

“Purify Your Thoughts”

H. BURKE PETERSON

As President Holland mentioned our neighborhood association in Bountiful, a thought went through my mind. You know how great he is; I’m not sure you know how great his wife Pat is. Picture with me for the moment the street where the Hollands lived and we live in Bountiful. It is up against the mountains and crosses one of the canyons where it goes down and then up. Also picture me jogging about 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning. I see two forms in front of me. As I get closer, I see that they are a man and a woman. As I get closer still, I see that the woman is pushing the man up the hill. Soon I am close enough to hear him say, “But Pat, I’d rather go back and sleep. I don’t want to be healthy.”

She is saying, “Come on, Jeff, I know you can do it.” And so she pushes him up the hill. It really was almost that way. They are great friends and it is good to be here with them and with you.

Respect for BYU

I have a great respect for Brigham Young University. I didn’t attend school here. In the day when I wanted to be an engineer, BYU didn’t have an engineering school. At least they didn’t have one with the reputation that it has now, and so I didn’t attend. We have four

daughters who have gone to school here, and I assume a fifth one will when she finishes up at Ricks. My wife also attended here. I have great respect for you. I have been in enough places in the Church throughout the world in the last eleven and a half years to know that from the ranks of this institution have come and will come some of the great leaders of the Church, of communities, of government, of business, and—I suppose more importantly—many of the solid families of the Church.

I think your opportunities are unlimited. I think the opportunities that you have are bounded only by what you may impose, by either your willingness or unwillingness to pay the price of success.

Signs of the Times

We live in a day like no other. Those of you who review the scriptures know that the signs of the times are around us, and the prophecies of men of old have unfolded or are unfolding. These are the days preceding the Second

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Coming of the Master. I've made some observations of my own as a member of the Bishopric, involved in things for which we have responsibility. For instance, a sign of the times, if you will: In the decade of the seventies, 1970–80, somewhere in the world the Church built about 2,000 chapels. That's in a ten-year period. During 1981 and 1982 following that decade, we built somewhere in the world almost 2,000 chapels in two years. And we have more than 1,000 in some process right now. You've read of the temples that have been dedicated, four already this year, one this week, the Tahitian Temple; the first of December, another one in Mexico City. I suppose that next year there will be five or six temples dedicated somewhere in the world. As you know, the great work of the Millennium is the work that will be done in temples. It seems to me that there is a preparation going on.

There are many wonderful things happening, but there is also something I would like to address this morning that I hope will have your attention. This is also a time of danger. This is a time to be careful, as you have never been careful before. It is a time to be on guard. Because this is the time, as I read the scriptures, referred to when "men's hearts shall fail them" (Luke 21:26; D&C 45:26; 88:91). This is a time when even the very elect will be deceived. This is a time when some will not have the courage to stand for what is right. This is a time when there will be a complacency and taking for granted of many gospel principles. This is a time when many—I suppose some among your number—will pick and choose the commandments they will keep, and others they will put aside for the moment. This is the time when Satan is unusually cunning and effective. I think he entraps many, many of us here today, without our knowing it. It is a time of trial. I have learned that trials come to children and teenagers and university students and parents, prophets, and apostles. I weep inside as I

watch the trials of President Kimball. Trials are a part of everyone's life.

The Ladder of Faith and Testimony

With all of this there is hope because I'm convinced that there is a spirit of revelation available to all of us, available to guide us in our trials. As you face your trials and what life may bring you, may I suggest one thing to remember. When you are in tune with the Spirit, you can handle any problem. I don't want to make you think that those who are in tune with the Spirit don't have problems. Everyone has them. But, when you are in tune with the Spirit, you are able to cope with the situation. When you aren't, and to the degree you aren't, then things can become unglued and come apart at the seams and you lose your composure.

I know it is a fact of life that all of us here this morning vary in the degree of our testimony. Not everyone here has the same strength of faith and testimony. There are those of you who are unusually strong, spiritually speaking. Others of us may be up and down the ladder. Sometimes we become discouraged if our strength and faith are not as someone else's seem to be. Sometimes we feel less important, less capable. May I suggest to you that I do not think it matters where you are on the ladder of faith and testimony. What I think matters is which way you are moving on the ladder. There are many great and wonderful people whose testimonies are just beginning to flower. They are on the lower rungs of the ladder, but they are moving up, and that is the thing that is important. There are others (some of you returned missionaries may want to keep this in mind) who have peaked out and who have begun to taper and slip somewhat in their faith. That is when I would get nervous. That is when I would become concerned. Which way you are moving is what is important.

