

# *The Value of a Testimony*

LEGRAND RICHARDS

I feel greatly honored, brothers and sisters, in the invitation to speak to you here today. As I came into the building, I said to Brother Peterson, “It scares you just to look at the building.” Then to think that you have to talk to all these wonderful young people. We’re so proud of this university—your president, the faculty, and you young people that help to make it what it is; and of course the campus is wonderful, but that isn’t what really counts. As far as the Church is concerned, you know we could get our academic training through our taxes without having to maintain this institution, but what it is doing here—implanting in the hearts of the youth of this great Church a desire to make something of themselves, a desire to help build the kingdom of God in the earth, preparing you for happy homes and for marriages in the temple—that justifies all the money that we are spending to help maintain this institution. We have four grandchildren enrolled here at present and one great-granddaughter. We have had five grandsons graduate from here, and they have all been on their missions, and they are all doing a great work in the Church, and if it can do that for all of the young men who come here, then we are getting good dividends on all that the Church is spending to maintain this institution.

## **Be Ready to Give a Reason**

Now, those of us who have been raised in Mormon communities sometimes just take our membership in the Church for granted, and we don’t really put forth an effort to understand fully what privileges are ours to be members of this great Church. We find some illustrations of this as we go through the Church in our ministry. For instance, some years ago Sister Williams, who was then a member of the presidency of that young women’s organization of the entire Church—and at that time she was the editor of the question-answer page in the *Deseret News*—told me this story:

She said that one of our Mormon girls married and went east, and when her neighbors found that she was a Mormon they all wanted to know what the Mormons believed. So she wrote to Sister Williams, and she said, “Please write and tell me what we believe. I know the first two principles are that you shouldn’t use tea or coffee or play cards.” Now can you imagine anybody getting much of a thrill out of

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membership in the Church if that's all that he knows about it?

I like the words of Peter. He said, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). And then you remember he said to the Church of his day, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Why? "That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Now, not only can we show forth his praises by the lives that we live, but also, in the words of the apostle Peter, we ought to be able to give a reason why we are members of the Church.

I went on my first mission to the little land of Holland. My cousin went with me. (He was the son of one of the General Authorities. If I were to tell you his name, I presume most of you older folks would know him." He was sent up to Norway, into the land of the midnight sun, and I was sent to Holland. He had been raised in a sheltered home. One day he wrote me a letter, and calling me by my name he said: "LeGrand, I met a man the other day who knows more about religion than I ever dreamed of. And I told him that if he had something better than I had, I would join his church."

I wrote him back, and calling him by name I said, "You told him just the right thing. If he has something better than you have, you ought to join his church. But," I said, "does he have something better than a personal visitation of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ to this earth, after centuries of darkness, to usher in the dispensation of the fullness of times and to pronounce judgment upon all the creeds in the world? Does he have something better than the coming of Moroni, with the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated? Just think of the knowledge this world has received through that Book of Mormon. Does he have something better than the coming of John the

Baptist with the Aaronic Priesthood, the power to baptize by immersion for the remission of sins? Does he have something better than the coming of Peter, James, and John with the Melchizedek Priesthood, the holy apostleship, the power to organize the Church and kingdom of God in the earth for the last time, to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ?" And then I went on, "Does he have something better than the coming of Moses and Elijah and Elias? If he has something better than this," I said, "you join his church." Well now, of course, he never joined, but if we just knew these facts and were converted to them, then nothing else in this world would really matter.

#### **A Waste of Time?**

Many of our missionaries that come out into the mission field have been raised in our Mormon communities; they hardly know what the Church is all about. Some of them don't even know who Adam was. We had a missionary come to us when I was president down in the Southern States. Before his assignment we held a meeting with him and the other missionaries, and he made a statement like this. He said, "I guess I am here to please my mother. My college professors told me that it would be a waste of my time, that I ought to remain at home and get my education." He said, "You know, I am a very practical sort of a fellow. I like to be able to go out in the orchard and pull the pears off of a pear tree; then I know it is a pear tree."

"Well," I said, "my boy, I wouldn't worry too much about that if I were you. Pears grow on our trees too." I said, "now I'll hand you the Book of Mormon. You are a college man. You study it. You tell me how it could have been written—with the information that is in it—at the time that it was published, if Joseph Smith's story isn't true. And when you get through with that, I will give you another one to start on."

I assigned him over in Alabama, and a short time after that I went over to attend a conference, and I said to the district president, "I would like to hear from Elder So-and-so," and he called him up. He bore a beautiful testimony. I went up to him after the meeting, and as I shook hands with him I said, "Elder So-and-so, you must have found some pears on our pear tree."

"Ah, forget it, President Richards," he said. When he came home, he was so thrilled with the gospel—he lived down in St. George—he got the bishop to let him run a tourist service to the temple, and he didn't charge for it, but he just bubbled over.

