

Be a Light to the World

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What a glorious sight you are! It's an honor, my young friends, to be here with you. I feel the tremendous weight of the responsibility which is mine to provide you with a message which will hopefully be helpful to you not only for today but, indeed, throughout your lives.

As I gaze at this vast audience, I'm reminded that each of you is one of a kind. Each has had experiences unique to you and you alone. You have come to Brigham Young University from locations across the country and the world. You come from varied backgrounds. And yet there is much that we have in common one with another. We know where we came from, why we are here, and where we will go when we leave this life. We know that we are children of our Heavenly Father and that He loves us. We know we want to return to Him after we leave this earthly existence. We know that what we do—and don't do—here in mortality is of utmost importance. We also know that, should we fall short, our Savior has provided us with the precious gift of the Atonement and that, if we change our lives and our hearts and take advantage of the power of the Atonement, our sins and shortcomings will be forgiven and forgotten.

We have in common the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we know it is our responsibility to share the truths of the gospel with others. One of the chief ways in which we can share the gospel is to be a righteous example, and it is about this that I wish to speak to you today. The Apostle Paul admonished, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."¹ He also wrote that the followers of Christ should be "as lights in the world."²

This is what I would hope for each of us—that we might be a light to the world.

What is light? Webster's dictionary lists no less than fifteen definitions for the noun *light*. I prefer the simple "something that illuminates." Just as turning on a light switch in a dark room will bathe the room in light, so providing an example of righteousness—and therefore being a light—can help to illuminate an increasingly dark world.

Each of us came to earth having been given the Light of Christ. Said President Harold B. Lee:

Thomas S. Monson was president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 1 November 2011.

Every soul who walks the earth, wherever he lives, in whatever nation he may have been born, no matter whether he be in riches or in poverty, had at birth an endowment of that first light which is called the Light of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, or the Spirit of God—that universal light of intelligence with which every soul is blessed. Moroni spoke of [that light,] that Spirit when he said:

“For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.” (Moroni 7:16.)³

Unfortunately, for many that light with which all were endowed at birth has dimmed—in some cases almost to the point of being extinguished—as outside influences have come to bear and the sometimes harsh realities of life have been experienced. Ours is the responsibility to keep our lights aflame and burning brightly, that they might shine for others to see and follow.

With the decline of religion in our society, many people have come to feel that they are sufficient unto themselves and have no need of a higher power. Wrong. A loss of religious faith implies a loss of faith in anyone greater than oneself.

In 2 Nephi we read these words, so pertinent today:

O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.⁴

It can at times be easy to fall into the erroneous thinking that we ourselves are capable of handling anything that comes our way, that we have all the answers, and that there is no

need for assistance from a higher power. When we realize, as one person put it, that “we are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience,”⁵ we come to understand where our main emphasis should be and on whom we are reliant.

In order for us to be examples of the believers, we ourselves must believe. I would think that each of us within the sound of my voice has a testimony, although our testimonies are no doubt of varying degrees. It is up to each of us to develop the faith necessary to survive spiritually and to project a light for others to see. Amidst the confusion of our age, the conflicts of conscience, and the turmoil of daily living, an abiding faith becomes an anchor to our lives. Remember that faith and doubt cannot exist in the same mind at the same time, for one will dispel the other. Among the most effective ways to gain and keep the faith we need would be to read and study the scriptures and to pray frequently and consistently.

Many years ago I was shown the flyleaf of a triple combination given to the late Maurine Lee Wilkins by her father, President Harold B. Lee. He had inscribed it with these words:

April 9, 1944—To my dear Maurine: That you may have a constant measure by which to judge between truth and the errors of man’s philosophies, and thus grow in spirituality as you increase in knowledge, I give you this sacred book to read frequently and cherish throughout your life. Lovingly, your father, Harold B. Lee

Wise words which can apply to each of us.

Brothers and sisters, have you read the Book of Mormon? Have you put to the test the promise found in Moroni 10:4, asking your Heavenly Father “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” whether or not that which is found in that book is truth?

