

# *A Time to Choose*

THOMAS S. MONSON

**M**y brothers and sisters, I am pleased to have this opportunity to be with you on this occasion here in the Marriott Center.

As I look at you my thoughts turn to your parents. Each week it is my opportunity to be in the home of a stake president, or a counselor to a stake president; and it's interesting, as we visit with them, when they have a son or a daughter at Brigham Young, that invariably the conversation will turn to the most important thing in their lives, namely you. It is a marvelous opportunity for me to let them know of the activities which you pursue here at Brigham Young University, the fellowship which is yours, and the opportunities which come your way. Sometimes rather interesting things occur when we stay in the homes of your parents far from here. We've had situations where a tiny brother or sister, not knowing that mother and dad have given their bedroom and their bed to the General Authority, will creep into the bedroom early in the morning and think that he or she is crawling into the bed with mother and father, only to find that such is not the case, but that next to the little one is a General Authority of the Church. But we don't mind; it's just as if we were home.

On one occasion while visiting the Indianapolis Stake, I remember President Low, who is with Purdue University there, saying to

me, "Brother Monson, would you like to come out to my home and stay with us, or would you prefer to forgo that forty-mile drive and stay here with my counselor in Indianapolis?"

I responded, "Well, President Low, it's late at night, and if it's all the same to you I'll stay with your counselor here in Indianapolis."

The next morning President Low greeted me at eight o'clock and said, "Elder Monson, you made an inspired decision."

I said, "How's that?"

He replied, "Well, we have a son away at Brigham Young University, and our anticipation was that we, of course, would have you occupy our bedroom on Saturday evening. But unknown to us, and totally unexpectedly, our son returned from Brigham Young University at two in the morning, came in the front door, walked up the stairs to our bedroom, turned on the light, and yelled, 'Surprise!'" I don't know who would have been more surprised on that occasion, the Brigham Young University student or Elder Monson. We love you, and that's why I am here today.

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*Thomas S. Monson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this address was given at Brigham Young University on 16 January 1973.*

### New Year's Resolutions

As I left our driveway early this morning, I noticed a remnant of Christmas: the old Christmas tree, on its side, awaiting its final journey to the incinerator. Gone was the tinsel; carefully tucked away in boxes awaiting next year were the trimmings; and Christmas and 1972 had departed. I looked at the tree and thought to myself, "We are in a new year: 1973. We are in a new semester here at Brigham Young University. Isn't this a most appropriate time to refer to Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, and read what he had to say about the times in our lives and the events that take place?"

In the third chapter of Ecclesiastes we read:

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

*A time to be born, and a time to die;...*

*A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. [Eccles. 3:1-2, 4]*

And I would add: a time to choose. There is no better time in all the world to make important choices than at the beginning of a new semester, and particularly at the beginning of a new year, for we literally become the product of our choices. Our choices determine our destiny.

I thought today of the words of William C. Clegg, the poet, writer of a song which we so frequently sing:

*Know this, that every soul is free  
To choose his life and what he'll be,  
For this eternal truth is given  
That God will force no man to heaven.*

*He'll call, persuade, direct aright,  
And bless with wisdom, love, and light,  
In nameless ways be good and kind,  
But never force the human mind.*

We have the opportunity to choose. I think an awareness of this truth prompted Ella Wheeler Wilcox to pen the lines:

*One ship drives east, and another west,  
With the self-same winds that blow.  
'Tis the set of the sail, and not the gale,  
Which tells us the way to go.*

*Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate,  
As we journey along through life;  
'Tis the set of the soul that decides the goal,  
And not the calm or the strife.*

We can choose our future.

I made a few resolutions at the commencement of this new year. I'd like to share them with you, hoping that you, too, will join in making the same choices, the same resolutions.

First in 1973, *I will listen*. Second, *I will learn*. Third, *I will labor*. And fourth, *I will love*. Four words beginning with the letter *l*, but four words which can well determine our destiny.

### Listen

When it comes to listening, and my promise to be a listener, and your promise to be a listener, I would hope that you would listen to your mother and listen to your father, each of whom is upon his or her knees each morning and each evening, praying for you, asking our Heavenly Father to watch over you and to guide you in your selections, to be cautious, as it were, in your conduct, and to generally be, as it were, a parent in their absence. I believe that when we recognize our parents and the fact that they are concerned for you and for me, then we honor them, and the words echoing from Mount Sinai have a personal meaning: "Honor thy father and thy mother."