This is the process of purification, of sanctification, this process of improving and

increasing in faith and testimony. Now, as some of us may be waiting for blessings to come to us, let us remember another principle. Moroni taught in the book of Ether something that oftentimes we forget. There are those who are constantly waiting for things to happen. They are waiting for blessings to come, not understanding what that great prophet taught. Moroni taught in the twelfth chapter of Ether that first we have an evidence of our faith and a trial of our faith, and then the blessing comes. We don't receive blessings to strengthen our faith, according to Moroni. We receive blessings because of our faith. Eternal life is the blessing of the faithful.

Now a thought this morning that has to do with this sanctification and purification process. Developing purity of thought is as vital and as important a part of the sanctification process as anything I know about. President George Q. Cannon, a former counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, said the following:

If a man be pure in thought, he will be correspondingly pure in action, but if he allows his mind to roam in unrestricted freedom through the various avenues of evil, or to dwell unchecked upon the contemplation of forbidden indulgences, it will not be long before his feet tread those paths and his hand plucks the tempting, but deceitful fruit. Once the tempter gains the citadel of your heart, his power is very great and there is no knowing to what excesses of folly and crime he may incite his unhappy victim. [Gospel Truth (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), p. 200]

The destructive forces of Satan are becoming increasingly more effective in their relentless pursuit of the hearts and minds of men and women everywhere. Many quite innocently, and let me emphasize quite innocently, have been led to habits that are gaining a stranglehold on some of the very elite in the army of the Lord. I fear that there are some here this

morning who are far less effective and far less satisfied with themselves than they could be or would be if they weren't so afflicted. Many of you may be victims and may not realize it.

Arizona Reservoirs

I would like to use an analogy that I used a few years ago because I think it makes the prime point I want to make. In east central Arizona there are some high and often snow packed mountains. We refer to them as the White Mountains. From this fountainhead stem most of the major water-producing streams that fill the agricultural valleys, the agricultural needs, and the domestic needs of central Arizona. From these mountains comes the water supply for the homes in the city of Phoenix. In the wintertime the mountains are covered with snow, oftentimes many feet in depth. The streams, as they begin here, run cool and clear, filled with delicious life-giving water. The streams run many miles in an unpolluted condition as they move down the mountains, through the valleys, eventually to empty into great reservoirs built to store the liquid during periods of drought.

There are also in eastern Arizona many high-grade ore deposits, which are and have been mined for many years, copper being one of the principle metals. Some of the streams which originate in the White Mountains run through the mining towns, and their water is used by the smelters in the processing of ore. The waste from this process in some cases finds its way back into the streams, causing discoloration and the addition of harmful elements that make the water unfit for human consumption. These streams also empty into the great reservoirs.

There are seasons of the year when there are cloudbursts in the mountains upstream from the dam. The heavens literally open up and discharge their contents. On these occasions, large amounts of soil are eroded; brush and sometimes trees are also washed down the rivers

into the reservoirs. These reservoirs have the unusual capacity of holding all that is put in them: the cool, clean, clear, and delicious water coming from the glistening snow pack, as well as the polluted water from the industries and the brown, silt-filled waters resulting from the summer thunderstorms. All of it accumulates behind the huge rock and concrete dams.

As we said, part of the water that is held behind these dams is used as a domestic water supply for over a million people. In this condition the water, of course, is undrinkable because of the impurities that have been dumped into it, and so there must be a filtering system that prepares it for human consumption.

First, there are large grates and nets and coarse screens that filter out leaves, branches, and dead animal life. The filtering system gets finer and finer as it removes other harmful impurities. Finally, after much careful attention, it is released into the pipelines of the cities in a now purified condition ready to be used by the people of the valley.

