love you. How I honor you and respect you. You do great credit to this church. You are not everything you ought to be, but by and large you are very good, and you can become what you ought to be. You are very fortunate to be here. What a blessing to mingle with thousands of your own kind, to establish friendships that will endure, to be engaged in a great and challenging pursuit of knowledge.

This is a marvelous time in the history of the world. How exciting it is to be on the stage of life when one millennium rolls into another. That happens only every thousand years. It has happened only twice since the birth of the Son of God. We speak of this sick old world that has seen so much of tragedy—almost all of it caused by man’s inhumanity to man. It is the result of greed and ambition, of selfishness and brutality.

In the first millennium the world lapsed into an age of darkness. It was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2).

Men did not live long at that time. There was so much of disease, of pestilence, that raged over many parts of the earth. The great plague took the lives of one-third of the people

of Europe. With all of the disease, with wars and conflict, with accidents and hunger and cold so widely prevalent, I sometimes wonder how enough people survived to provide you and me with ancestors. Then the Renaissance began to dawn. It flowered, and I believe it is still flowering with magnificence.

As we close this great and remarkable century, I stand in awe of the blessings we have. I have now lived through 90 years of this century. When I think of the wonders that have come to pass in my lifetime—more than during all the rest of human history together—I stand in reverence and gratitude. I think of the automobile and the airplane, of computers, fax machines, e-mail, and the Internet. It is all so miraculous and wonderful. I think of the giant steps made in medicine and sanitation. I think that all of the great medicines we use, with the possible exception of aspirin, have come forth in this century, including the antibiotics that have healed and made well generations of beneficiaries. When I was born, the life expectancy

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of a man in the United States was 50 years. Today it is more than 75. To think that 25 years have been added to the life of an average man in North America and western Europe is miraculous.

I am led to exclaim with the words to the hymn:

*We are living, we are dwelling
In a grand and awful time,
In an age on ages telling;
To be living is sublime.*

[Arthur Cleveland Coxe, "We Are Living, We Are Dwelling" (1840), in *The Hymnbook* (Richmond: Presbyterian Church in the United States, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and Reformed Church in America, 1955), no. 356]

And with all of this there has been the restoration of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. You and I are a part of the miracle and wonder of this great cause and kingdom that is sweeping over the earth blessing the lives of people wherever it reaches. How profoundly thankful I feel.

No generation that ever walked the earth is as fortunate as are you. I believe that it was of this day that the prophet Joel spoke when he said: "And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28).

We are the beneficiaries of the visions and the dreams, the labors and the sacrifices of all who have gone before us.

They are gone, and we are here.

Recently, at the dedication of the Columbus Temple in Ohio, I had an interesting experience. My wife and daughter were with me. A granddaughter and her husband and children drove up from St. Louis.

As I sat in the celestial room, I thought of my great-grandfather, the first in my family to join the Church. I had recently visited his place of burial in Canada just to the north of the New York boundary line. He accepted the gospel

when the first missionaries came there from Kirtland. His children were too young for baptism. He died at the young age of 38. Tradition has it that he was the victim of a smallpox epidemic that raged through that part of the country. I do not know of anything of significance that he did in the Church other than he kept the faith.

Then there was my grandfather, who was baptized in Nauvoo and who subsequently crossed the plains in the migration of our people. His young wife and his brother-in-law both died on the same day. He made rough coffins and buried them and picked up his infant child and carried her to this valley.

At the request of Brigham Young he built Cove Fort, was the first president of the stake in Fillmore, and did a thousand other things to move this work forward.

Then came my father. He came here to the BY Academy as a very young man and was taught by President Karl G. Maeser. He went east to school, and then he taught here in the business department until the Brethren asked him to move to Salt Lake City and take over responsibilities there. He became president of the largest stake in the Church with more than 15,000 members.

These three good men represent the three generations of my forebears who have been faithful in the Church. Reflecting on the lives of these three men while I was seated in the temple, I looked down at my daughter, at her daughter, who is my grandchild, and at her children, my great-grandchildren. I suddenly realized that I stood right in the middle of these seven generations—three before me and three after me.

In that sacred and hallowed house there passed through my mind a sense of the tremendous obligation that was mine to pass on all that I had received as an inheritance from my forebears to the generations who have now come after me.

I thought of an experience I had long, long ago. In the summer we lived on a farm. We had a little old tractor. There was a dead tree I wished to pull. I fastened one end of a chain to the tractor and the other end to the tree. As the tractor began to move, the tree shook a little, and then the chain broke.

I looked at that broken link and wondered how it could have given way. I went to the hardware store and bought a repair link. I put it together again, but it was an awkward and ugly connection. The chain was never, never the same.

As I sat in the celestial room of the temple pondering these things, I said to myself, "Never permit yourself to become a weak link in the chain of your generations." It is so important that we pass on without a blemish our inheritance of body and brain and, if you please, faith and virtue untarnished to the generations who will come after us.

You young men and you young women, most of you will marry and have children. Your children will have children, as will the children who come after them. Life is a great chain of generations that we in the Church believe must be linked together.

