

“Prophetic Priorities”

RICHARD G. HINCKLEY

I am delighted to be with you this morning. You have just heard that President Samuelson is traveling today. I am disappointed. I had hoped to borrow a blue tie from him for today’s devotional. I actually considered buying one but wasn’t sure I would ever have occasion to use it again! President Samuelson is a great leader, a devoted Latter-day Saint, and a dear friend and colleague in the Seventy. He and I were in undergraduate school together—at the University of Utah. I can assure you that it crossed neither of our minds in those days that he would be the president of Brigham Young University or that I would be speaking to the student body here! How interesting and unpredictable is the course of life.

In discussing this assignment with a trusted friend in the Seventy some time ago, he suggested speaking to the topic of “prophetic priorities.” That thought resonated with me, and I have chosen it as my topic today. This has been the subject of General Authority training for some time now as we try to focus on what the current prophet is teaching and the direction in which he is leading. I am grateful for his suggestion, as it has given me the opportunity to think and to study this theme even more carefully. The citations I will use are those of our current prophet. Other prophets have

also had much to say about these and other priorities, and I commend their teachings to you as well.

There is an interesting line in the movie *Anna and the King*. As our current prophet approaches the end of a long and productive life, think of these words in the context of that life and the impact he has had on the Church and on the world:

It is always surprising how small a part of life is taken up by meaningful moments. Most of them . . . are over before they start, although they cast a light on the future and make the person who originated them unforgettable.¹

Of course there will not be time this morning to discuss with you an exhaustive list of these prophetic priorities. In preparing for this talk I counted well over 30 from President Hinckley’s recent speeches and writings. Rather, I will limit the number discussed to six. I will not attempt to speak of them in any particular order of importance. They are:

Richard G. Hinckley was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 15 May 2007.

1. Temple work and building temples
2. Paying tithing
3. Avoiding unnecessary debt
4. Extending forgiveness to others
5. The family
6. Personal testimony

Before going on to discuss these, however, I would like to make an observation. As I have thought about this subject, it has occurred to me that all of our modern prophets have been optimists. That certainly is true of President Hinckley. Virtually every time he speaks, he leaves us with a sense that the future is bright, and we feel optimism, hope, and the desire to do a little better. He manages to do so even while warning of the dangers and pitfalls that beset us and even while, at times, chastising us.

Everything we do in this Church requires optimism. The building of temples is a sign of great optimism. The creation of new stakes and new missions; the opening of new areas to missionary work; the building of hundreds of meetinghouses every year, year after year; the tremendous humanitarian effort we carry forth; the continued support of this great educational institution—all are signs of great optimism.

And so, what is the role of a prophet? It is to warn the people; it is to preach and teach of the Savior; it is to proclaim the restored gospel to the world; and, yes, it is to continue to lead, build, promote, and encourage personal growth among all of God's children and to establish the Church in all the world in an optimistic way, in spite of and in the face of terrorists, doomsayers, economic ups and downs, wars, and rumors of wars.

I love the optimism in what is said to be an inscription on an old Yorkshire church tablet:

In the year 1652 when through England all things sacred were either profaned or neglected, this church was built by Sir Robert Shirley, . . . whose special praise it is to have done the best of things in the

*worst of times and to have hoped them in the most calamitous.*²

So it is, I have found, with modern-day prophets. They teach, they cajole, they encourage, they warn, they build, they move forward boldly in the best of ways even in the worst of times, and they continue to look forward with faith in the most calamitous.