May I share with you the experience of Brother Clayton M. Christensen as he sought

to know for himself. Brother Christensen has served in many positions of leadership in the Church, including as an Area Seventy. He has received far too many academic awards for me to mention here. He is currently the Robert and Jane Cizik Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School. He is also an alumnus of Brigham Young University, and I believe his son Spencer and daughter Catherine are currently students here.

When Brother Christensen finished his schooling at Brigham Young University, he received a scholarship to go to Oxford University in England as a Rhodes Scholar. When he arrived at Oxford, he realized that it would be somewhat challenging to be an active member of the Church in Oxford. The Rhodes Scholarship Trust that had given him his scholarship had a lot of activities for the recipients of the scholarship, and if he were going to be active in the Church, it would be difficult for him to participate in those activities. He intended to obtain in just two years a degree in applied econometrics—a program which took most students three years to complete. This, of course, added to his lack of extra time. He realized, as he thought through how involved in the Church he could be, that he didn't even know for certain if the Book of Mormon was true. He realized that he had read the Book of Mormon seven times up to that point, and that after each of those seven times he had knelt in prayer and had asked God to tell him if it was true. He had received no answer. As he thought through why he hadn't received an answer, he realized that each time he had read the Book of Mormon it was because of an assignment—either from his parents or a BYU instructor or his mission president or a seminary teacher—and his chief objective had been to finish the book. But now, as he was about to commence his studies at Oxford, he realized that he desperately needed to know if the Book of Mormon was true.

He recognized as well that he had sustained himself on a belief in many of the doctrines of the Church and in his parents because he knew they knew it was true, and he trusted his parents. Here he was, however, desperately needing to know for himself if it was true.

Oxford University is one of the world's oldest universities. The building Brother Christensen lived in was built in 1410 and was beautiful to look at but horrible to live in. The only heat which was provided was from a small heater inserted into a hole which had been dug in the wall. He decided that he would commit every evening from 11 p.m. to 12 midnight to reading the Book of Mormon—this time with the purpose of determining if it was true. He wondered if he dared spend an entire hour each night, because he was in a very demanding academic program and he just didn't know if he could afford allocating such an amount of time to this effort. Nevertheless, he *did* allocate the time, and he began at 11 p.m. by kneeling in prayer by the chair by his little heater, and he prayed out loud. He told God how desperate he was to find out if this was a true book, and he told Him that if He would reveal to him that it was true, then he intended to dedicate his life to building this kingdom. And he told God that if it wasn't true, he needed to know that for certain, too, because then he would dedicate his life to finding out what *was* true. Then Brother Christensen would sit in the chair and read. He began by reading the first page of the Book of Mormon, and when he got down to the bottom of the page, he stopped, and he thought about what he had read on that page, and he asked himself, "Could this have been written by a charlatan who was trying to deceive people, or was this really written by a prophet of God?" And he asked himself what did it mean for Clayton Christensen in his life? And then he put the book down and knelt in prayer and verbally asked God again, "Please tell me if this is a true book." Then he would sit in the

chair and pick up the book and turn the page and read another page, pause at the bottom, and do the same thing. He did this for an hour every night—night after night—in that cold, damp room at the Queen’s College in Oxford.

By the time Brother Christensen got to the chapters at the end of 2 Nephi, one evening when he said his prayer and sat in his chair and opened the book, all of a sudden there came into that room a beautiful, warm, loving spirit that just surrounded him and permeated his soul and enveloped him in a feeling of love that he had not imagined he could feel. He began to cry, and he didn’t want to stop crying because as he looked through his tears at the words in the Book of Mormon, he could see truth in those words that he never imagined he could comprehend before. He could see the glories of eternity and what God had in store for him as one of His sons. That spirit stayed with him for the whole hour, and then every evening as he prayed and sat with the Book of Mormon by the little heater in his room, that same spirit returned, and it changed his heart and his life forever.

President Ezra Taft Benson, thirteenth president of the Church, said, “When you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed. . . . The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature . . . , and changed men [and women] can change the world.”⁶

Brother Christensen has indicated that he loves to return to Oxford. Most of the people there are either students or tourists who have come to look at a beautiful university. But he loves to return there because it’s a sacred place to him, and he can look at the windows of that room where he lived, and he recognizes it as the place where he learned that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph Smith was the prophet of the restoration for the true church.