Pollution of Our Minds

When we were born on the earth, our minds and thoughts were clean and sweet and pure, unpolluted by the harmful impurities that come to us as a part of the experiences of this life. In our infancy our minds are free from unrighteous and unwholesome thoughts. We are innocent and untouched by the harmful effects and influences of Satan. Our minds, which are like tremendous reservoirs themselves, are capable of taking in whatever they may be fed, good and bad, trash and garbage as well as righteous thoughts and experiences.

As we go through life we may be exposed to stories, pictures, books, jokes, and language that are filthy and vulgar, or to television shows, videos, or movies that are not right for us to see or hear. Our minds will take it all in. They have the capacity to store whatever we will give them. Unfortunately, what our minds take in they keep, sometimes forever.

It is a long, long, process to cleanse a mind that has been polluted by unclean thoughts. Sometimes our minds may be so cluttered with filth and pollution that they are unable to be a spiritual strength to us and to our families, let alone to mankind in general. When in this condition, we find our thinking processes are not clear or correct. Schoolwork may be overwhelming. Everyday problems are more difficult to solve. Decisions are often made on shaky ground. We say and do things we would otherwise never be a part of. We are not at our best.

Cut Off the Flow of Trash

There are two things we must do. First we must stop the flow into our minds of these unhealthy and unwholesome streams of experiences and thoughts. Evil acts are preceded by unrighteous thoughts, and unrighteous thoughts are born of vulgar stories, jokes, pictures, conversations, and a myriad of other satanic products.

Vulgarity appears in many ways. We live in a society where profanity and vulgarity are accepted means of conduct and expression, even a way of life for some. Elder Packer has said, "The reality of profanity does not argue for the toleration of it" ("The Message: The Clean Voice of Youth," *New Era*, January 1976, p. 5). We are the victims of a vile habit. There are those here this morning who are victims, who are misled into thinking this is acceptable conduct for a Saint, who think the influence is not that serious. I would suggest that some are misled who think vulgarity occurs only now and then when a person utters obviously crude or offensive words. Vulgarity is not so rare as it should be. It is sustained by constant exposure to a steady diet of vulgar and filthy experiences.

We might consider vulgarity in a couple of ways: first, *as an expression of a personal weakness*; second, *as a contribution to a personal weakness*. Some demonstrate or express a personal weakness when they tell jokes or stories about the body and its functions, when they

joke about or make suggestive comments concerning women or girls, when they are casual about sacred things. There is vulgarity when some speak crudely of body parts or sexual matters. Too often common slang, even gutter terms, are used by brethren of the priesthood as well as by too many of the sisters. Ofttimes anger is used as an excuse for such an utterance. This is wrong. It comes of Satan; he is the author. No one need swear or be vulgar at any time.

Some contribute to this personal weakness when they read or experience filthy magazines, movies, television shows, and videos, or remain in a group where unclean discussions occur. Some married couples will even joke about sexual matters. Each of these kinds of experiences will weaken any spirit and will make it less able to withstand the fiery darts of the adversary.

Now, my brothers and sisters, beware of loose thinkers, be they peers or teachers. The subtlety of their influence can be disarming and destructive. Regardless of what others may do, there should not be any X- or R-rated movies that we participate in viewing or talking about. Shun them as you would the plague. A good movie with only a little pornography or vulgarity is not a good movie; it is satanic. There must be no pornographic magazines or pictures or music—and I plead with you, be careful of the music—or stories, no retelling of filthy jokes or crude experiences.

Once in a while we should stop and ask ourselves, “In whose army are we fighting? Whose battle lines are we defending, Satan’s or the Savior’s?” We are in one or the other, and, like it or not, our actions signal our true allegiance. Do you have the courage to walk out of an off-color PG-rated movie or video? Or do you watch, listen, absorb, and suggest to yourself, “This soon will pass” or “Everyone is doing it, it must be acceptable entertainment”? Have you the courage to keep out of your home television shows and videotapes that are

filled with suggestive sexual conversation and even visual experiences? I think one of the subtle dangers that we have are the so-called “soaps.” They tell, teach, and display the deteriorating breakdown in morals and in marriage. Have you thought lately how effective these shows are in piercing even the strongest spirit? We must not feed ourselves a diet of trash. We become what we think; we think about things we hear and read and see.