First: Temple Work and Building Temples

President Hinckley said:

*These unique and wonderful buildings, and the ordinances administered therein, represent the ultimate in our worship. These ordinances become the most profound expressions of our theology. I urge our people everywhere, with all of the persuasiveness of which I am capable, to live worthy to hold a temple recommend, to secure one and regard it as a precious asset, and to make a greater effort to go to the house of the Lord and partake of the spirit and the blessings to be had therein. I am satisfied that every man or woman who goes to the temple in a spirit of sincerity and faith leaves the house of the Lord a better man or woman.*³

We now have 124 operating temples, with several others announced. This is nearly three times the number operating in 1995, when our current prophet became president. I responded to a very rare invitation by my father to accompany him on a journey through Africa in 1998. I was not a General Authority at the time. In Ghana, after examining a proposed temple site in Accra and approving of its purchase, he announced to the 6,000 members gathered in an outdoor meeting that a temple would be built in their land. The response was instant and unexpected. They stood and embraced their neighbors. Many wept and pointed to the ground as if to say, "We will have a temple right here in our homeland." We had been told the day before of a couple who recently had walked 25 kilometers in order to renew their

temple recommends, with no hope ever of seeing a temple. I will never forget my father's response. He said, "We are here to give them hope." I will always remember that experience. That temple was dedicated in January 2004.

I plead with you to be worthy to hold a temple recommend at the time in your lives when it is appropriate, to never let it lapse, and to use it frequently. You will be blessed as a result. How grateful I am for the magnificent blessing of temples.

Second: Paying Tithing

Said our prophet:

I am profoundly grateful for the law of tithing. To me it is a constantly recurring miracle. It is made possible by the faith of the people. It is the Lord's plan for financing the work of His kingdom.

It is so simple and straightforward. It consists of thirty-five words set forth in section 119 of the Doctrine and Covenants. What a contrast with the cumbersome, complex, and difficult tax codes with which we live as citizens.

There is no compulsion to pay tithing, other than the commandment of the Lord, and that, of course, becomes the best of all reasons.⁴

I have a deep testimony of the law of tithing. It has blessed my life. Through observing this law, my faith has increased, my empathy for those in need has deepened, and my appreciation for the Lord's blessings has grown. My testimony is stronger as a result of my observance of this law. I am at a loss to give expression for my gratitude to the Lord for the blessings I attribute to the law of tithing. Don't wait until you think you can afford to pay tithing. There is never a time when you can afford NOT to pay it.

Third: Avoiding Unnecessary Debt

President Hinckley said:

We have been counseled again and again concerning self-reliance, concerning debt, concerning

thrift. So many of our people are heavily in debt for things that are not entirely necessary. When I was a young man, my father counseled me to build a modest home, sufficient for the needs of my family, and make it beautiful and attractive and pleasant and secure. He counseled me to pay off the mortgage as quickly as I could so that, come what may, there would be a roof over the heads of my wife and children. I was reared on that kind of doctrine. I urge you as members of this Church to get free of debt where possible and to have a little laid aside against a rainy day.⁵

When I was 12 years old, my father took me along to look for a new car. Nothing is more exciting for a boy than to shop for a new car with his father. Our car was old and well worn. On the outdoor lot of a car dealer was a brand-new 1953 Plymouth. It was just the ticket, my father thought. A four-door sedan at a reasonable price. After some rather intense negotiating, my father said, "Would you take \$1,600 cash?" I was stunned. I didn't think anyone in the world had that much money, let alone my father! The offer was accepted, and that car served us well until I returned from my mission over nine years later. When I turned 16, I learned to drive in that car.

A few years ago, my father reminisced about that car over lunch.

"That old Plymouth was a great car," he said.

I reminded him that one of my friend's fathers bought two cars in 1957, just four years after we had acquired the '53 Plymouth—one was a Plymouth Fury, the other a Studebaker Golden Hawk. You're too young to remember those speedsters. Both had big V-8 engines and were built to be fast! My friends and I took measure of a car in those days by just how fast it would go over Parley's Summit, a long climb to a high point on the four-lane highway east of Salt Lake City.

"Both of my friend's cars could do 100 miles an hour over that summit," I said, making

sure my father understood that my friend had reported that to me and that I was not present to witness it.

Curiosity finally got the best of him. “What about the old Plymouth?” he said.

“Thirty-seven,” I reported, “in second gear.”

“Still, it was a wonderful car,” he said.