We found that so often in the mission field. Here a short time ago a young man returned from down in Argentina. (I knew him and his people back in Washington, D.C.) And I said, "Craig, did you feel like it was a waste of time to be in the mission field, that you ought to have been home getting your education, and getting ready to settle down?"

"Oh," he said, "Bishop [I'm still a bishop], if the Brethren want to make me happy, just let them put me on the plane tomorrow and send me back to the Argentine." And they had kept him over six months—that's when we were keeping them for two and a half years—so he had been there for three years. He hadn't yet been home to greet his parents and his best girl that he left behind, and yet he said, "If they want to make me happy, just let them load me on the plane and send me back to the Argentine."

Now, speaking about taking our religion more or less as a matter of fact, during the past summer I have attended quite a number of these youth conferences—one up in North Dakota, one over in Illinois, two here on this campus with stake groups that came here—and we always ended a youth conference with a testimony meeting of the young people. We brethren would get down on the front seat and they would line up on the stand, and as soon

as one seat was vacant another young person would be there, and when one was about through bearing testimony, another would be standing right here, waiting for a chance to bear testimony, and, with tears in their eyes and tears in their voices, they would thank God that the Mormon missionaries came to their homes and they would tell what the gospel means to them. Now, that is in the mission field (I'm a missionary). And then the two that we held here on the campus. When it came to the time to bear testimonies, you know, most of the testimonies were given by their leaders that were there, their chaperones; the young people just didn't have it. If I had my way, I would send them all on missions, so they would learn what they really have. And that's what I mean about taking for granted what we have.

Those of us who have labored in the mission field realize what this experience means to our young people. I think this is the greatest institution in the Church except the mission field, and I have to put that ahead of you because although we don't give them the academic training there we give them something in the mission field--and many of you have experienced that--that is worth far more than just the academic training. I would like to read to you here a statement by Matthew Cowley that he delivered here at Brigham Young University some time ago. He spent ten years in the mission field down in New Zealand. And this is what he said:

*As you have heard, I have been on two missions to New Zealand. I have attended two universities, and I will say now, at the outset, if I had my life to live over again, and I had to choose between the missions to New Zealand and my education in two universities, I would select my missions to New Zealand from every standpoint: from the standpoint of education; from the standpoint of spiritual development; of character development, and every other angle of development that we might consider. I*

*would not exchange one for the other for anything. And so, I am pleased to stand before you now, not as a lawyer, not as a college graduate, but as a missionary.*

Now any of you who have known the spirit that Brother Matthew Cowley has exhibited in his books and his sermons about missionary work know that that came out of the depths of his heart.

Now I would like to read you just a little statement from one of my grandsons who was on a mission down in Australia a few years ago. Just to show you what kind of a thrill he had in a Mormon community before he went, this is what he had achieved: he was the junior high boy of the month, president of the junior high school, Mr. Football at his high school, the best athlete in his class at high school for three years, captain of the football and basketball teams, and a member of the all-Church basketball team. You would think that that was about as much of a thrill as anybody would get as a young man. I copied one paragraph from one of his letters that he wrote to me from the mission field, in which he said: "Things are really tremendous down here. I can honestly say I have never been so thrilled and excited and happy in all my life. The Lord is really blessing me." Now, he couldn't get that feeling around here because he just took his membership in the Church for granted. He might in this institution, but not out in the regular wards of the Church.

We have so many wonderful testimonies of a nature similar to that from the missionaries. We had one young man labor with us down in the South. He had played on BYU's basketball team that won the intermountain championship (we should do it a little oftener). But anyway, he said, "When we won that game, our companions literally carried us around on their shoulders. That was the greatest day of my life, until I came on this mission." And he said, "I would not exchange a night like that

[and he was bearing testimony of the restoration of the gospel] for all the basketball games that I have ever played." Now that is what the gospel is when it comes to life, and I hope that here, in this institution, you are doing all you can to help to bring it to life.

### **Get the Spirit of the Gospel**

I toured the mission up in Portland, Oregon, some few years ago, and in our testimony meeting one missionary was testifying of the goodness of his companion, and that companion started bawling just like a child—the spirit of the gospel was there—and another missionary said that he would not take a check for a million dollars for the experience of his mission, and he himself was a convert. I sat back of him, and I said to myself, "Would you take a million dollars for your first mission in the little land of Holland?" And I began to count the families that I had been instrumental in bringing into the Church. What else could I have done in this world to lay away treasures in heaven like that missionary work that I had done?