Run through an exercise with me for just a moment. Put yourself at whatever level you are on that ladder we talked about, the ladder of faith and testimony. Whether you are low or high, as I said, doesn’t really matter. Now assume that tonight or this evening you watch a movie or show of whatever kind which contains obvious sexual conversation and implications of breakdown in morals, and so on. If you watch that show, regardless of the level you are on, in my opinion, your spirit will step down just a bit after having had the experience—just a bit—not much, but a bit. Or assume that this afternoon you are involved in retelling an off-color story: your spirit will step down again.

Every time you go through one of these experiences, it has been my observation that the spirit steps down little by little, and little by little. As I have reviewed Church court cases over the years, I have found that the tragedies that occur in the lives of men and women do not occur overnight in one thoughtless act. It is a step-by-step process. Now I am not suggesting that if you go to one of these shows, you are going to be involved in immorality. Some will, in the process. But I do know this: there will be dilution of the spiritual strength within you that will have its effect, long-term, even though you never get involved in a physical immoral action. There will be dilution of your righteousness and your power to do good, to think clearly, to make decisions that are proper, every time you put some of these materials into your mind.

Cleanse the Reservoirs of the Mind

Assuming that you have cut off the flow of trash (and I am not saying, “Cut it down”; I am saying, “Cut it off”), the second thing you must do is set up a filtering system which will cleanse the great reservoir of your mind so that the thoughts coming from it may again be pure and fit for your use and for the blessing of others. The effectiveness of your filtration system depends upon the pattern of your life. You will be no more successful in helping yourself and others than you are pure in your mind. True, you may systematically perform many of the tasks that are assigned in the Church: teach a Sunday School class, Relief Society or priesthood lesson; prepare reports; conduct meetings; and so on, but unless your spirit is in tune, and you speak, teach, and act under the direction of the Holy Spirit, you accomplish little of an eternal value.

The secret of cleansing the spirit of whatever the impurity is not very complicated. It begins with prayer every morning and ends with prayer every night. This is the most important step I know in the process. It may simply be a prayer for strength to turn from bad habits or a prayer that sin will be distasteful to you, remembering that not all prayers are answered the next day. Sometimes it takes a long time. But with this step in place, I’ve seen hundreds of miracles take place. Without it, there is continued frustration, unhappiness, ineffectiveness, and despair. If you have tried and have given up, I plead with you to try again . . . and again . . . and again. He will not forsake your efforts if you persist.

Secondly, an added refinement will come in your filtering process, and added measure of spiritual maturity, if you please, can be found in a daily study of the scriptures, not long perhaps, but every day. If I were you, I would read the scriptures tonight and never let a day pass without reading some in them, even if only for a few minutes. There is an added measure of inspiration promised to those who read the

scriptures regularly that others do not receive. Surely at this time in your life such an assist would be welcome.

Thirdly, continue the cleansing of your spirit by doing something good for someone that he or she doesn’t expect. Keep it simple, but do it daily. It may only be a cheery hello, a short daily phone call to a homebound friend, a wheelchair ride for an elderly patient, a thoughtful note to someone who is sick or has a lost friend. It may even be picking up your dirty clothes to thrill an unsuspecting roommate. According to the scriptures, a disciple of the Savior is first a servant of others.

Fourth, when necessary receive the blessing that comes with the confession process. Too many are harboring the inner feeling of guilt resulting from unrepented mistakes. Part of the repentance process is confession. If you happen to be one of those who has this need, I plead with you to go see your bishop before the sun sets today.

And finally, pick a commandment you are still struggling with and obey; give it an honest chance to bless your life.

To Cleanse the Spirit

Now, remember, first stop the flow of polluted thoughts; be far more selective of the experiences you feed the great reservoir of your mind. Second, develop an effective filtering system that will remove the impurities and cleanse the spirit. Let your spirit become a powerful influence for good. Spirituality is a product of righteousness; it is not an unearned gift. Again, remember that when you are in tune spiritually, you can handle any problem and you can be sanctified.

I testify this morning that the Savior is the head of this work for which you and I are responsible. I also add my prayer that each of us will be found faithful in the things with which we have been entrusted. For the Lord said, “O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart,

might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day" (D&C 4:2).

This then, purity of thought, is one of the secrets to a happy and productive life and to the eternal rewards of a loving Father in Heaven. This I testify in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.