I fear there will be some broken links. Do not let yourself become such, I pray.

Stay close to the Church. Stay close all of your lives. It really does not matter where you serve, what office you fill. There is no small or unimportant duty in this Church and in the kingdom of God.

One does not have to be a General Authority, a stake president, a member of the high council, a bishop, or a leader in the auxiliary organizations to serve in an acceptable way before the Lord. What matters is the spirit in which we serve and the manner in which we apply our talents and our resources.

What is an acceptable offering unto the Lord in terms of our callings? The first requisite, as is noted in the scripture, is cleanliness of hands and heart.

The Psalmist wrote:

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

He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. [Psalm 24:4]

It is not the calling we have, it is not the office in which we serve, but rather the manner in which we serve.

It is the attitude with which we pay our tithes and offerings. Do we pay them begrudgingly as a duty? Or do we give the Lord our offerings with thanksgiving for the opportunity, with a cheerful heart and a pleasant way? Are we inclined to hold to the last penny, or do we add a little on the assumption that we may have forgotten some item that came to us during the year?

When one of our newer temples was being built, I received a letter from a boy who said, "I am eight years old. I am sending \$100 to help build the temple. I do not like to do this. It was very hard to earn. But I want to give this for the construction of the Lord's house."

I later received a phone call from a well-to-do man who said, "I desire to give a million dollars to the construction of that temple." Whose gift was the more acceptable? Both of them were, the boy's \$100 as well as the man's million.

The Lord made it clear that the widow's mite is received with great appreciation because of the spirit in which it is given. But I am satisfied that He also would have thanked the man who was well-to-do for his generosity in giving with that same spirit.

Sometimes men and women in the Church aspire for office. This is unfortunate. It becomes the very reason why they should not be granted such office.

I think of a bishop whom I had to call one day to report that a missionary he had sent into

the field was failing and was determined to come home. The mission president had done all he could with him. The bishop at his own expense in time and money went to the place where the young man was laboring. He talked with him. He cried with him. He prayed with him and blessed him. And then he went out and worked with him. The missionary was saved. He finished honorably. All of his future life will be blessed by reason of the love and kindness of a great bishop.

The other evening I looked at a video a man had sent me. It is the story of his mother. It is titled *Morning Will Come*.

It is the story of Misao Toma, whom I first met on Okinawa almost 30 years ago. She was married not long before the Second World War broke out. During the war she, her husband, and their two little children suffered unspeakable misery. They lived in a cave hiding from the soldiers—both American and Japanese—as that area of the world was devastated with gunfire, cannon fire, and bombs, with tens of thousands of casualties. Her husband suffered a collapse. He wanted to die. He cried out that he wanted to be killed. She felt utterly helpless and broken.

A vision came to her in the night when her family was hungry to the point of death. There came into her being a sense of the reality of God. It gave her strength to carry on. This little woman literally saved her family. She fed them leaves and little creatures from the river. She found a hive of wild honey that revived her husband. After the night of awful darkness the morning came. Somehow they survived.

Two sister missionaries later called on her. Their message touched her heart. She and her husband and their children were eventually baptized. He became the first native branch president on Okinawa. That is when I met them. They were beginning to prosper, had a nice home that had come of their industry, and were faithful and active in the Church. Then the husband suffered a stroke and died. That was

in 1962. Because of the unconscionable actions of another man, she was left with terrible debts for the business and for her husband's medical care.

For long years she worked from 5 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock each night. To get food for her children she asked the grocer to give her the tops, the green leaves, from the bunches of carrots and radishes. Sometimes she would come home and say to her children, "We will sing hymns tonight." That meant to the children that there was no food to eat that night or the next morning.

Her children grew. They received scholarships to the Hawaii campus and later came here to BYU. They served missions. They became involved in business and were highly successful. They wrote to their mother and told her to sell the house and pay the debts and come and live with them. They bought for her a beautiful home in Tokyo.

So far as I know she held no office in the Church except that of a worker in the Tokyo Temple. She may have taught a class or two, but she did not preside over any organization.

Was her offering acceptable to the Lord? She gave her children, having nurtured them in faith with prayer and love. She did whatever she was asked to do.

She died here in Provo three years ago. But today, as I think of her family, I think of her great offering and of its acceptability before the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, as President Clark said: "In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how" (J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *CR*, April 1951, 154). Is there gladness in our hearts and joy in our lives as we reach out to bless others?

At the close of each day can we quietly sing:

Have I done any good in the world today?

Have I helped anyone in need?

Have I cheered up the sad and made someone feel glad?

If not, I have failed indeed.

["Have I Done Any Good?" *Hymns*, 1985,
no. 223]

God bless you, my dear friends. Be faithful.
Be true. Be loyal to the great cause of which you
are a part. Never become a weak link in the
chain of your family's generations. Do what-
ever you are asked to do, and do it with a glad

heart. Do not worry about office or position in
the Church. Simply do whatever your calling
requires, and do it with joy and gladness.

May the Lord bless you as you strive to
serve Him in righteousness and with faith. I
leave my love and my blessing with you in the
name of Jesus Christ, amen.