I trust that we will listen to the words of the prophets, and particularly the counsel and the advice of our prophet, seer, and revelator, President Harold B. Lee. I hope also that we will listen to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit. I promise you that if we have an ear attuned to the Holy Spirit, if there is a desire for righteousness within our heart, and our conduct

reflects that desire, we shall be guided by that Holy Spirit.

Just at Christmastime, for example, I was returning home from an activity. I drove on a street that I very seldom travel. As I proceeded eastward on California Avenue, I happened to think, "In one of these houses there resides a family that lived in our ward when I was bishop, long years ago. I wonder how Sister Thomas is getting along." I drove right on by, hurriedly anticipating my next appointment. But then the Spirit seemed to indicate to me, "Why don't you go back, Brother Monson, and find out how Sister Thomas is getting along?" I turned the car around, found the house, pulled into the driveway, and knocked at the door. No one answered. I knocked again. Still no answer. I returned to the automobile and began to back out onto the street, when someone appeared at the doorway. I walked over to the doorway, and there I beheld a lovely, silver-haired woman with whom I had served in the MIA years before, Sister Zella Thomas. I extended my hand and said, "Sister Thomas, it is good to see you. How are you?" her hand seemed to grope for mine.

She said, "I know the voice, but I can't see you. I'm blind."

Only then did I appreciate why the Lord had directed me to bring a Christmas greeting to this sweet friend of years ago and to her family. As I talked to her and to her family members, I found that on that particular day she happened to be remembering the anniversary of the death of her eldest daughter. She particularly needed comfort from a source known as the priesthood of God. I hope that I shall ever listen for the whisperings of that Holy Spirit, that not only at Christmastime but during each day of the year you and I may have the opportunity to respond to these promptings and the directional influence of our Heavenly Father. Therefore, I promise to *listen*.

### Learn

Number two, *I will learn*. It isn't enough simply to listen if we don't learn. I make a pledge that I will learn more from the scriptures and, hopefully, that you too will have that privilege. Wouldn't it be marvelous if we could take into our hearts that counsel from the Lord, "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). Let us learn from the standard works, but let us also learn from the lives of our Presidency of the Church and the lives of those who are closest to us. For example, I believe that I can learn patience by better studying the life of our Lord and Savior. Can you imagine the disappointment which he must have felt, knowing that he had the keys to eternal life, knowing that he had the way for you and for me to gain entrance into the celestial kingdom of God, as he took his gospel to those people in the meridian of time and saw them reject him and reject his message? Yet he demonstrated patience. He accepted his responsibility in life, even to the cross, the Garden of Gethsemane preceding it. I would hope to learn patience from the Lord.

Next I would hope to learn the principle of acceptance. And I would learn that from President Hugh B. Brown, a man who on many occasions has spoken to you here, a man who for seven years has said good-bye to his sweetheart each morning, as she has been confined to her bed, paralyzed from a stroke. And yet he is encouraged by her example. She'll whisper good-bye; she'll whisper hello; but that's about the extent of what Sister Brown can say. As I see that loyal husband and father say good-bye to his wife and speak of her, I think of the time when he and I came to Brigham Young University a few years ago, when I was to give a commencement message. As we left President Brown's home, and he entered the car, he said, "Before we leave, wait a moment." He took from his pocket a handkerchief, and he waved it out the window of the car. I looked

toward the home and saw Sister Brown, sitting in a wheelchair in front of the window, waving her handkerchief back. He said, “Now we can go.”

I said, “No, President Brown, I want to know what’s all this about the waving of the handkerchief?”

He said, “From the first day we were married, when I heard a rap at the window as I walked down the pathway and turned and saw Sister Brown waving a handkerchief, I fumbled around and found one and waved back, and that has been a sign between the two of us that everything would be all right until we were together again that evening.” What a beautiful lesson from which I might learn an important principle in life.

I believe that I could learn other lessons. From President N. Eldon Tanner I could learn loyalty. Here is a leader, a man who is integrity through and through, a man who has the capacity to be a true counselor as he was to President McKay, a true counselor to President Smith, and today a true counselor to President Harold B. Lee—unyielding, undeviating, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. I would learn that lesson from President Tanner.

I would learn from President Marion G. Romney a lesson of tenacity. Here is one who clings to truth, who clings to duty, who clings to the word of the Lord. Nothing can shake him. We could well profit from his example.