“It was a flathead six,” I complained. “It had no radio, no air-conditioning, no power windows, no power brakes, no power steering, no power seats, no power.”

“It never broke,” he said.

“It couldn’t,” I said. “It had no moving parts!”

“You didn’t suffer a bit,” he said. “And it was paid for.”

He had me. I hadn’t suffered, and I knew it was paid for because I had been there when he bought it and had watched him write out the check for \$1,684, including taxes and license.

Be careful with your finances, my dear young friends. You don’t need the finest car or truck, the latest iPod, a big flat-screen television, or the latest laptop to be productive and happy. You will be happy when you can comfortably meet your obligations and put a roof over your head and feed your families.

Fourth: Extending Forgiveness to Others

Said President Hinckley:

I think [forgiveness] may be the greatest virtue on earth, and certainly the most needed. There is so much of meanness and abuse, of intolerance and hatred. There is so great a need for repentance and forgiveness. It is the great principle emphasized in all of scripture, both ancient and modern. . . .

There are so many in our day who are unwilling to forgive and forget. Children cry and wives weep because fathers and husbands continue to bring up little shortcomings that are really of no importance. And there also are many women who would make a mountain out of every little offending molehill of word or deed. . . .

. . . Somehow forgiveness, with love and tolerance, accomplishes miracles that can happen in no other way.

The great Atonement was the supreme act of forgiveness. The magnitude of that Atonement is beyond our ability to completely understand. I know only that it happened, and that it was for me and for you. The suffering was so great, the agony so intense, that none of us can comprehend it when the Savior offered Himself as a ransom for the sins of all mankind.⁶

A number of years ago I read a little book first published in 1953. It is called *Too Late the Phalarope* and was written by Alan Paton, the author of *Cry, the Beloved Country*. As with the latter book, it is set in South Africa. It relates the story of a young husband and father of Afrikaans descent who commits a terrible indiscretion. He humiliates himself, disgraces his community, and brings shame to his family. He serves time in prison. His aunt longs for his family and others to forgive him and to begin the process of healing from their deep and mortifying wounds. The book contains some poignant passages regarding forgiveness. Here are two:

“There’s a hard law . . . that when a deep injury is done to us, we never recover until we forgive.”⁷

“[Would that men could] have turned to the holy task of pardon, that the body of the Lord might not be wounded twice, and virtue come of our offences.”⁸

I pray that you will cultivate the ability—the gift—to forgive, to let go, to put offense behind you. It may be difficult, but it is necessary. The Lord Himself commanded us to forgive seventy times seven. And He further said: “For he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.”⁹ If there exists fracture within your family or with a friend, pray, work, mend, and seek the faith

and strength to forgive. Joy, relief, peace, and happiness will be your reward.

Fifth: The Family

In 1995 the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles issued “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” It is bold and unequivocal. When President Hinckley announced this proclamation, he said:

With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn and forewarn. In furtherance of this we of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles now issue a proclamation to the Church and to the world as a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this church have repeatedly stated throughout its history. . . .

We commend to all a careful, thoughtful, and prayerful reading of this proclamation. The strength of any nation is rooted within the walls of its homes. We urge our people everywhere to strengthen their families in conformity with these time-honored values.¹⁰

There can be no mistake as to where the prophet of God stands regarding families. Many of you are married, many not yet. When I think of my own parents—father and mother, man and wife—I sometimes think of the words of Shakespeare found in act 2, scene 1, of *King John*:

*He is the half part of a blessèd man,
Left to be finished by such a she;
And she a fair divided excellence,
Whose fullness of perfection lies in him.¹¹*

I like to think that Shakespeare borrowed that idea from what Paul wrote to the Saints in Corinth: “Nevertheless neither is the man with-

out the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”¹²

I know marriage and family can be a sensitive subject on this campus. Those of you here, particularly you men who are of sufficient age, have received a great deal of counsel on the subject of dating, courtship, and marriage. Fortunately for you, I do not have time to add to that counsel, only to endorse it and encourage you. I had an experience in connection with the passing of my mother three years ago that affirmed in my heart and soul the grand and magnificent principle of the eternal nature of marriage and of families. It left a deep and lasting impression on my soul, sweet and tender and powerful, for which I will ever be grateful to a loving Father in Heaven.