And so I am interested in the spirit of the gospel. Now I think that this institution is the next contributing institution to that spirit. For instance, I was down in Glendale, California, some time ago, and I attended a Relief Society bazaar down there, and it was in part of the territory over which I presided as the stake president years ago. And a young lady, a daughter of one of the families that lived in our stake, told me this story:

She came up here to the Y. She started keeping company with a boy who had been raised in a Mormon community but didn't know how to appreciate his membership in the Church and wasn't active in the Church. And when he became serious and he proposed to this girl, she said, "I will never marry a man who does not do his duty in the Church and honor his priesthood." She said, "I am going to be able to point to my children and say to them, 'You

follow your father.'” Well, he wasn't willing to pay the price. So their courtship ended there. In a short time she started keeping company with another young man. Their engagement was announced in the newspaper, and a friend of the first suitor sent a copy of that paper to him. He was then living in Chicago. When he read it, he called her up all the way to Los Angeles—that was before we had these cheap rates—and he said, “I cannot live without you. If you will call off that engagement and give me another chance I will do anything and everything you ever asked me to do in the Church.” That is what she got by coming here to this institution. And when we met them there, he was a counselor in the bishopric, and I have checked on him since and he has since been the bishop of the ward, and they told me down there that he was the best bishop in that stake. I met him in front of the Hotel Utah here about a year ago; he had just been appointed a member of the stake presidency. Now that is what this institution is planting in the hearts of our young people.

A young man called me one day and he said, “Is this Bishop Richards?”

I said, “Yes sir.”

And he said, “Well, I am in trouble.”

I said, “What is your trouble?”

“Well,” he said, “I have been keeping company with a girl for three years, and she heard you preach the other night and now she won't go out with me anymore.”

I said, “Why won't she?”

He said, “Because I am not active in the Church.”

And I said, “Good for her! I am glad to know that there is at least one girl in Israel who will listen to an old man like me. Now what are you going to do about it?”

He said, “What can I do?”

I said, “Get active in the Church, and then go back to her.”

He said, “How can I?”

I said, “You go and talk to your bishop, and if he doesn't help you, I will be glad to help you.”

Now, I think he must have talked to the bishop all right, because he never has been back.

### **Know the Divinity of This Work**

Now, I thank the Lord for this institution; I thank the Lord for what it is doing for you. When we go out in the stakes of Zion where we are nearly all members, and we see that the temple marriages run from twenty-five to about forty percent, and a few of them only may get fifty percent or so, and then we see the record that you make in this institution, that ninety to ninety-six percent of the young people marry in the temple, we feel then that our money is not spent in vain, and these are the dividends that we receive from investing the tithes of the Church.

If you don't know the gospel's true, I advise you to find it out. You do not have to be old in order to know it. When you have gone down in the waters of baptism, and you have received the Holy Ghost, you can be entitled to the inspiration and the revelation of the Holy Ghost, and you do not need to be old in order to get that witness of the truth of the Church.

I was down in Sacramento some years ago, and a good sister there, a new convert, told about being on the train on the way to Salt Lake. She lived in San Francisco—she was a Catholic—and there was a little boy on that train about eight or nine years old. And she said, “He was such a cute little fellow, I thought I would try and visit with him.” She said, “I tried to talk to him about his school. He did not seem very interested. I tried to talk to him about the games he liked to play. He did not seem very interested.” Finally he spoke up and he said, “You are going to Salt Lake, aren't you?”

And she said, “Yes.”

He said, "Then you are Mormon, aren't you?"

She said, "No, I am not a Mormon; I am a Catholic."

He said, "Well, I am a Mormon boy. Would you like me to tell you a little bit about my church?"

And she said, "Even a Catholic woman could not refuse to listen to an eight- or nine-year-old boy who wanted to talk about his church."

He told her all about how Joseph Smith did not know which church to join, and how he went out in the woods to pray, and about the revelation that he received of the Father and the Son, and how Moroni brought the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. And then he quoted the Articles of Faith. And she said, "And when he went to bed that night, he slept in the upper berth, and I noticed that his light was burning late." The next morning she said, "It took you a long while to settle down last night."

He said, "I never go to sleep without reading a chapter out of my Book of Mormon."

That little fellow so impressed that Catholic woman. Her son met her at the station in Salt Lake and took her over to the Temple Square Hotel. (It's right across from the Temple.) She

went over there, she went through with a guide, she bought a copy of the Book of Mormon, and she stayed there till she had read it. She fell into the hands of one of our bishops, and he gave the finishing touches, and she went back to San Francisco a member of this Church because a little eight- or nine-year-old boy had the spirit of testimony. I would rather have my children and my grandchildren enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost, a witness of the divinity of this work, than anything else that they can achieve in this life, or any companionship that they can gain.

I pray that God will bless each one of you with a desire, if you do not have it, to know the divinity of this work. That is the only thing that can bring you back sweet and clean into the presence of God, the Eternal Father. That song of the Primary, "I Am a Child of God"—if we realize that, then we will want to be like him, and then we will try to live to be worthy of his presence. I ask God the Eternal Father to bless you, each one of you, with a testimony of the divinity of this work that will lead you back into his presence and prepare you for every responsibility and honored privilege that awaits you in this Church, through your faithfulness, and I leave you my love and blessing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.