From President Spencer W. Kimball I would learn cheerfulness. I would learn devotion to duty. A man who has undergone major surgery, who has undergone serious treatments relative to another illness, and yet a man with whom I have been in session already this morning, in the fulfillment of his responsibility as chairman of the Missionary Executive Committee. He does not let anything stand between him and the performance of his task.

These are lessons which I hope to learn by emulating my brethren. I offer the same to you

and would urge that you join me, in 1973, with a pledge, *I will learn*.

### Labor

Then, number three, *I will labor*. It’s not enough to wish, it’s not enough to dream, it’s not enough to promise, it’s not enough to pledge. Literally, we must do. The Lord said: “He that thrusteth in his sickle *with his might* . . . layeth up in store that he perisheth not” (D&C 4:4; italics added). And Nephi declared, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded” (1 Ne. 3:7). It was James who summed up this lesson: “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

No better example of laboring in the vineyard of God can be found than Elder LeGrand Richards, a special person in the hearts of all of the Latter-day Saints everywhere. I know of no personality in the Twelve who is more genuinely loved, no spirit more sweet, no service more sacred than that offered and rendered by LeGrand Richards. Did you know, for example, that there is never a day when Elder Richards is free from pain, that his hip bothers him constantly? Did you know that he’s excused from kneeling in our prayers but never accepts the excuse, that he kneels right with everyone else, although one can tell from his face that it brings him physical pain? And then, at the conclusion of the prayer, one will be on one side and one of us on the other, and we’ll lift him to his feet, and he’ll thank us. Each week he’s out to a conference in the far reaches of the Church, building and lifting, obedient to the counsel of the apostle Peter. “Be ready always,” said he, “to give . . . every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).

How many people can trace their membership in the Church to an introduction from Elder LeGrand Richards, particularly through that classic of his, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. Earlier this summer, for example, I had a weekend free. Yet the Spirit prompted me to

fulfill a responsibility. I boarded the plane for San Francisco, and there met with our branch of single people in San Francisco, and then boarded the plane to go to Los Angeles, where I might have the opportunity to meet with our young adult leadership in the southern California area. As I sat down, the seat next to me was empty. However, there occupied that seat eventually a most beautiful young lady. I noted that she was reading a book. As one is wont to do, I glanced at the title: *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. I said to her, “Oh, you must be a Mormon.”

She responded, “Oh, no. Why would you ask?”

I replied: “Well, you’re reading a book written by a very prominent member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

She said, “Is that right? A friend gave this to me, but I don’t know much about it. However, it has aroused my curiosity.”

Then I wondered. Should I be forward and say more about the Church? And the words of Peter came again, to be ready at all times. And I decided that this was the time when I should bear my testimony. I told her that it was my privilege years ago to have assisted Elder Richards in printing *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. I told her of this great man. I told her of the many thousands of people who had embraced the truth after reading that which he had prepared. Then it was my privilege, all the way to Los Angeles, to answer her questions relative to the Church—intelligent questions, that came from a heart which was seeking the truth. I asked if I might have the opportunity to have missionaries call upon her. I asked if she would like to attend our branch in San Francisco. Her answers were affirmative. Upon returning home I wrote to President Irvn G. Derrick of the San Francisco Stake and passed along to him this information. Can you imagine my delight when, about a month ago, I received a call from President Derrick, in which he said, “Elder Monson, I thought

you would like to know that today Yvonne Ramirez, a stewardess with United Airlines, a young lady who sat next to you from San Francisco to Los Angeles, a young lady to whom you said that it was not coincidence that you sat next to her and that she was reading *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* on that trip, has become the newest member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” I was overjoyed.

I realize that I have a responsibility to *labor*.

### Love

And then that final pledge: *I will love*. Do you remember the answer which the Savior gave to the inquiring lawyer who asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

And he replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:36–39).

It was Shakespeare who wrote, “They do not love who do not show their love.” How might you and I demonstrate our love for God and love for our fellowmen? Through obedience to God’s commands and the counsel of his servants. We have the privilege to obey the law of tithing, to obey the code of morality, to obey in each facet of our lives the word of our Heavenly Father.