Brother Christensen has stated that he looks back at the conflict he experienced when he wondered if he could afford to spend

an hour every day apart from the study of applied econometrics to find out if the Book of Mormon was true. He said, “I use applied econometrics maybe once a year, but I use my knowledge that the Book of Mormon is the word of God many times every day of my life. In all of the education that I have pursued, that is the single most useful piece of knowledge that I ever gained.”⁷

Brothers and sisters, many of you probably came to Brigham Young University already knowing that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is indeed a prophet, and that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ. Some of you, however, may still be living on the testimony of others—your parents, your friends, your Church leaders. May I suggest that, as Brother Christensen did, you set aside time every day to find out for yourself if the Book of Mormon is a true book, for it will change your heart and change your life. If you seek this knowledge “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ,”⁸ I promise that you will receive an answer. And once you know that the Book of Mormon is true, then it will follow that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. You will have that burning testimony and knowledge that this church is true.

Such knowledge, such a personal testimony, is essential if we are to safely navigate the sometimes treacherous paths through life with the adversary attempting to deceive us at every turn. As you keep the flame of testimony burning brightly, you will become a beacon of righteousness—even a light—for all to see. Said the Savior: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”⁹

I share with you an example of two individuals who let their lights shine and whose good works were recognized and appreciated. Several years ago I received a letter from a lady whom I did not know but who chose me, for whatever reason, to write to concerning the example of two members of the

Church who had had an influence for good in her life.

Her letter began, “Dear President Monson,” and then she wrote:

I would like to commend two of your church members for their extraordinary compassion and faith. I am a practicing Catholic and grew up in Salt Lake City. Oftentimes, as a youth, I remember feeling ostracized by the other children who lived on our block because I was not a member of the LDS Church. I must admit that this impression has stuck with me for many years, until my encounter with Rick and Dan McIntosh. Last year my sister’s husband, Tom Brown, was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and was given one year to live. He passed away last week. Of course neither my sister nor her husband are members of your church. For the past year, Rick, who is the bishop of the ward close to my sister, and Dan have spent countless hours with my sister and her family. They have prayed numerous times for Tom, and their wives have brought food to the house. They shoveled the walks in the winter. And each time they have come they have asked my sister if there was anything she needed or that they could do. And they meant it. It was not important to them that my family was not LDS. Tom was their neighbor and their friend, and they were there to do whatever they could to help. These two men truly live their faith, and I felt deeply moved by their compassion and example. From one who used to indulge in Mormon bashing, I am writing this letter to tell you that through the example of these two men, not only will I never again criticize the LDS faith, but I will not allow it to be criticized in front of me. Your church has my deepest respect.

Our opportunities to shine are limitless. They surround us each day, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. As we follow the example of the Savior, ours will be the opportunity to be a light, as it were, in the lives of those around us—whether they be our own family members, our coworkers, mere acquaintances, or total strangers.

It has been my opportunity through the years to associate with countless individuals who I would consider to be outstanding examples, even lights to the world. There is a special spirit we feel around such people which makes us want to associate with them and to follow their example. I would venture to guess that some of you in this audience are members of the Church today or have become active in the Church because of such examples. When we encounter them, they are a powerful influence, for they radiate the love of the Savior and help us to feel His love for us.

In speaking of those who are unafraid to live lives of righteousness and example, I am reminded of one of the missionaries who served in Eastern Canada when I was the mission president there. He was a special young man by the name of Elder Roland Davidson. He was dedicated and hardworking and obviously loved the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then he became very ill. After weeks of hospitalization, as the surgeon prepared to undertake extremely serious and complicated surgery, the surgeon asked that we send for the missionary’s parents. He indicated that there was a great likelihood that Elder Davidson could not survive the surgery. His parents came. The evening before the surgery, his father and I, in that hospital room in Toronto, Canada, placed our hands upon the head of that young missionary and gave him a blessing. What happened the following day provided for me a never-to-be-forgotten example of the influence of a true “believer.”