Sixth: Personal Testimony

President Hinckley has repeatedly counseled and urged each of us to work to obtain our own testimony and to live by it. I quote his words:

The marvelous and wonderful thing is that any individual who desires to know the truth may receive that conviction. . . .

It will take study of the word of God. It will take prayer and anxious seeking of the source of all truth. It will take living the gospel, an experiment, if you please, in following the teachings. I do not hesitate to promise, because I know from personal experience, that out of all of this will come, by the power of the Holy Ghost, a conviction, a testimony, a certain knowledge.¹³

I will repeat the essence of what I told the students at Ricks College in a talk I gave there six and a half years ago.

Some of you struggle with certain doctrines or practices of the Church, past or present; they just don’t quite seem to fit for you. I say, so what? That’s okay. You’re still young. *Be patient, but be persistent.* Keep studying them, thinking about them, and praying about them. Everyone

has questions. I suppose even the prophets themselves had and have some questions. But don't throw away the jewels you do have in the meantime. Hold on to them; build on them.

Did you know that the two greatest intellectual achievements of the first half of the last century, the general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, are in some points in conflict with each other? They cannot both be right in every detail. These are not my words but the words of Stephen Hawking, the great British physicist. Yet scientists rely on both of these theories every day to advance scientific knowledge, knowing that someday the differences will be understood, reconciled, and corrected.

So it is with the gospel and our testimonies, yours and mine. This is not to suggest that the gospel is imperfect, but our understanding of it sometimes is. Like the scientist who uses relativity and quantum mechanics, we do not discard the gospel or our testimony because not every piece "fits" today. Years ago a Church leader used the following metaphor: Have you ever watched a stonemason build a rock wall? He will sometimes pick up a rock that just does not fit anywhere in the niches in the wall. But does he abandon the wall and walk away? No, he simply sets the rock aside and keeps building until a niche appears where it fits and then proceeds until the wall is finished. So perhaps should we temporarily set aside questions that we continue to struggle with and that we cannot quite seem to answer today, having faith that at sometime in the future a niche will appear in the rock wall of our testimony where they fit perfectly. Don't abandon the rock wall of your testimony because one or two rocks don't seem to fit. That has been my personal experience.

Temples and temple work, tithing, avoiding unnecessary debt, forgiveness, family, personal testimony—these are but a few of the priorities of our current prophet. I encourage you to pay close attention to them and to incorpo-

rate them into your lives so as to experience the blessings that will flow from adherence to them. These are difficult and trying times. It would be easy to become discouraged as we look to the future. But remember the optimism of the prophet, which is real and palpable, and remember that, as was the case with Sir Robert Shirley, it is President Hinckley "whose special praise it is to [do] the best of things in the worst of times and to [hope] them in the most calamitous."

I bear testimony of the truthfulness of these things. I bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, the only Begotten Son of God in the flesh, who lives and who leads this church with a sure and divine hand, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Narration of Prince Chulalongkorn, *Anna and the King* (1999).
2. Edward Callan, introduction to Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (New York: Scribner, 1987), 30.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship," *Ensign*, November 1995, 53.
4. Hinckley, "Of Missions," 53–54.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," *Ensign*, November 2001, 73.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Forgiveness," *Ensign*, November 2005, 81–82, 83, 84.
7. Alan Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995), 278.
8. Paton, *Too Late*, 284.
9. D&C 64:9.
10. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Stand Strong Against the Wiles of the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 100, 101.
11. William Shakespeare, *King John*, act 2, scene 1, lines 437–40.
12. 1 Corinthians 11:11; emphasis added.
13. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Faith: The Essence of True Religion," *Ensign*, November 1981, 8.