There is a poem, a very beautiful classic—it’s almost a song—“How do I love thee?” I won’t attempt to provide that illustration today, but choose instead to recall the Primary lesson of long ago, even a verse which is more my style and closer to my heart:

*“I love you, Mother,” said little John;  
Then forgetting his work, his cap went on,  
And he was off to the garden swing,  
Leaving Mother the wood and the water to bring.*

*I love you, Mother," said rosy Nell,  
"I love you more than words can tell."  
So she teased and she pouted half the day,  
Till Mother rejoiced when she went to play.*

*"I love you, Mother," said little Fan,  
"Today I'll help you all I can.  
How glad I am that school doesn't keep."  
So she rocked the baby till he fell asleep.*

*Then stepping softly, she fetched the broom,  
Swept the floor, tidied the room.  
Busy and happy all day was she,  
Busy and happy as a child could be.*

*"I love you, Mother," again they said,  
Three little children going to bed.  
Now how do you think that mother guessed  
Which of them really loved her best?*

Our Heavenly Father can appreciate our love for him by how well we serve him and how well we serve our fellowmen.

### **By Love Serve One Another**

Four pledges for the new year: *I will listen, I will learn, I will labor, I will love.* As we fulfill these pledges, we can have the guidance of our Heavenly Father and in our own lives experience true joy. Now, I don't simply mean that we should make a wish, or that we should dream a dream, but rather determine to do that which we pledge to accomplish. We can, if we will. It was Henry Ford, the industrialist, who declared, "Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can't, you're right." Now, shall we go forward with such resolutions? Can we change our practices if such need changing? I declare that we can.

For an example, may I refer to an experience which I heard a friend relate to me and to a public audience some years ago. He was talking about his boyhood. "My," he said, "my twin brother and I had a boyhood filled with difficulty. We had a lovely mother and we had

a fine father, but he had become addicted to drink. It was frequently our task to go to the saloon on Saturday night, at mother's bidding, and bring father home. It was sad." My friend continued: "On one occasion, my twin brother and I were celebrating our thirteenth birthday. We had invited our playmates to our home for a party and were playing games and enjoying the day when in stumbled father, dead drunk. He looked at us. Our embarrassed friends fled from the room. Mother had a pained expression upon her face. We said some unkind things to our father. 'Can't you stay sober, Dad? Even on our birthday?'" That young man stated, "My father turned to me and to my twin brother and said, 'Boys, I'm sorry. I promise you I shall never touch another drop of liquor.'"

The same old story, the same old tune, and into the bedroom he went. The boys complained to their mother. They were harsh in their attitude toward Dad. But that wonderful mother said to them, "Boys, your father holds the priesthood, and one day he will honor it. So I ask that you honor him."

The young man declared, "My father was true to his word. Never again did he touch liquor. He became the kindest and most considerate father twin boys could ever have. And oh the joy this change in Dad brought to our mother!" That father passed away some time ago, but that mother, who had the ability to inspire within her twin sons that a man's word can be his bond when he really means it, had the privilege to see each of those twin sons called to serve as a mission president in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I testify today that when the Savior spoke those words recorded in Revelation he was giving you and me counsel to help us be true to our pledge this new year. Remember his words? "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him" (Rev. 3:20). My prayer today is that we will have listening ears,

that we might in turn hear his knock, appreciate the invitation of our Lord, and have the wisdom to open wide the doorway to our heart and the portals to our mind, that Jesus Christ might come in unto us. Shall we make room for him in our hearts? Shall we provide time for him in our lives? Once again the choice is yours, and the choice is mine, remembering that our choices, our decisions, determine our destiny.

God bless you in your new semester, bless you in every part of your lives. I leave with you my testimony that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that our Heavenly Father hears your prayers, that he will guide you in your determination to serve him and keep his commandments *as you listen, as you learn, as you labor, and as you love.*

I declare that we are led by a prophet of God, even President Harold B. Lee, a man from whom we can learn important lessons, a man who teaches all of us the beautiful les-

son of humility. When we see President Lee stand and hear him say to the membership of the Church and to people everywhere, "I am not the head of the Church. I am sustained as President, but the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Jesus Christ the Lord; and I shall attempt to so live that he can direct the Church through his prophet," I am grateful for the humility and for the leadership of God's prophet, seer, and revelator, President Harold B. Lee.

I thank my Heavenly Father too for the privilege which has been mine today to have by my side here on the stand my sweetheart, even my wife, who brings me joy, to have by her my mother, who gave me birth and taught me in those tender years, and our daughter, who is representative of each of you here today, a student at Brigham Young University. I express my gratitude to the Lord and to our Heavenly Father and ask our Father's blessing to be with each of you. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.