Elder Davidson was in a six-bed ward in the hospital. The other beds were occupied by five men with a variety of illnesses. On the morning of Elder Davidson’s surgery, his bed was empty. I learned later that the nurse came into the room with the breakfast these husky men normally ate. She took a tray over to bed number one and said, “Fried eggs this morning, and I have an extra portion for you.” Bed number one was occupied by a man with his

toe wrapped up in a bandage. He had suffered an accident with his lawnmower. Other than his injured toe, he was well physically. He said to the nurse, "I'll not be eating this morning."

"All right," said the nurse. "We'll give your breakfast to your partner in bed number two!"

As she went over to bed number two, he said, "No, thank you. I think I'll not eat this morning."

She said, "That's two in a row. I don't understand you men, and there is no one this morning in bed three." She glanced at the bed Roland Davidson had occupied, and then she went on to bed four, bed five, and bed six. The answer was the same from each one: "No, this morning I'm not hungry."

The young lady put her hands on her hips and said, "Every other morning you eat us out of house and home, and today not one of you wants to eat. What's going on here?"

And then the man who occupied bed number six came forth with the answer. He said, "You see, bed number three is empty. Our friend, Davidson, is in the operating room under the surgeon's hands. He needs all the help he can get. He is a missionary for his church, and while he has been lying on that bed he has talked to us about the principles of his church—principles of prayer, of faith, and of fasting wherein we call upon the Lord for blessings." He continued, "We have come to admire Davidson as a person of great goodness and compassion and faith. He's an example of what a follower of Christ should be. He has touched our lives—each one of us—and we are fasting for him today."

The operation performed on Roland Davidson was a success. In fact, when I attempted to pay the surgeon, he refused any money, saying, "It would be dishonest for me to accept a fee. I have never before performed surgery when my hands seemed to be guided by a power which was other than my own. No," he said, "I wouldn't take a fee for the surgery which Someone on high helped me to perform."

My friends, may we be, as the Apostle Paul admonished, "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."¹⁰ May we always be known as followers of Christ and, as such, become "as lights in the world."¹¹

I want you to know that I can feel your collective goodness here today. You are choice sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven. Just think how much good can come to the world from our collective lights as we allow the gospel to radiate through us.

Over the years I have enjoyed collecting gems of wisdom from movies and musicals. I always have with me a pen and a piece of paper so that I can write down any quotes I might find worthwhile. I have quite a collection. On one occasion some years ago I was watching the animated movie *The Lion King* with a few of my grandchildren. I took many notes, for I found lessons there. That which I desire to share with you is an exchange which takes place between a grown-up Simba and the spirit of his departed father, Mufasa, as Simba is doubting himself and his destiny. Says Mufasa's spirit, "Look inside yourself, Simba. You are more than what you have become. . . . Remember who you are. . . . Remember."

To all who are here today, I say, "Look inside yourself. You are more than what you have become. Remember who you are." You are a son or daughter of our Heavenly Father. You have come from His presence to live on this earth for a season and to live in such a way that you are an example of the believers and a true light to the world. When that season has ended, you will be able to return to live with Him once again. May this be your blessing as you nurture your testimony and as you follow the example set for you and for all of us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, "the true Light, which lighteth every man [and woman] that cometh into the world."¹² Of Him I testify: He is our Savior and our Redeemer, our Advocate with the Father. He

is our Exemplar and our strength. He is the light that shineth in darkness. That each of us here today may pledge to follow Him and to be His lights among men and women is my prayer. In His holy name—even Jesus Christ the Lord—amen.

Notes

1. 1 Timothy 4:12.
2. Philippians 2:15.
3. Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 115.
4. 2 Nephi 9:28.
5. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 1881–1955.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, *CR*, October 1985, 4–5; “Born of God,” *Ensign*, November 1985, 5–6.
7. See Clayton M. Christensen, “Decisions for Which I’ve Been Grateful,” Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional address, 8 June 2004; byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2004_06_08_Christensen.htm.
8. Moroni 10:4.
9. Matthew 5:16.
10. 1 Timothy 4:12.
11. Philippians 2:15.
12. John 1:9.